

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

What do I remember about those times in the sixties and early seventies when I was part of the Hemel and Wythenshawe experience? Not as much as I should like to is the answer. But enough to record a few recollections, which might just strike a chord for others.....

The constant stream of bodies up and down between Hemel and Wythenshawe, with the M1/M6 and The Pullman each providing their fair share of adventures, mishaps and tall tales.

The coffee and tea trolleys – very civilised – and fruit buns once a week, Thursday I think.

Puleston's taxis fetching in on-call programmers at all times of the night

Harry Cordwent arriving at 7am everyday to eyeball the night shift leader's handover report, preferably when he wasn't looking. (He was planted a spoof report one morning)

Bird Brown's inordinately lengthy compilations, which often expired ignominiously before completion.

The Wagon and Horses – time spent there was best measured by how far I had retreated down the bar in earnest conversation with Doug McCall.

The Portway – certain shift leaders were more likely found there than in their proper place.

The Great Nightshift Ice Cream Robbery (case closed unsolved – were DNA samples taken?)

Another unsolved mystery – who was the B shift phantom farter; a few suspects but no confessions or convictions.

Round-The-Table at break time – where did we get the energy?

Dick Baylis using the backdoor, coercing/bribing operators to work weekend shifts, when the official channels had denied his request.

Battles raging across the computer room with paper tape cores, some turned into lethal ammunition with a healthy coating of black-and-sticky.

The more legitimate, but equally acrimonious, contest for the middle printer, switchable between the two machines.

“RTI on 6” fooling each new wave of trainee operators.

The White Powder crisis; faulty tapes infected much of the mag tape library. Just like bird flu but worse. No sooner than it appeared to be cracked, another outbreak would occur.

Groups of visitors gawping into the computer room being entertained through the large plate-glass window by operators doing goldfish impressions.

Jim Hitchen turning up in the Mailing Room in the document lift, scaring the knickers off the giggly mailing girls.

The 0930 daily priority meeting; better training than any course – negotiation skills, anger management, stagecraft etc.

Ketchup Roulette – a nightshift favourite – twist the cap, shake vigorously, pass it on.

The Rubber Game – bounce an eraser from the floor to the mail baskets – 1 point for the top tray and 5 for the lower tray.

Stanley Day nicking tapes from the library to prove security was bad – bless him.

A tray of 2000 cards spilled on the floor by a clumsy operator in front of a candescent Mike Pallett, the self-appointed 911/913 king. Just a joke Mike – they were blank.

Paddy Dunford, a willing but inept footballer, being asked to stand still on the penalty spot at a free kick and we would try for an in-off. And Ken “Red-mist” MacLennan, having despatched a nippy winger into the next field, being halfway to the dressing room before the ref could get his card from his pocket.

Just recalling these things, and loads more I must have forgotten, makes me wonder whether we worked. We did though, often very hard – we just had a lot of fun doing it. Well I did anyway.

PETER HUNT

1962/4 London Division/MSD – then took Quis test

1964/5 Hemel Ops

1965/6 Wythenshawe Ops

1966/71 Hemel Systems

1971/5 Hemel Ops

1975/6 Wythenshawe Systems

Brand separated to Shell UK

Took VS in 1989 – freelance consultancy until 1995

Now 64 year-old house-husband in Colchester with second wife and 13 year-old lad.