

## Podcast transcript

### The Dublin dockers

**With Declan Byrne and John 'Miley' Walsh from the Dublin Dock**

**Workers Preservation Society**

*14 Henrietta Street presents Tea Time Talks, a series of talks inspired by the history and people of 14 Henrietta Street.*

**Declan Byrne:** Go back to the 40's or 50's there was a big demarcation between Deep Sea and Cross Channel Dockers, so that if you went to an early read at 7 o'clock and you weren't picked on the Deep Sea reading, I think if you were lucky and had loads of money you got on a bike, if not you were only down for Cross Channel .... If you got picked then you were guaranteed a day's pay.

In the 70's and 80's it suited the employer to differentiate "you're Deep Sea, you're Cross Channel", so much so that unfortunately the work was all into that. There used to be fights between Deep Sea and Cross Channel Dockers but the Reed was where originally stood the Howth at the forlong picking. So again, the idea the foreman before the famous Button arrived, would pick his relations and his best friends and there was no justice in it, there was a fairly derogatory system.

He didn't bother remembering your real name, he gave you a kind of a derogatory nickname as you can see, Lumps, Smeckler, Harkey.. so that system wasn't straight because when you were picked you had to reimburse the foreman, by cleaning the hub or if he stood on the hath of the ship with a London cigarette you were expected to throw up a box of matches in it and in addition to matches there were other things that had to be paid as well.

So the union brought in the Button System, the Button System was for men to prove that they followed the work for a period and then you were allocated a button and then you stood in the reed and you were picked first and it was only when every other Button Man was picked that the non Button Men were called or thereabouts were then called again a member of families, a family was offered a Button and for some reason the man decided not to take it and then for the next ten or twenty years he totally regretted it.

Also in the Button System if the Button Man died or became very ill he could hand the Button on to one of his children so you could have been following the work down there for

twenty years and then a little slip of the young fella and he stood on the reed and he got picked first.

Again before getting involved in the group I wouldn't have known anything about the same detail and we had a do in the Ferryman Pub one night, one of the dockers present was telling us that the Ferryman Pub was a tenement building that his family lived in it along with multiple other families at the time and one of the foremen was such a lazy so and so that he held a reed out of the upstairs of the Ferryman Pub and hundreds of men gathered below, I asked was he in his pyjamas.

Being in the History Group has been a fantastic experience, we've come across historians, I'm not just talking about the ones here tonight, Pdraig Yates, Hugo McGuinness, The East Wall History Group, that have done tremendous work covering that period, and some of the stories were totally amazing.

At the turn of the 1900's a lot of the firms were Protestant so the Managers would have all been Protestant, so I'm kind of aware of that, but there was one particular firm that decided not to employ Dublin Catholics. What they did was they offered people from the Midlands of England to come over to the East Wall and they guaranteed them a house, a church which was St Bernards, a school and a social home. The architecture and people have researched this and shown this, but the story I love is that this Protestant Community had a habit of going to Protestant Bakers, whatever company they gave their business to, but they couldn't find anybody to alter their clothes, or to make suits or whatever. So a particularly famous woman in the East Wall called Mrs McManus did this for them and I asked the question, did that not have a kick back from the locals?, and I was told no. Mrs McManus was responsible for 'Buncream', so Buncream is a technical term which means that you stow a shoe, such a fashion so when it goes to see it doesn't sink but in the case of Mrs McManus' Buncream was putting false pockets in the inside of your coat, so that if you were robbing or smuggling everything, it was padded, so when the harbour police stopped you, you could open your coat so there was no way they could see that you had everything on you, so Mrs McManus was a lovely lady.

The other thing, when we give talks, people ask about the smuggling and the robbing but we've been told by solicitors that the Statute of limitations is ok, we can talk about it. And then what also comes up a lot is the drinking, the early houses, beating the foremen in the pubs and all of that but part of the reason we formed the group was to tell, we don't deny that that happened, but to tell some of the other stories.

Again it would have been before my time, but if a docker died, whether it be from Ringsend, Pearse Street, or the Northside, the coffin in the hearse would start where the Point Depo is now, and he would drive down the quays and in those days as much work was done outside the court gates as inside the court gates, and each ship would stop work and the crane

would turn around and be lowered in respect and then the ship would go over the quays and come down Pearse Street and to Ringsend.

Also the solidarity that I saw when I worked there, you fought like cats and dogs when things were going grand and then when something didn't, like a strike or a lockout, we were all involved in the lockout in 1992 and it went on for 8 months. The employers told us if we applied for our own job we would get it, there was one application and this chap had the face to point out that his wife had counterfeited his signature. So 218 people who were out of work did not apply for their own jobs, that kind of solidarity when people hit hard times if one of the family was sick was truly amazing. I haven't seen any of this around, and that existed.

There was a rivalry, I worked in Ringsend and they told me they were true Dubliners and being a Northsider you weren't a real Dub, and there's an expression in Ringsend that no woman should marry someone who is across the bridge. So everybody assumed that referred to the Northsiders, it doesn't it refers to Pearse Street, they couldn't marry someone from Pearse Street or they could be shot if they married an outsider, so you had these close communities made together during hard times.

So the history group has done remarkably well, a chap called Don Daniels, Eadaoin O'Carroll, years and years ago went down to the docks and did interviews on tapes and typed them up and when we set ourselves up they joined our group and they turned around and they wrote a book called Dublin Dockers which does capture the history. The only sad point is that when they went down 30 or 40 years ago and they interviewed church dockers and recorded them, those recordings are still in existence. They also interviewed 30 dockers wives and I'd have paid big money for the black label potential of those as they were logs, you'd miss that part of history that we haven't properly captured is women working in the docks.

So there was a famous factory called Lever Brothers, the women there were paid less than the men, so 95% of the workers were women on full rate and 5% were men as Managers. [Holds up picture] This is a photograph of the women from Lever Brothers. Because the Liffey Ferry operated and I'm told there was 5 to 6 ferries, and the women in that factory would have been from Sheriff Street, North Wall, East Wall, but they would have also been from Pearse Street, Ringsend, likewise there was factories in Ringsend, where the exact same thing happened, there was a fish factory, and people in Sheriff Street told me that they had enough fish since their granny was working in the fish factory.

The second book that came about was 'Fighting Words'. Again sounds like I'm arse licking, but the best story in 'Fighting Words' is Kay Fordance, because she tells a story about how her father was a docker and when she announced that she was going to work in the docks and he wasn't too pleased but he went on to support her completely. In the docks it was definitely a very male environment, but as the history is being recorded we have attempted

not too successfully to have the relevant stories told and up until now that has been kind of missing.

So we done a number of projects with school kids and students and one of them was with Sean Hegarty in Marino College. We went in myself and Martin and John and there were bin bags all over the place and these students says to us 'Do we have to listen to you? We're from Sherriff Street, we know nothing about the docks and none of our relations have anything to do with the docks'. So I said ok, has any of your relations got a nickname. A hand goes up and said, 'My mother's brother is 'Billie The Greek', and I said 'I've only got an hour to talk about the stokes, and the laugh and the crack, it would take me 2 hours to tell you about Billie The Greek'.

So it really is amazing giving talks in Ringsend, in Sherriff Street and in North Strand that the connection that was there and I believe it went from 3,000 -5,000 men down to zero, not just containers but through forklifts and other mechanisation and then the amount of casual labour. The dockers were the elite but you had people loading and unloading trucks and loading containers in the timber yards and in the coal yards and as all these disappeared I believe places like North Wall were completely devastated, the money may not have been great but it kind of fed the families. There's a lovely chap down the North Wall called Jimmy Fay and he describes it as 'manage decay, manage destruction' and to me that's exactly what happened in those communities. When the docks was there, there was a means of making a livelihood but when the work dried up whether it be timber yards or train as dockers there was no option for young people I think that's what's led to its destruction within communities. On that cheerful note I'm gonna pass you over to 'Miley'.

**John 'Miley' Walsh:** I don't know what to say now because he's after saying most about them. I'm one of the guys who operated on the docks under a fictitious name, my name is John Walsh, if you at any time while I was working there rang, in fact this did actually happen, my eldest son was born and I wasn't at the birth, the wife has never forgiven me, but she rang, everyone around her rang looking for John Walsh and no one knew him, because when you get one of those things there you put it on your collar you become a different person, I became my father who was Miley Walsh. When they rang nobody knew who John Walsh was, even today there are more people who recognise me as Miley than John. It's a consequence of the job, everybody went through the same thing. I'm now going to apologise to one of the guys that's here, that is the only other docker that's in the place but I don't see his name on the list, you picked the wrong list, we have a demon in here today, Demon Dent here right in front of us.

**Demon Dent:** That's me!

**John Walsh:** Like myself, he got his father's button. I'll try and explain a little bit about the button system. It was a copy of a system that happened in the UK, many years before us.

The work on the docks was to say the least, it was willy nilly, it was lots of work one day and the next day nothing and you couldn't hold ships back until tomorrow to suit everyone so everybody wanted their ships in and done and gone in a hurry so they had thousands of men working one day and none the next. On top of that there was a group of people, who had just seen a war in Europe and a lot of people went away to that, but the docks kept going and they kept going with a smaller group of people who felt that they had given their life to the docks and they deserved something like sort of a preferential treatment. So they copied this UK system and in 1947 they issued Buttons and they very much thought that by issuing the Button they were doing away with all of the problems. In fact it didn't because like any job not everyone thinks the same and there was a lot of men there that had given the same amount of time to the job and deserved the recognition but there were only 630 buttons being handed out. Plus nature being what it is, some of them didn't want the stigma of being Button Men, which means I am on call all the time. They thought that the casual system might have been better to suit them, so they took what was called a cart at the time, wasn't an awful lot of them 600 or something of them, but it meant that they split their opportunities in half trying to get a job

The next thing to happen to the Button was the system of handing it down to a son...or a daughter but that never happened. In my case I had 3 sisters, it was never going to be handed down to them, and in 1963 I became 'Miley' Walsh because my father was never coming back to work. There was a lot of fellas down there like me who had taken their father's button, but not too many of them were as clear cut as my situation. I had no opposition whatsoever but it was your father's button on you, it had the name of getting the button. But that wasn't always the case, it wasn't always true. You can imagine a family with four sons and the eldest son is probably thinking about getting married or gone off to get married, there's not much point of handing over a button for him to be the breadwinner for the family because he's going off with his own wife and going to rear his own family. So very very often it would be the case where the mother would have the say on who got the button or certainly there would be an argument ensuing - and women always win arguments - so it would probably be the eldest son in the house who's guaranteed to be there maybe until the father gets better or the others grow up and what have you and go to other jobs.

So the button system then came under a lot more scrutiny because if you go back to what I mentioned about the guys who didn't take a button and they're looking at someone like me, now I wasn't always like this I was like that when I went down there, they were saying things like how's he going to lift a 12 stone bag? You were getting work in front of them. In particular in my position where my very first day on the docks I stood into a read for a bag boat and I didn't know what it was. My uncle had just told me where to stand what to do, bag in hand and whenever they call anymore Button Men out you go and you handed it in now you're working as a docker. But what do you do as a docker? I had a big lunch under my hand, it was so obvious to everyone there that this fella is here for his first day.

When a read finished, you saw the amount of men there hanging around when the foreman, not only when he finishes, but if the foreman sneezed there would be 2,000 men that would run from there to over there where he is going to wipe his nose because the next person's name out of his mouth is going to be over here. Every time the foreman did that a couple of hundred men would move.

It was absolutely chaotic at a time where if you were in line to get work or if you need work - everyone needed work - or if you had not worked that week you had nothing to go home to the wife , you need a job today that last job is taken by a 16 year old young fella, who has a lunch under his arm, has never seen the docks before, doesn't know where to go, watches the guys that was employed directly after him because he knows he's working in the same gang, follows him into the ferry, everyone gets off the ferry over there, this guy goes this way, can you follow him? And here's this fella getting jobbed in front of you. I'm talking about myself now. So I ended up in a block of flats following this fella and he looked back and he says to me, 'Are you following me?' Yeah yeah I was employed just before you I didn't know where to go? 'Have you got a hook?' I didn't know what a hook was, I didn't have a hook that day, I didn't even know what one was, so he got me a hook for the rest of that day. He brought me back to the ship, I was in the middle of a block of flats looking for a ship! He's forced now to work with the greatest thick that he's ever met in the last 6 months.

Not only did he work with me, he educated me, he made up with me in the hatch, there were 6 men in the hatch, the crane driver, they go in three twos, the crane driver is over number one, two, three, one, two, three, all day long. You have to have a hoist of 12 eight stone bags in a rope, there's a skill at spreading the rope, but one of the things you probably will never ever remember again is when picking up stuff like that it's all below your feet, everything is bending, bend the knees, bend down, but this fella would teach you the skill, spread the rope, get the first 4 bags into it by snaring them, throw them out and make a hole, dig down so far, so that when you're 5 or 6 bags down in this hole, you work very very hard for the first hour and from then on you're throwing the bags down instead of up. That's one of the skills.

Another of the skills is they had remarkably fast hands. They would talk all day, they would tell you, 'Watch my hands'. You picked the bag up, this is in one hand and you've just your own, so you're throwing to the side like that all the time or this way and you had to lift at the same time as him, not so bad then with an 8 stone bag, but there were other bags there that would be for Cadburys, they were 12 stone full of cocoa beans, they were a much bigger bag and if you were slow on the lift, once he gets that bag up, the reason he told you to watch my hands, cause he's now lifted 3 stone and you're lifting 6, you're not going to keep going all day like that, especially if you're not a big burly strong fella like him. So their hands were remarkably quick. You had a certain amount of time to learn what to do, take it on board or suffer, that's the way they would teach you. They were relentless at teaching you, probably because they saw that it was to their benefit as well, but you were the son of a friend of theirs, so they thought you well, they made you forget about what you are actually learning

because that's how everyone of them got nicknames, you did something wrong bang you're called a name.

The next thing to sort of talk about is, there were so many different types of bags, some of them juice, some of the hemp. You can imagine bags of cement and you're lifting them from below your feet and trying to dig into a hole, along with the dirt and the wind blowing around. There was dangerous cargos such as asbestos, the asbestos is the one that killed, I think, most of us down on the docks. You won't see a docker walking around without hearing him coughing. We were never told by either our union or the people at Dublin Port, in particular, who must know or have to know what types of cargos come in, because they are the ones who decide whether it comes in or not. So with the knowledge that asbestos was damaging to people's health, they took all this stuff in, because we weren't important and we didn't have a say. But throughout the years we got a voice, and we're still using that voice in courts today to represent people who have died from asbestos.

That's all the bad side of it, well not all the bad side of it. To get back to the type of people that they were, every single day no matter how hard the work was, the craic in the hatch was absolutely amazing. Some of the guys in that larger photograph, the Carricks, were fabulous singers and in particular two of them were opera singers and on occasions if they were in the middle of an aria and the crane came in for a hoist, some of them would say 'Hold it there, Oh they're near the pitch', and they just had to finish that particular song until the foreman came along screaming like blue Jesus and got the work going again. But that's the type of fellas they were and if you remember what I said earlier on, among all that hardship, everyone of them had one guy like me to teach.

To get to the stuff that started to begin to affect us. If you had a ship with 5 gangs and there could be 100 men working on a ship, we're not claiming that we were the only ones that worked hard, but if you want to talk about hard work, take a look at those shovels there. I never dug coal, I never even done the breaks, but some guys came down and they would do their tea break or dinner break for their fathers, I was too young to do that. The coal being dug was still being done when I started on the docks but at the time they had, I think 7 to 10 votes to get rid of these things and replace them with a mechanical grab on the crane, so much handier and when you think that most of the coalies were between 70 to 80 years of age and they were the ones who had the vote that said 'No we will not accept this grab'. They remained digging coal, and again I'm talking about digging below your feet and the coal keeps running away from that shovel, it will not stay on it. It was probably pound for pound the hardest job that was ever done on the docks; between that and digging canite and phosit stuff like that used to go on fire when they were digging. Those guys had a vote 7 or 8 times and they voted 'Absolutely no I'm staying here until I die'. We're waiting on the grabs to come in so we can get a whack of this thing. Anyway it came to pass and it started a kind of a revolution because when they got the change with the coal and the grabs, change began to appear in all the other cargos coming into Dublin.

I have to tell you about one, the Russian ships with timber, you could have 4 to 5 gangs on the timber with these things and they were massive ships. Again I'm going against the grain here in saying that we worked very hard, the guys before my era worked harder again and before them harder again, but we weren't the only ones. When you put timber into a strap and you're picking it up with this thing, see those floorboards, everything is below your feet, you're digging that in, yanking it up and putting it into a strap, hopefully getting almost a tonne, almost a tonne into the strap, and it goes out onto the wall and then it's wheeled on a little bogey a couple of 100 yards away and then stacked. I'd love you to see a photograph, we have it in other books but we don't have one tonight. The Russian timber boats were all this white deal and when you finish off the deck you go below the hatch. One of the most amazing things that we find that kind of brings you back to earth to say that you're not the only ones that worked hard, was that when we opened up the hatch the snow, this stuff came from Russia, the snow was still on top of the timber in the hatch and it was hard and there were footprints in the snow. The footprints in the snow were those barefoot footprints of women and children who loaded the ship. I can tell you know now I can get that hook in there, you couldn't get that hook in there on a Russian timber boat, they were packed so tight, it was absolutely incredible. So it gave us a sense of do you know we think we're getting it bad, these people, I don't know whether their men were off at war or whatever, that was the most traumatic thing to happen to us to bring us back to the realisation that we're not the only ones that did a lot of work.

We began to sort of understand or I did anyway, that when we put all this cargo out and we stacked it on the quay wall, hundreds of men had to come from T and C Martins and bundle it to a bundle like you would see now with what they call a fair end on one end and all the overhanging pieces on the other end and they would band it and a forklift truck would take it away. That all came loose then and slowly but surely it began to be bundled in the home countries. Everytime that happened they modernised and we lost men. So it began around the middle sixties that we had a company called Palgrave Murphys who were probably one of the biggest employers on the docks ever and they did 5 ships in a week, they had .. (list of ship names), and those ships would take 2 gangs of 20 men each week or every two days, there was 40 men running those two ships and the 5 of those ships were replaced by one ship called The Tyro 2, that took one gang of 40 men, it carried nearly double the cargo those 5 ships had carried, it also had 2 cranes on it's deck, a 25 tonne crane and a 16 tonne crane, capable of loading containers down into the hatch, cars, it had 2 ramps you could drive cars in and drive cars out. You also could load maybe 5, at the beginning she carried her own forklift trucks, so you would have to drive the forklift truck in the hatch, you just brought the car up to the door and the forklift truck on the quay wall take it away, same with the cranes. So you're gone from 5 ships with 40 men to one ship with 40 men, and this ship came every week, not every two weeks, or whatever. It done everything from carrying fridge stuff, frozen stuff, and it took an immense amount of meat and stuff, Irish exports, it began to put us on the map in so far as exports of meat were concerned, we began to trade against Argentina, and it didn't take us long to knock the stuffing out of them, not in rugby, but in dock work.

It also brought the danger to us where if the cargo began to change it stands to reason that the men have to change. The cargo is not coming loose to be thrown into a strap by two men, it is now coming on a pallet or it's now coming in a container. So what happened was they left us with the 20 man per gang and they hired in two or maybe three forklift trucks to take the stuff away, the problem was that they began to look for the shortening of the gangs. But the forklift trucks that they brought in at first, this was a very clever move by the companies, they brought in outside workers, and for a while we were looking as someone said or you said earlier, we were now looking at the work going on instead of doing the work. These outside forklift truck drivers were doing our work, so we had to do something about that, so we insisted on driving the forklift trucks ourselves, as part of the gang. This is a thing that went against the grain because the way that it was operated it forced us to actually sack some men, the guys who were driving the forklift trucks but they had never worked on the docks in the first place and we had to protect our jobs.

So we then became the forklift truck drivers of Dublin Port and it's a thing that blossomed to a degree where when a lot of the companies were disbanded Dublin Port took the license from them and took over themselves, because they had never adhered to any safety standards, Dublin Port on the other hand when they took over as DCH they were very very safe and they made sure that everyone had the proper licences and the proper training. So much so that we set up training competitions and we went to the Annual Competitions for Health and Safety and stuff like courses and we won thousands of pounds in prize money. To look at a man maybe 60 years of age and you're getting him to stop bending down to pick up bags and pick up timber and now you're putting him onto a forklift truck, it wasn't going to work. So we tried as much as we could to get all of the younger lads to do it but it was the fellas with the experience who had the cars and the driving license and all, so it was a huge undertaking to get the younger fellas trained, some of them were done overnight but there was quite a lot that took a long long time. I know because I became an instructor with the company for a number of years, I was one of the guys that set up the training course that won us so much money, drinking money that was, but like everything else things began to go too smoothly.

Instead of being employed by a foreman standing up on the reed system saying 'you you you and you', we were now done in alphabetical order. So the chances were you were working with your relations, your cousins, your brother, you became family gangs again. That brought about a bit of a problem, because we were very very generous at giving people time off and if somebody said cover me I'll be back in an hour, he might come back in two days. So it got a little bit out of hand and the company we were dealing with now wouldn't take any messing, they made the decision and that was it.

So we found ourselves in 1992 with the company one day deciding, I was told on a Thursday, myself, Georgie Guidan and this engineer, I can't think of his name, we were being sent over to Haifa in Israel to pick out 15 mafees, which are articulated trucks with a hydraulic 5th wheel and we were going to be doing the pandora work and within 24 hours we were all

sacked, every single one of us. Were all put on the labour because the company liquidated. The thing is about the liquidation at the time was that it was not only unjustified but it was totally illegal because the parent company Dublin Port had astronomical resources, they had furious money, money coming out of their ears. So their liquidation had to be illegal, but the position that we were in, we were out of a job, we were no longer wanted, they wanted a clean sweep, get rid of the whole lot of us in one go.

So we were out for 9 months as Declan said earlier on and we had no one to claim against. If you know anything at all about liquidations, there is no enemy there, they're gone they have someone else there dealing on their behalf and this other guy who is dealing on their behalf all the rules are in his favour and he's belligerent, absolutely belligerent, the guy in particular who was doing this came down with a load of hoods gangsters that he had hired, we know they were gangsters because most of our fellas knew them. No need to laugh because it's true. Nothing happened for years we were just left to waste, and it's something that had to have the sanction of the government at the time and it was one final attempt at getting rid of these, because we were seen as being too strong. Declan rightly says that this was the first time when you were applying for any kind of assistance that you had to fill in a form and join ANCO, it was ANCO at the time, FAS now or something else is it. The instructions went out from our committees, you had to fill in the forms to say what type of work you were looking for, what type of money you were looking for? So everyone put down the same thing, something like 1,000 quid per week and what do you want to work as? A chef.

What was there left of us at that stage, 400 and something of us left. We saw it through until a lot of the companies were offering bits and pieces of work and if one man had have taken up the job offer I dare say we would not have finished on the docks the way we did. Not one single person accepted the job from those companies. I'll go back a little bit before the DCH started. The reason the DCH started actually was because the stevedore companies that we had worked for before, had been earning an absolute fortune from the docks. But before them was the Dublin Masters of Stevedores, the Association of Dublin Stevedores, and they were all different companies like Palgrave Murphys, George Bell, Conway Shipping. As a group George Bell, for instance, who would have been a big employer, they never owned one thing, they never owned their own crane, Dublin Port provided them with a crane and a crane driver, so they hired on a day to day basis, the way they hired us on a day to day basis. But yet when they moved after making all their profits in Dublin they moved from Dublin to Waterford, where they built this massive ferry terminal and container handling terminal with 5 or 6 cranes in it. That was bad enough but when we read two weeks later that they moved out of an office building up town, where they moved out without taking a piece of paper with them. They had everything in their hire, they didn't even own a chair in this building, so they were preparing to move out of Dublin for 20 to 30 years. Our jobs were always on the line.

The company that I worked for and I had to go down to Waterford to teach a guy to drive a crane, Dublin Maritime, they didn't own the crane, yet they bought one in Waterford set up by Waterford Management. Basically these companies, what they were doing was making all

their money in Dublin and investing it in places like Waterford and Cork. So Dublin Port themselves got sick of them, that's why they set DCH to take them out of the equation and to get the port running right. But unfortunately the time was wrong because.. I'm going to go back to the button again where I had one, Demon had his father's' button, it was fair to a degree that we got our fathers' button, that was great from that point of view, but if you could imagine getting preferential treatment Monday to Friday and you're bringing a load of money home to your mother and your family. My first week I was met at the stairs by my father who says 'Give me that money first', he wouldn't allow me to pay my mother, because I was nearly going to give her the whole lot but I got a couple of wallops. I was way laying there every week. The thing about it was on Monday to Friday I was only getting work in my father's name so I had 4 mates at the time and I earned £21 and the 4 of my mates didn't earn that much between the 4 of them. I was just lucky because not all jobs were as good as that at the time.

But the other thing was and this is the part that hit me because I wasn't supposed to feel this way because you were told by all the other button men, 'ah you've nothing to be worried about, you've nothing to be ashamed about', but if you went to work on a Saturday which was overtime and you're after getting preferential treatment all week long, you're still in front of a non button man who may not have got a day's work for the whole week, that man may have had 6 kids. I'm not going to ask you how you felt to be in the way of a man. I'm pointing out here the unfair system, ok it protected us from the rogue bosses who were demanding money off dockers and some weak men and that, but the system could have been tweaked a little bit better in favour of when it came to overtime. I don't think the preference should have stood, now it's easy for me to say because I began to earn quite a lot of money at that time, had I not earned money I might not have had the same opinion as everyone else and said no what is is what is, but it didn't sit right with me. There could have been a better system, maybe make all men equal, that did happen later, because what has been found out about those buttons is you only got one of them when your union dues were paid up, the non button man didn't have that, they had a card that they handed out, so they had to be well known. If all men had have been given buttons then I think that would have been a level playing field. Unions are only as strong as the men, men make a decision, the union must follow the decision, that's what union is about, it's about the opinions of the men, if the men are strong enough and honest enough.

\*applause\*

**Declan Byrne:** Is to have Families to tell their own stories, I want to thank Paul Kelly of the North Wall series, he decided to take different photographs of different families and a picture tells a thousand words. There's a fantastic photograph of a docker called 'The Hawk', a chap called Hawkins from Ringsend, and then we all worked for the son who was John Hawkins, so he was Hawkie, so there was The Hawk, Hawkie, and then I don't know how the daughters figured it out but one of the daughters is now the Hawkess. So I think that's a nice tradition.

Likewise the next person up is Margaret Cullen, she was born and reared in Sheriff Street, her father was Glimmer Byrne so getting people to tell the story, I'm now going to embarrass a few people. She was very honest about the good side and the bad side of her father working on the docks.

The family I'm going to embarrass is Skipper Dunne's family, even though there's enough of them here, because they when we were doing *The Fighting Words*, talked about waiting for their father to come home and emptying the pockets out of his coat in the hope, they were disappointed when it was tea, when it was bananas or apples they were more happy.

It was great to get the stories from families, the nicknames started off as being derogatory. I was in the office and I would have given anything for a nickname. I was hinting to a docker trying to give me a nickname, passed by now, Jack Dash was a Liverpool docker who was a communist and I would have given anything for that.

**John Walsh:** Something that we failed to mention that in that photograph, I'm not sure which one it is, is the grandfather of an England Captain, you know Michael Cleric who played for Man United, his grandfather is in that there somewhere.

**Declan Byrne:** We promised him some photographs of his grandfather if he comes up with a few bob and sends it to us immediately, but he's ignored all our emails so far. I'll tell you about this one, when I started on the docks, I didn't realise what danger was and I was in the office, he's still alive today, Ben Hannigan, he was a famous soccer player and he happened to be acquiring stuff on a card that was meant for Hector Grays. It was Indian feathers, he put the Indian feathers down his trousers, now I got caught smuggling, I nearly lost my job, and it was vodka, that's a true story, but he had hidden the feathers down his trousers, then he put his coat around. Shane the guy the checker decided this would be a good laugh, because my face wasn't recognised, I was to run up there to Ben and say to him, I'm Customs and Excise are going to arrest you for stealing out of the shed. So Dan said 'I haven't stolen anything', open your jacket, so I opened his jacket and there were these Indian feathers sticking out of his trousers and I says to him, well I'm going to have to arrest you for Indian feathers, he says to me 'what's your name?' I said I'm Declan, and he says to me 'well Declan you can't arrest me for this, this will ruin my reputation, these are just Indian feathers! And the amazing thing about it was myself and Ben went on to become good friends.

I'll tell you a Ben Hannigan story, I think it was Ireland got to play Man U in a charity match for cancer funding, raising funds, and in those days the Man United players had the option of not coming. So of the Man United first team 6 of them didn't show and Ben Hannigan was asked to transfer to Dalymount and he was going to play for Man United along with Bobby Charlton, and all through the game Bobby Charlton passed the ball there and Ben kept giving out to him and saying to him 'to me feet, passing it way down there, I done nothing, to me feet!' So coming off at half time, Charlton said I'm not going back on, that fella has really insulted me, and he said to him that's Ben Hannigan, he's just really witty and the whole lot.

So they persuaded Charlton to go back out and finish the match. And then it got in the papers and went around the story and Ben went around saying 'I'm the man that taught Bobby Charlton how to pass a ball. Prior coming to Ireland he used to shoot it out there and now he shoots it to your feet'. It was an absolute pleasure working on the docks, the craic, the solidarity, the hassle.

**John Walsh:** Sorry Declan can I say one more thing, something we should have mentioned earlier, about some of our very brave dockers. The guy that drove a winch at a coal boat, they were digging coal, beside The Ferryman Inn, they had finished the ship and the American sailors were cleaning up, dockers were going shortly and they were cleaning the buildings. Coal makes gas, so when they opened the buildings up, these guys were gas, he was the only one left to take out the rubbish. So the story that we've been told and it has been proven to be true, he got a rope threw it into the hatch, jumped down into the hatch, slung the 3 of them American sailors and hooked them on, ran back up, started the winch up again, and lowered them onto the quay wall and saved their lives. For that he received a Gold Medal and also like a Parchment from Dublin City Council and the American Embassy.

The stuff got lost and so his son got in touch with us and we went through this rigmarole of trying to find where everything was and also to get a plaque put on the wall of either the Ferryman or the building beside it, the building beside it was the one that Bono and his band owns The Banana Stores. On either one of those buildings, as like one of the tourist attractions you know and it's a true story. But when investigating the story we discovered that this man who did it, done it a couple of times actually, this was so remarkable that one of the crew that was down there was either a Chief Officer or the Skipper, we're not sure which, is that correct?

**Declan Byrne:** Yeah.

**John Walsh:** So he would have been an educated man, whereas our docker guy would have finished school at 12 and he had the intelligence and cleverness to go down and the knowledge, he had the knowledge to take the hanky from around his neck, you know the way they always wore hankies to keep the dust from going down there right and put it around his mouth and get down and he wasn't overcome by the gas. So he was a bit of a scientist and that story is 100% true. We're still pursuing the plaque on the wall and so on. How did a guy that left school at the age of 12 or 13 years of age have the knowledge to know that your urine could stop you from being gassed. I've often heard of fellas digging, they have shovels or picks in their hand and their hands are raw, they'd pee all over them and it cures it, for all your health!

\*applause\*