

In this extract John Bradley is talking about his first job as a House Surgeon at St. Thomas' Hospital under John Hovel

TRACK THREE – 00:07:01 – 00:10:17

Are you saying that the operating list went from the afternoon into the evening?

Well it started at 5:30 and I think--,

Oh I see.

It started at 5:30 and I'd finished around about seven. Now when you're doing these things, your learning curve is quite steep. Now I've got reasonable, basically manual dexterity. I loved doing woodwork and still do, and this is one of my loves of most of my life. And surgery is not unlike doing woodwork, if you like. Many of the same skills and techniques that you acquire for cabinet making, you need in surgery. And so I was used to handling chisels and things like this, and drills and so on and so forth. Well you're doing drills anyway, in the Conservation Department, you see, at Guy's. So that wasn't a problem. Anyway, the clearances went off fine but the third case was this lady with only five lower anteriors to come out, was the real challenge because it was the glass and concrete syndrome and I had to reflect a flap, remove buckled bone and managed to prise these things out, you see. I did, it took a while to do it and Sister Fessy was in charge of the theatres and she realised I'd got a difficult one, so she said, "Are you having trouble, lad?" I said, "Yes Sister, it's glass and concrete." "Hmm," she came and scrubbed up and assisted me. She was very experienced, was Sister Fessy. I think Sister Fessy must have seen just about everything. And she told me what to do [laughs], so it was fine. And the operation was completed properly and that was fine. But my learning curve was almost vertical at Thomas'. I was given tremendous challenges at that time and there was very little supervision because the staff there consisted of John Hovel, the houseman, a senior registrar, who was called Donald Winstock, who was a very well known chap in the end, and we had one technician, Mr Dark, and he came from Belgium originally. And that was it. We had a part time staff nurse in the outpatient department, so it was a very small department. But it was John Hovel that fired me and he did a mid-facial osteotomy after I'd been there about four months, with Mr Richard Battle, who was the plastic surgeon there, he was a delightful man and they took a bone graft from the iliac crest because it was a case of not atrophy, but hemi-facial deformity, you know, part of the face hadn't grown properly, essentially. It wasn't true atrophy. And he did one osteotomy, if I remember, on it, and did a sagittal split on the mandible and with the gap of the maxilla, they put an interpositional bone graft in. And so he was, as you rightly say, he was ahead of his time and he was doing that, and that was in the early part of 1959.