

## **My Memories of Ian Whittingham**

I first met Ian Whittingham in 2002, when I was working as the union convenor on the Paternoster Square project next to St Pauls Cathedral for Bovis Lend Lease. This was a very big project as we were building 3 office blocks all at the same time. On average the workforce was between 1,500 and 2,000 at any one time. It was my job to identify and deliver the monthly toolbox talk to the whole workforce. As we were doing a lot of work at height, I decided to deliver a toolbox talk on the dangers of working at heights.

I heard about a gentleman going around construction sites who was in a wheelchair talking about his accident and how it can be prevented. I managed to get his telephone number arranged for him to come to our site and deliver a safety toolbox talk. He agreed to come in September of 2002. Before he came I had to organise a ramp outside the canteen so he could gain access. I remembered that in one of Ian's talks he said that since his accident he has to plan every journey in advance; this is something we take for granted.

The canteen held about 200 men at a time, so myself and the health & safety manager for the project set up a rota for the talks over a 2-day period. The canteen was full every time Ian did his talk. As he started to tell his story the canteen fell silent and all present listened to his every word. I can honestly say he made huge impact on everyone on that site. I remember thinking to myself every time he spoke about his accident that he relives that terrible day, but that never stopped Ian. He was determined to let everybody know that his accident could happen to anyone, especially if you don't wear a harness or follow your method statement when working at heights.

After our first meeting I got to know Ian very well and would often ring him up from time to time. I made sure that every new job I went on, I would arrange for Ian to come along and speak about his accident. I managed to work alongside Ian as a safety advisor and got to meet him on several other company projects. This was something I enjoyed very much.

My first time on a building site was in 1976 when I had just left school to become an apprentice bricklayer. I can't honestly say that health and safety has got a lot better since then. Come to think about it, Ian could have chose not to speak about his accident if he wanted to, but Ian was determined to tell everyone about how his accident could have been prevented. Although Ian is no longer with us I am sure everyone who listened to him talk will never forget the message he was left with us. I know I will never forget Ian for all his hard work and commitment to help make construction a safer place to work. It was an honour and a privileged to have known him.

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