

Recollections of Mike Bess

I joined SMBP in 1961 at Bristol as a Relief Clerk gaining experience at Llandarcy, Bridgwater, Gloucester, Yelland and Avonmouth terminals. After about a year I moved to CMR working with Len Bacon then onto Agencies with Jack Bryant.

In 1962 we in Bristol were informed that SMBP were going to replace all the hollerith machines with computers and that a new Computer Centre was being built in Hemel Hempstead. I joined a number of "volunteers" wishing to join this "New World" at HH.

In September 1963 I moved from Bristol to HH and was in the second wave to join the Computer Centre from various Regions in the Southern part of England. My first job was on Retail CMR working with Roy Barrett. I was quickly moved onto Industrial CMR working with Alan Mallett. In 1965 was promoted to Senior Clerk and moved to Government CMR working with Ron Hedger and Charley Presley. In 1966 I was moved from CMR to a new department called Product Stocks headed by Len Piggitt. I was sent to Shell-Mex House to learn the Product Stocks procedures from staff in London. I then headed a small team of people who went to Manchester to bring North West Regions Product Stocks down to London and then to the Computer Centre. Unfortunately in 1968 the predicted computerisation of Product Stocks didn't happen at the first bight and I was then moved to Sales Input working with Derek Sandy and promoted to Senior Assistant. In 1969 I was then moved back to CMR as Barry Watkins Senior Assistant leading a CMR section of 24 young people. In 1971 I was transferred to Shell-Mex House joining Financial Procedures working with Arthur Minski then Dennis Lucas and finally Keith Robinson until Brand Separation in 1976 when I joined Shell UK Exploration & Production (Expro) in Shell Centre. I stayed with Expro until I retired in 1989.

My funniest recollection of my time in the computer centre was in the early 70s at the time when the power was deliberately being cut due to the miners' strikes. As the computer centre spanned the Marlowes (road) in HH the power was being cut at different times on each side of the road. So one side of the computer centre had power while the other didn't. Dick Baylis, one of the Senior Managers, had the idea of linking the power to both sides of the building. This worked well for some time but unfortunately the scheme got discovered and was stopped