



The Essex 2020 Podcast

Podcast #12 – Grant Bibby

In this series, we go behind the scenes of the UK's biggest celebration of science and creativity.

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In each episode, Essex 2020 project director, Richard Freeman meets some of the brilliant people and organisations who are working to create inspire and discover Essex's past, present, and future.

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Richard Freeman: Welcome to the Essex 2020 podcast. I'm joined this afternoon by Grant Bibby from Global Marine Group. I'm really thrilled to be talking to you Grant. How are you?

Grant Bibby: Yeah, good thanks. Good to be here Richard, thanks for having me on.

Richard Freeman: Absolute pleasure. Where does one work when one is an apprentice at Global Marine Group?

Grant Bibby: Well usually, if times were better, I'd be in the office in Chelmsford, just off the Boreham interchange near Springfield. But currently I am at home. And will be for the foreseeable future.

Richard Freeman: Have you been kitted out with a plush office and a studio and you know, tea making facilities. Or are you just making do with a spare room or kitchen table?

Grant Bibby: Making do with my kitchen table.

Richard Freeman: Fair enough, we're all in the same boat. Boats is a lot of what you guys do. So, I am keen to explore a little bit about two or three things really.

A – let's find out a little bit more about Global Marine Group. I've been really interested in the work that the organisation been doing. So, I'm looking forward to hearing a bit more of the kind of scope and technicalities of the work. That's one thing to talk about.

The other thing I want to talk about is your role as an apprentice. What's been the experience like for you as an apprentice? Working in an organisation like that. So, we will find a little bit more about your story perhaps.

And then three Essex 2020, which is this big wonderful project that brings together elements of science and creativity in action. So, I'm really keen to hear about in your job particularly. How you bring that sort of real creative skill to life as a designer and you know as a drawer. But very much

working towards the ends of highly technical, mathematically driven, in the cutting-edge of engineering.

Grant Bibby: Yeah, yeah of course. Go ahead.

Richard Freeman: What's Global Marine Group? For those that are un-initiated. How would you sum up the work of the organisation?

Grant Bibby: So, we are a company that have been around for 150 years. We work on offshore so, we started off in telecommunications, which is essentially laying fibre optic cables underneath the ocean. A lot of people would say that most calls go through satellite but 98% of your calls go under the ocean through fibre optic cables, which is a little interesting fact for you. But like I said we are one of four partners: we are Global Marine, which is what I work for; Global Offshore; Sea Wind and Ocean Like You, which had just been announced.

Global Marine, they mostly cover telecoms whereas Global Offshore and Sea Wind sorry go over to power so stuff like renewable energy, wind farm **raise**, that's mainly what they work on. So, that's just a basic overview of what we do. And I believe that we have 11 ships that are capable of laying cables on the ocean along with RAV's and cruise transfer vehicles, but I don't know how many we have of those.

Richard Freeman: Let's say lots. So you said your based in Chelmsford at the HQ but there are sites sort of dotted around the UK at different coastal ports and things.

Grant Bibby: Yep. From what I know of we have one in Blyth and one in Aberdeen and there is one elsewhere, but I can't remember. But we do have four in England and I believe we work in Taiwan as well we have Sea Wind.

Richard Freeman: The brain power and the engine come from central Essex which is quite exciting and not a lot of people will know about. I think it's one of the big missions of Global Marine is to be, you know, a bit more visible. Particularly in terms of people like yourself, cream of the crop, talent coming into the organisation, they need to be seen and heard. It's an exciting time probably for a company like Global Marine to kind of pick up some of that young talent coming in.

Grant Bibby: I think it's funny you say about, Sorry I just want to butt in there, when you say about the shift in jobs. The bit of background from me is that I lost my job back in March as an apprentice for an automotive company for interior design. So yeah, I can completely agree with what you just said in terms of jobs shifting, lucky enough for Global Marine to find me.

Richard Freeman: Oh, okay. I didn't know that. That's really interesting. So your position is as a direct result of being made redundant through the COVID pandemic? You've now been able to pick up a new opportunity.

Grant Bibby: That's it. I see it in a good light really, being made redundant. So, I wouldn't have become an apprentice here, which I far more enjoy.

Richard Freeman: I mean that such good news! Congratulations on that. That's a little bit of glimmer of hope because I know conversations I've been having with colleges and local authorities and stuff that people are really concerned about the number of apprentices that are going to be losing their jobs. I mean there are tens of thousands of apprentices that have been furloughed. So, tell me about being an apprentice then, lets rewind a bit, what was you doing before you became an apprentice the first time with the automotive company? What led you into that?

Grant Bibby: I'll go even further back. I've been to university twice, dropped out both times. STEM related subjects. First time I didn't enjoy it, that was in computer game design. Second time was more personal reasons, but it was aerospace engineering. I've done a bit of CATIA work, which is a software CAD design software, which is what I put on my CV and I applied for design apprentices because I wanted to work full time study part time. I found the balance a bit better. And then my CATIA knowledge stood out for them and then I ended up getting that apprenticeship. That company was more focused on interiors of cars but more supercars, like high up cars so I can't say what cars cause I did sign something but they are nice cars so he's working with yeah.

Then obviously they made me redundant because of the COVID pandemic. And then my college has been a really good blessing. They're main reason I found this new job because I know that Global Marine was going through colleges to find new talent and an apprenticeship based on the new government scheme and they ended up finding me! I was highly recommended which was nice about college to recommend me so and then I ended up here.

Richard Freeman: You're very free to give your college a shout out there's no rules on that if you if you want to give them a plug it's up to you.

Grant Bibby: Colchester's Institute. It's a good place.

Richard Freeman: They would be very pleased, I'm sure. So, you're an apprentice... we were chatting just before we started recording. You said designer, design draftsman engineer apprentice. So, I think I understand broadly what design means. I know what an apprentice is, and engineering always confuses me. I have conversations with many many engineers who all tell me that the definition of engineering is entirely different. So, I would love to hear what that means to you. Draftsman haven't got a clue! So, talk me through it. What is it to be a design draftsman engineer apprentice in 2020?

Grant Bibby: Okay so, I would say my title is given to me because of the draft side of things; more 2D drawings, sketches and that kind of thing, which is what the company is current... the way things are, essentially in the drawing office. So, it's a lot of 2D work. But based on my experience with the previous company I have quite a bit of 3D work, which is the design side of things come in I'd say. So I can do a lot more 3D models and just maybe get into animation because you obviously have storyboards, which are 2D. If you get an animation that more 3D so, just helps better visualize the processes that you want to tell your clients I'd say.

With the engineering side of things that's more my college so I'm trying to learn all the maths and physics, all the STEM related topics at college. So currently doing thermal dynamics and mechanical principles along with two engineering projects at college. So, that side of things I am not doing too much of the maths at work at the moment, but I do talk to a lot of the engineers there to try and get a bit of knowledge from them.

Richard Freeman: What an amazing mix of learning. So, what is it that you are designing?

Grant Bibby: So, at the moment, if I give a real-life example of what I'm doing; I'm assisting with a hybrid crew transfer vehicle. So essentially, it's got a piston engine and an electric motor so we're focusing a lot on renewable so being highly efficient and with low emissions. We work with wind farms, so you'd think we would be. That's what I'm currently working on. And I'm doing more of the operational side of things, so I'm trying to make a more comfortable saloon, which is where all of our technicians will sit when they go to the wind farms. So that's my focus at the moment for new layouts and then a few edits, so if for example, there was a design problem where the door was

facing outwards over the overboard, so if you wanted to get stretcher in there, for example, you'd have to hang the person over the edge of the boat. So just by simply putting angled door you'd solve that problem so small things like that.

Richard Freeman: It's those small problems that can derail a job, but people really worry about.

Grant Bibby: Yeah definitely.

Richard Freeman: What have you learned as an apprentice you know this this combination of on the job and college learning and particularly in being an apprentice in these strange times? Obviously, you've done well to get the new job but it's all your learning online now or are you able to connect with peers and classmates who are doing apprentices elsewhere as well?

Grant Bibby: The way it works at the moment is we are currently doing face to face sessions at college. We came back on the 1st of October so it's once a week every Thursday 9AM till 6PM. We are mixture of class; it's been half now because of trying to limit the exposure of each student so we have half classroom size. But some people have paid for it themselves and some people are apprentices so, it was a bit varied. But we do remain in contact via WhatsApp but at the moment we're in face to face sessions. But with the new lock down rules coming in I'd assume we're going back to zoom calls, which was what it was like back in March when I was still attending before everything went a bit bad. They haven't announced anything yet, but they already had contingency plans in place anything like this came about so they have got a direct line of communication to tell us that we no longer need to go into college will just do zoom calls. I find it just as good as going in really, I prefer face to face sessions but you still learn just as much and plus you don't have commute time, so you get a bit more learning I suppose.

Richard Freeman: Do you feel you're getting a different experience as an apprentice to some of your colleagues? Is that sense of working with peers who may be with other organisations, does that add some value? Or does it not really make much difference?

Grant Bibby: I find add some value because not everyone is in the same industry. So, two of the apprentices there are actually old colleagues from my previous job and coming into this new job, we're doing completely different things; the way management handle their apprentices are completely different. It is really nice to get the experience from other people, some people are better at design, some people have more theoretical knowledge, so yeah, I find it really helpful to be honest. To be able to go in and see what everyone says.

Richard Freeman: And how far through your apprenticeship are you?

Grant Bibby: So luckily, I got put on a break in learning and I didn't have to restart; so, I'm a year... yeah just a year because I started my apprenticeship on the 2nd of October. Part of the apprenticeship you have two sides to view it apprenticeship you have the NVQ and the HNC.

So, the HNC is a year and a half so an 18-month course ends in February. And then the NVQ side is strictly down to me and my determination to finish it. I'm hoping to finish it at the same time as my HNC so I can move on to the degree level, which is something they're looking to put me on next.

Richard Freeman: Oh, that's great I was going to ask you what's the progression route? I know that degree apprenticeships are certainly you know gaining some traction so that's great news if that's your next step potentially.

Grant Bibby: Yeah! It goes to higher national diploma into a top up degree, so it's ended up another 2 and a half years of education.

Richard Freeman: So, it's interesting you know you said you'd gone to University, tried that couple times. You know it didn't quite work out and for many many people that it doesn't. You know I think there's a perception that it's one or the other: University or apprenticeship. Too many people think it is one or the other. But actually, that's not the case at all. There's lots of people who do both. And people move between. I think some of the most talented people I know show that real depth of experience and understanding in a technical qualification but also have a good academic brain and can think about the sort of ideas underpinning it. I think that there is some lazy thinking out there that you're either one thing or another. Clearly talking to you, there's lots of different sides to the skills and knowledge that you are able to apply in the workplace.

Grant Bibby: Yeah definitely. That's the problem though! I feel like they build it into you when you're going through your education that you can either go to university or you can be an apprentice and then that's it. But like you say, there's definitely hybrid options of the two; you can work your way up, you can find your feet that way. I certainly feel a little less pressured and I wish I knew it before to just you know... work my way up get some practical knowledge and then think oh! I didn't know this was a job, I'm going to go down that route and then see what I can you know expand on and if there's any more progression route I'll go back to education.

Richard Freeman: A very reasonable and admirable outlook there, I think. We do ourselves a disservice really as a country and certainly within the education system not always intentionally... but this idea that if you want to do that you have to do this! You know success being pegged to some very specific kind of milestones or achievements, which is pretty nonsense to be honest for I don't think I know anybody, who's in their dream job that had any idea how they were going to get to it when they were 15/16.

Thinking about the kind of balance between creativity and science lateral part of the brain and the technical part of the brain. Do you feel that your work has a good combination of the two?

Grant Bibby: I would definitely say it's one of the best ones for equaling out the two. Because obviously you have to come up with the designs, then you have to sketch through the concepts and then, you have to be there narrow them down, expand, narrow, expand until we get correct design. So, it's the whole process of going from the development stage and coming up with these new ideas and then going into the engineering side of things, with how am I going to make this now? So, I definitely feel like you got a good balance of the two and that's why I enjoy it so much. I like the combination too so I'm quite creative but also quite hands-on and theoretical, so I suppose that's why I chose this job. Definitely need a healthy balance of the thinkers and the doers really.

Richard Freeman: What advice would you give? I know that's an awful question chatting to your 15-year-old self or you know you are in front of a bunch of schoolchildren.

Grant Bibby: I'd definitely say just let things naturally flow don't put too much pressure on yourself. My best advice would really be to talk to people you know, talk to people in those positions, send across emails to companies, know how you would get there. They are the people that have got there so they're probably the best people to tell you how to get there, if that's something you're interested in. Don't feel pressured to do the university route, don't feel pressured to do the apprenticeship route, just go with how you feel go with your gut instinct and you always get there in the end I believe.

Richard Freeman: Amazing. What do you think the future holds? So, you're working on some pretty cool technologies, you know we are we are fast heading towards a world of automated technologies, of energy that we create ourselves and then feedback into the grid... Of ultrafast broadband 5G/6G,

whatever comes around the corner, where we connect together and... So, how does that feel like as a young man working in that sort of industry? Do you feel a sense that you're kind of privy to this world? Where the future sort of being designed and written and you got a part to play in that? Does it feel like that? Or is it just actually now it's just very...

Grant Bibby: Definitely! That's another reason why I like this job so much, it's nice to be a solution to problem rather than part of the problem.

So, working in the renewable energy sector is really nice you know. We are in the green industrial revolution at the moment and that's where things are heading. And I think the future is... I think they already have them, it's the floating wind farms, where they have a combination of both wind power and hydroelectric which is underneath obviously. So, yeah! It's really exciting to be working with it and I'm looking forward to my future here.

I'd definitely say, well one of the reasons I got my job now and I can imagine it's going to be completely the same in the future, you just got to have the enthusiasm and the can-do attitude to want to be in the industry really. And as with all engineering aspects, you can't be afraid to make mistakes. You're part of a team you know you're not always going to have a perfect solution. Just you know rely on each other. That's the main part of my job is communicating, communicating with the team and not putting everything on your own shoulders.

So, I don't know which specific roles will come about but I do know the skills for those roles will always be the same, show enthusiasm don't be afraid to be you know make mistakes and just enjoy your job I'd say.

Richard Freeman: Focus on being someone who's curious, open minded, a good communicator, hungry for knowledge and actually let yourself be led by that and those skills you'll learn, you'll pick up.

Grant Bibby: Exactly yeah! I completely agree.

Richard Freeman: It's been fantastic talking to you Grant! I think you're an inspiration truly. It sounds like you do some really fun things...

Grant Bibby: Good to talk to you too Richard.

Richard Freeman: But I'm sure it's hard work as well.

Grant Bibby: Oh definitely! I do have my work cut out for me.

Richard Freeman: Global Marine Group, do they have any plans for future kind of recruitment campaigns? or anything like that? You said they were working with colleges to try and find you know cream of the crop apprentices. Is that something that's going to continue?

Grant Bibby: Well if I put it into perspective; I'm the second apprentices they've had. It didn't go so well with the first one. So, I'm still a guinea pig and they're still actively looking for apprentices. They do ask me if I have any friends that are interested. They also have the graduate scheme, that's always been very successful, they still have that there. And just any trainees or anyone that wants to get involved in this industry, it's just moving really fast. We are a small company, we're growing and that's the best time to get in I think.

Richard Freeman: Thank you Grant.

Grant Bibby: Yes, thank you.

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