

I was at a loose end in the Summer of 1966 living with my brother in Hemel Hempstead so I went to Shell Mex's reception to ask for a vacation job. They set me an aptitude test and offered me a permanent job but as I was going to university I had to decline.

I was at another loose end in the autumn of 1970 living with my brother in Hemel Hempstead so I went to Shell Mex's reception to ask for a permanent job. I might have even said, "I would like to take up your job offer". One successful aptitude test later

I started gainful employment of a salary of £1,350 plus a London allowance of £100 in January 1971. Lunch was a shilling but pudding was extra.

I was persuaded to join the company because I had regularly visited a friend who worked for Shell at Waterloo (which had a swimming pool and squash courts) so I expected more of the same at Hemel.

I was in the Vehicle Maintenance Team and I had to write COBOL reporting programs, VM7, VM8 and VM9 (three and a half boxes of punched cards). Other team members were Ken Miller, Tom Campion, Ann (who unfortunately died in a fire accident on a boat in Norfolk Broads), Mike Wheeler, Nick Edmonds and Geoff Cozens (who later left the company to head up a team of freelancers in Brussels).

I initially stayed in a B&B in the old part of town and I shared a room with a man who held up one of the banks with a bow and arrow. The man in the next room was a famous poisoner, Graham Young. Later I stayed in a maisonette with legend Jim Douglas.

I remember Tony Teal regularly buying us drinks in the "Wagon & Horses". He was happy to buy my lager and blackcurrant but he asked me to order it.

I bought 20 Vivaldi albums with my first monthly pay check – other pay checks went on shares that became worthless in time. Money also went in buying the operators drinks in the "W&H" – the secure way to improve on the 24-hour turnaround time. There were great parties at Mr Knight's cottages.

The magic roundabout fascinated me.

As for work I remember Univac 1108 and 1106 (EXEC 8), Fastrand, TPF\$ and @COB,Options.

After two years I moved to Wythenshawe to replace Dave Moston who became the Systems Programmer (with part time DJ Tim Boddington as boss). When I went for the look-see I had several pints in the Portway at lunchtime and that impressed my future colleagues. I was a lot happier there working alongside Derek Trueman, Brian Grimshaw, Alan Winwood and Tina Emmett. The operating side was headed by Jim Hitchen, Jim Smith and John Beaumont.

The only development team was Agency and I inherited three COBOL programs, AG92, AG93, and AG94 from Dave. My stewardship of the Assembler program

AG10 from Brian was not a success (too complicated for the likes of me). The computer was a Univac 9400 (TSOS) - 49,152 bytes of storage.

I had a great time in Wythenshawe because it was a more informal place. I saw “The Bee Gees” and “Olivia Newton-John” at “The Golden Garter”.

I remember the Hazel Grove pub crawl when Jim Hitchen sunk two pints in the last pub. We even got Harry Cordwent drinking frothy Northern pints at one of the pubs.

I could not see a future at a company though when they wondered why I came to work every morning in a different direction.

I left the company to work at ICI Pharmaceuticals in Alderley Edge which turned out to be the worst decision of my life.

After three and a half years I went freelance which I did happily and successfully for 30 years.

I retired last year and I remain to live in Durham with long trips to France.

Alan Anderson.