



THE WEEKEND MILLIONAIRES: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE THAMES LIGHTERMEN

(Part of the Digital:Works Archive)

(DW/11)

DW/11

The Weekend Millionaires

2015

Name of Creator: Digital:Works, community history group; Various.

Extent: 22 mp3, 22 jpgs, 1 dvd, 1 booklet

Administrative/Biographical History: 'The Weekend Millionaires: An Oral History of the Thames Lightermen' is a collection of oral histories of former lightermen and their families. These histories were also video recorded and together with archival footage they were used to make a documentary about those who worked for generations on the River Thames before the lighterage industry ended in the 1990s.

Themes covered in the histories and the film are the difference between lightermen and watermen, the family histories of lightermen, working conditions, the various cargos coming in and out of London, and the camaraderie among the lightermen. Also discussed were apprenticeship, the necessity of working with the tides of the Thames, and amassing knowledge the Thames' curves and bridges. The project highlights the effects of containerisation and how the lighterage industry closing affected lightermen and riverside communities.

'The Weekend Millionaires' was a collaborative project between the charity digital:works and Year 6 Children from St George the Martyr and Westminster Cathedral Primary Schools. The children learned interviewing and documentary skills while conducting the oral histories. The project includes 22 oral histories and one documentary.

Custodial History: Deposited with Bishopsgate Institute by Digital:Works, 2019.

Scope and Content: Material created during the project, 'The Weekend Millionaires: An Oral History Project of the Thames Lightermen', which was developed and produced by digital:works. Includes:

- Twenty-two original oral history interviews recorded for the project
- Copy of the booklet researched and written by children from St George the Martyr and Westminster Cathedral Primary School, and DVD of the documentary created during the project and featuring extracts of the oral histories
- Digital photographs of the individuals who participated in the project

Note: digital material is stored in the digital drive and can be consulted in the Researchers' area.

System of Arrangement:

No further arrangement required.

Language/scripts of material:

English

Access conditions:

OPEN

Copying conditions:

Photocopying, scanning and digital photography (without flash) is permitted for research purposes on completion of the Library's Copyright Declaration form and with respect to current UK copyright law.

Finding Aids:

Copy of handlist available in researcher's area.

Rules and Conventions:

Compiled in compliance with General International Standard Archival Description, ISAD(G), second edition, 2000; National Council on Archives Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names, 1997.

DW/11/1

Alan Lee Williams

[2015]

Name: Alan Lee Williams

Recording length: 56min

Summary: ALW describes moving as a child from Deptford to Blackheath; his father working as a lighterman and his grandfather as a master mariner birth on the Thames; can trace family history working on the Thames back to 1909; during WWI lightermen were considered so important that they were not drafted, and the industry was so important to the war effort that apprenticeship lengths were shortened, there was also an agreement between lightermen and the Royal Navy; the process of securing his apprenticeship at 14 years old; different working conditions for different companies; what it was like working with his father as ship master; working 24 hour shifts as a cabin boy on a tug; different skills and tools he worked with on a tug; being happy that he'd earned enough to attend the theatre in a theatre box, which also earned him the nickname 'Shakespeare' at work; falling into the Thames by Tower Bridge; accidents at work; difference between lightermen and watermen; having to stand up to dockworkers who wanted to steal cargo; the length of the journeys, and how he'd spend his free time reading on the long trips; difficulty of navigating in the dark, including navigating near gas lamps; participation in acting troupe 'The Webster Players'; importance of having a good whistle or being able to whistle well; trade unions and strikes; entering political life after being a lighterman, becoming an MP for Greenwich; joining the Royal Air Force; his feelings about the lightermen industry ending

NB: these are digital files which can be accessed in the Researchers Area

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DW/11/2

Alan Pettit

[2015]

Name: Alan Pettit

Recording length: 57min

Summary: AP describes the difference between a lighterman and a dockworker; being born in Hertfordshire because his mother was evacuated due to WWII; growing up in Poplar

then moving to Hainault; family history of lightermen; began his apprenticeship in 1956; first job as a tug boy working for Union Lighterage; different paperwork used for different cargo and the different docks which dealt with different cargo; working with the tides; different certifications he received over the years; enjoying football (West Ham) and motorcycling; nicknames among lightermen; companies and wharves which are no longer in business; his responsibilities as an apprentice on a tugboat; learning the river and the bridges, navigational aids, loading craft, preparing the craft for loading; how lightermen were paid; working with dangerous cargo; camaraderie at work; different 'characters' he worked with; the decline of the lighterage industry; containerisation

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DW/11/3

Barry Bullock

[2015]

Name: Barry Bullock
Recording length: 38min
Summary: BB describes his parents' jobs; his childhood community in East Ham; origins of the term 'lighterman'; his family history (25 generations) of lightermen; effect of WWII on the lighterage industry; his apprenticeship; learning the river and bridges; working conditions; going overboard twice; witnessing a grievous accident; camaraderie between lightermen; nicknames; whistling and sound signals; trying to be a 'mod', buying lots of clothes and a scooter; thieving; strikes; containerisation; working for Port of London Authority; feelings on the lighterage industry ending; how the Thames and riverside communities have changed over the years; roles of women on the river

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DW/11/4

Bill Ludgrove

[2015]

Name: Bill Ludgrove

Recording length: 42min

Summary: BL describes growing up in Rotherhithe; family history of lightermen; childhood neighbourhood community and the effects of living so close to the river; how he gained an apprenticeship and the skills he learned, including the rivers and bridges, driving barges, using the tides; camaraderie between lightermen; a typical day for him on a tugboat; working conditions; falling into the Thames and accidents he had seen; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; working on the Thames at night; lighterman's whistle; strikes; travelling to Greece and Turkey; how the riverside has changed over the years including the disappearance of wharves and the addition of luxury flats

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DW/11/5

Danny Bullman

[2015]

Name: Danny Bullman

Recording length: 65min

Summary: DB describes his family history of lightermen and watermen for 400 years; getting his apprenticeship; lighterage today doesn't deal with cargo anymore other than rubbish and aggregate; travelling around the world including living in the Philippines for a few months; camaraderie with co-workers; working conditions; history of dock companies including East India Docks; thieving on the docks; his aunt working on the river and the bullying she received for doing so; how the town Teddington originated from the term 'Tide-ending Town'; learning the tides of the Thames; current work on the Woolwich Ferry and for Thames Luxury Charters; trade unions; his involvement in the film 'The Last of the Lightermen'; accidents on the Thames

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DW/11/6

David Cossey

[2015]

Name: David Miller

Recording length: 49min

Summary: DM describes the difference between a lighterman and a waterman; his family history of relations working on the river; his apprenticeship; effect of WWII on the river, including the different bombs the Germans used; different skills of lightermen and watermen; working with the tides; how he was paid and what he liked to spend his pay on; camaraderie between lightermen; working with different cargo including dangerous cargo; working conditions; working in inclement weather; containerisation; press gangs

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DW/11/7

David Miller

[2015]

Name: Eddie Pring

Recording length: 33min

Summary: EP describes his post-WWII childhood in Hackney; his affection for the Thames as a child; family history of relations working on the Thames; his apprenticeship; working in inclement weather; different cargo he worked with; different skills he learned on his apprenticeship; working conditions, accidents and fatalities; falling into the Thames; the term 'Weekend Millionaires'; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; working on the Thames at night; thieving at work; strikes he participated in; effect of lighterage and docks closure; different in riverside between now and when he worked on the Thames

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DW/11/8

Eddie Pring

[2015]

Name: Eddie Pring

Recording length: 33min

Summary: EP describes his post-WWII

childhood in Hackney; his affection for the Thames as a child; family history of relations working on the Thames; his apprenticeship; working in inclement weather; different cargo he worked with; different skills he learned on his apprenticeship; working conditions, accidents and fatalities; falling into the Thames; the term 'Weekend Millionaires'; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; working on the Thames at night; thieving at work; strikes he participated in; effect of lighterage and docks closure; different in riverside between now and when he worked on the Thames

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DW/11/9

Eddie Smith

[2015]

Name: Eddie Smith

Recording length: 43min

Summary: ES describes being 'bombed out' of Bermondsey and moving to Greenwich; his childhood community in Greenwich; as a child wanting to work on the Thames; experiences of WWII as a child; his apprenticeship; working conditions; danger of falling into the Thames; camaraderie at work including on lighterage football teams; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; working in inclement weather; nicknames at work including his father's; how he got paid and how he spent his wages; thieving at work; working with different cargo including asbestos; strikes and trade unions; changes in the river over the years; different jobs he had after being a lighterman; women on the river; finding bodies in the river; slang

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DW/11/10

Eileen O'Sullivan

[2015]

Name: Eileen O'Sullivan

Recording length: 14min

Summary: EO describes her childhood community and playing by the Thames; relationship between lightermen and

dockworkers; accidents on the Thames; how the river has changed in her lifetime; professional options available to women during her lifetime

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DW/11/11 Jack Faram [2015]

Name: Jane

Recording length: 3min

Summary: Jane describes being the first woman to be employed by the Port Authority of London; her family history of watermen and lightermen; having childcare responsibility and working; working for a trade union

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DW/11/12 Jane [2015]

Name: Jane

Recording length: 3min

Summary: Jane describes being the first woman to be employed by the Port Authority of London; her family history of watermen and lightermen; having childcare responsibility and working; working for a trade union

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DW/11/13 Jean Hogben [2015]

Name: Jean Hogben

Recording length: 16min

Summary: JH describes her childhood community on the Isle of Dogs, playing on the causeway and barges when the tide was out; accidents on the Thames; thieving on the docks; how the river has changed over the years; experiences of WWII, aged 9 when it began

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DW/11/14

John Barrett

[2015]

Name: John Barrett

Recording length: 48min

Summary: JB describes the difference between lightermen and watermen; his childhood community; how he wanted to be a lighterman as a child; his apprenticeship; being evacuated during WWII; typical day in his working life; dangerous working conditions, including inclement weather; how he was paid and how liked to spend his earnings; nicknames; trade unions; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; strikes; women on the river; different companies he worked for and the different roles he had over the years; containerisation

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DW/11/15

John Daniel

[2015]

Name: John Daniel

Recording length: 52min

Summary: JD describes his early childhood during WWII, including being evacuated; as a child being with his grandfather who ran a tug company; joining the Sea Scouts as a child; family history of people working on the Thames and the Medway; early job working on a 'sludge' boat; getting his apprenticeship; working conditions, including inclement weather; the dangers of falling into the Thames; accidents at work; how he met his wife; nicknames; thieving

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DW/11/16

John Fletcher

[2015]

Name: John Fletcher

Recording length: 49min

Summary: JF describes the difference between lightermen and watermen; his childhood community; family history of lightermen; his apprenticeship; how he was paid; what he

enjoyed about lighterage work; camaraderie and social life among lightermen; nicknames; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; trade unions and disputes; women working on the river; working conditions; Thomas Doggett; working on pleasure boats; working in the film industry; containerisation

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DW/11/17

John Jupp

[2015]

Name: John Jupp

Recording length: 75min

Summary: JJ describes the difference between lightermen and watermen; getting his apprenticeship; how WWII affected the lighterage industry and him personally; skills needed to be a good lighterman; working with tides; how he got paid and how he spent his earnings; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; trade union involvement; Thomas Doggett; containerisation

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DW/11/18

Keith Ledger

[2015]

Name: Keith Ledger

Recording length: 19min

Summary: KL describes his childhood community; being taken to work with his father who was a captain on a tugboat; family history of people working on the river; what he enjoyed about being a lighterman; his apprenticeship; working conditions; what happened if someone fell in the Thames; relationship between lightermen and dockworkers; nicknames; how he was paid and how he spent his earnings; thieving; the lighterage industry ending; how the riverside has changed over the years including the addition of luxury housing and the loss of jobs

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DW/11/19

Kitty Finch

[2015]

Name: Kitty Finch

Recording length: 30min

Summary: KF describes her childhood before, during and after WWII including rationing; playing down by the water gates by the Thames; accidents on the Thames; thieving; different cargos arriving on the ships like peanuts and fruit; women working on the Thames; strikes; different jobs people of her generation had; her brothers and sisters; being evacuated during WWII

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DW/11/20

Peter Daniel

[2015]

Name: Peter Daniel

Recording length: 23min

Summary: PD describes his father's career as a lighterman; difference between lightermen and watermen, including the history of these industries; history of London's bridges; his experience of being the son of a lightermen, including his family history of lightermen and watermen; dangers of falling into the Thames; importance of the lighterage industry on WWII; ending of the lighterage industry; the song 'Lighterman Tom'

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DW/11/21

Ted

[2015]

Name: Ted

Recording length: 19min

Summary: Ted describes the humour and solidarity among lightermen; the effect of WWII on the lighterage industry, including his book on the subject from which he reads

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DW/11/22

Terry Bowden

[2015]

Name: Terry Bowden

Recording length: 75min

Summary: TB describes his childhood community; going to work with his father, who was a lighterman; family history of people working on the Thames; his apprenticeship; working on the river during WWII; how he got paid; taking up sculling; nicknames; trade unions and strikes; women on the Thames

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DW/11/23

The Weekend Millionaires: An Oral History of the Thames Lightermen **[2015]**

Title: The Weekend Millionaires: An Oral History of the Thames Lightermen

Created by: digital : works

Recording length: 45min

Summary: Documentary about the lighterage industry featuring archival footage, interviews with former lightermen and the children of lightermen.

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