

Bygone days

A CAREER REMEMBERED

by Gerald Healy.



Photo courtesy of Dave Thornley. L to R Gerry Healy, Ray Bell (Telecomms), Barry Knowles.
Note: Smoking was banned in the Control Room c1985

INTRODUCTION.

My earliest awareness of the existence of an industry called Electricity Supply considerably predates the commencement of my subsequent employment within its ranks. This was due to the simple circumstance that my father was himself a power engineer and thus from my earliest years of continuous memory, my life was influenced by a growing understanding of how my father earned not only his living but also mine, as well as that of my sister and mother. He had begun his working life as an apprentice electrician with the electricity department of his hometown (Wigan County Borough Council in the county of Lancashire) municipal electricity undertaking accompanied by a course of study for a Diploma in Electrical Engineering at the local Wigan & District Mining & Technical College. As time elapsed and he progressed in experience and responsibility, he joined the ranks of the generating station operational staff and inevitably I frequently found myself within the station precincts for a variety of reasons on very many occasions.



The Wigan Generating Station boasted 3 x 6MW British Thomson Houston multi valve governed turbo alternator sets driven by four or possibly five, (exact memory evades me at this remove), Babcock and Wilcox chain grate water tube boilers. These were the early years of the second world war and the self-sufficiency of the nation's energy supplies was a key factor in national survival so I am sure that our local experience was replicated across the whole of Great

Britain. The installed plant that I knew must have commissioned around the early twenties and replaced what had originally been in place since the turn of the century and which I recall being informed had been steam engine sets with vertically aligned reciprocating feed pumps supplying the boilers. The original footings for these machines were still visible at one end of the boiler-house. Certainly, there was a foundation stone in the office building which fronted the station which bore the date 1902. (NB: the year my father was born).

I do not know if the area was specifically targeted by enemy action from the air but being situated exactly halfway between Liverpool and Manchester on a line running virtually due east/west, the fallout from the severe blitz raids on those two cities was very close on occasion. Also, there were important munition factories within four or five miles which came in for some Luftwaffe attention. As it happened, the effect of the war on me personally was not as drastic as it might have been, or indeed, as it was to some of my friends and schoolmates. My father, I understand, had volunteered and registered for war service as an engineer in the Merchant Navy, as being an activity closely allied to his civilian experience not to mention one essential to national survival. However, as one of the older young men on the staff, (being then in his late thirties) he was prevented from this course of action and designated "reserved occupation". Someone had to stay to "run the job". I do remember though that a company of the Home Guard was formed from the staff of the Wigan Corporation Electricity Department into which he was drafted. I recall that frequently, if he was not on night shift



in his civilian capacity, he was required to don uniform for a security stint at work against the perceived possibility of enemy infiltration. I recall him also attending the local drill-hall for rifle range training and practice. In these complacent days, we laugh at the portrayed antics of "Dad's Army" but I can vouch at first hand that it wasn't always too amusing at the time and was in fact regarded as a serious last resort, however futile it might have proved in the event. Mercifully, they were never put to the test!



Whenever I was taken into the station, it was an environment which, I found at once puzzling and awe inspiring in those childhood years and my memories are many and varied. Among the ones that stand out is getting to know many of my father's colleagues: these seemed to me to consist of men who were endowed with a high degree of wisdom and kindliness and who invariably took the trouble to acknowledge the presence of a young lad. They were indeed men of high calibre, some of his senior colleagues having served with distinction in the Great War and indeed one of whom I later learned had been decorated for gallantry with the award of the Military Cross. I was at various times witness to some of the routine activities of a power station and did not go without explanation from the experts of the significance of what I saw. One particular highlight in this regard occurred soon after the ending of the second world war when the lights literally went on again after the years of

blackout. The local authority had caused the town to be illuminated afresh and the old pre-war street lights were replaced by the more modern technology whereby the illumination was provided by, I think, mercury lamps which emitted a purple effect which I thought cast a somewhat spooky glow into the Wigan streets. However, my “fifteen minutes of fame” came when I was accorded the privilege of switching them on one evening at lighting up time. The street lights were controlled from a console located, as I remember, on a switchboard controlling the old No. 1 BTH turbo alternator set and I, under strict supervision, was allowed to make the requisite selections and operate the control handle which triggered the relay which triggered the contacts which triggered the lights of Wigan. My superior demeanour the next day when I “casually” informed my schoolmates that I had: “switched the town lights on last night,” elicited reactions varying from awestruck envy through total disbelief to a desire to “scrag” me out of sheer jealousy.

Another unusual aspect of the original Wigan generating station, (aka Bradford Place, so named because of its location off Bradford Street), was its coal handling arrangement. Every single ton of coal was conveyed into the plant by water transport, being borne from local collieries by barge along the Leeds-Liverpool canal to a jetty whence it was transferred to the bunkering conveyor system literally by hand shovelling and wheel barrowing in those early times.

I recall a vast improvement to this state of affairs when the then very “hands on” Deputy Station Superintendent designed and specified a mechanical grab system which was ultimately constructed and brought into use by the resourceful Maintenance Engineer and his staff and did away with the need to manhandle the fuel. All this was achieved, as I remember, in house and without recourse to expensive outside suppliers and contractors. I even seem to recall the aforementioned Deputy Super (who was frequently to be seen wearing a boiler suit) actually fabricating the structure of the grab bucket with his own hands in order that the maintenance staff should not be absent from their routine duties any more than was necessary. Very proud of his prowess with the welding gear was the Deputy! The coal grab was very much his baby and it worked.

It was toward the end of WW2 that the Wigan County Borough Corporation decided that Bradford Place needed to be supplemented. It had by then been connected to the nascent national grid system under the auspices of the old Central Electricity Board, a public body charged with connecting together the disparate undertakings throughout the country and the forerunner of the present National Grid PLC in some senses.

(NB: It is interesting to note I think that in that sense, a form of “nationalisation” was introduced into the industry long before the Labour government reforms of 1945 and beyond, albeit for very different reasons and applying only to the transmission infrastructure but of course, not to the production function).

In Wigan, it was determined that a new generating facility should be tendered for and thus began the process which culminated in the commencement of the construction of the Westwood Generating Station on fairly adjacent land across the canal from Bradford Place, incorporating the relatively modern system of pulverised fuel boilers and 4 x 30MW turbo alternators...if not a big deal



in 1946 at least a reasonably sized one. I well remember the new edifice slowly taking shape on the local townscape and particularly the erection of twin cooling towers which the natives wondered at greatly. Come 1945 and the election of the post war Labour government with its commitment to public ownership of the essential utilities, the partly constructed Westwood was removed from the oversight of the Wigan Town Council and became the property, lock, stock and barrel of the new British Electricity Authority on vesting day, 1st April 1948. Westwood ultimately commissioned in I think 1950. It was not long afterwards that my own career in Electricity Supply commenced, as it turned out, a career that coincided, give or take a year or so either end, with the period of nationalisation. Notwithstanding the commissioning of this addition to the system in Wigan, the old Bradford Place station was not immediately supplanted. It continued operations until I think sometime in 1957 and indeed, as we shall see, I completed my training there before its closure.

THE WORLD OF WORK.

Although it was never inevitable that I should follow my father into his working environment, I suppose my exposure to it as described above must have had a deep influence. I had nonetheless as much interest at school in languages, particularly English and French as I had in Science subjects and probably more so than in mathematics and might well have followed a different career path. However, I finally decided to try for what seemed to me to be "the family business". I had achieved a clutch of modest GCE "O" levels in the academic year ending in 1951 which was incidentally the first year of the GCE system. The former School Certificate had been the standard for many years and I was among the first candidates to be subject to the change, although there was no alteration to the academic content of the syllabus. My efforts in that regard, together with the inevitable interview by the Education and Training department of the newly established North West Division of the BEA, were considered adequate for the offer of an apprenticeship in Mechanical Maintenance accompanied by the study for Ordinary/Higher National Certificate in Mechanical Engineering on a part time basis. Thus began the culture shock of transition from grammar school desk to ash basement in one easy leap.

My initial posting was to Bolton Generating Station (known as "Back o'th' Bank"), a distance from my home of some 15 miles or so and equipped with 3 x 30MW turbo alternators (of I seem to remember English Electric manufacture) and fired by the ubiquitous Babcock and Wilcox chain grate boilers, six I think in all. It was certainly a huge transformation in my life but with the optimism and adaptability of a sixteen year old, I became accustomed to the change reasonably quickly, a process helped by the acquisition of my first motorbike, a thrill which I have never forgotten and, at this remove, sometimes wonder how I survived. Very soon after the commencement of my new employment, I was transferred for six months to the newly established Workshop Training Centre to acquire the fundamental techniques of hands on workshop engineering. This was located on the site of the Stuart Street Generating Station in the Bradford district of Manchester and my group were the second course to attend. Along with day to day workshop practice instruction by the Chief Instructor and his Assistant, I recall some of the more senior trainees were enlisted to help us younger lads which was intended presumably to give



them an insight into wider aspects of their working life. Also, numerous industrial visits were laid on for our benefit. Among the more memorable of these were visits to the famous Mather and Platt works which manufactured pumps, electric motors, and firefighting equipment and supplied many power stations with auxiliary plant; also to Bradford Colliery which at that time was the deepest mine in Europe and I believe from my recollection must also have been the hottest. Another unique feature was the fact that Bradford Colliery supplied the Stuart Street bunkers direct from the coalface via an underground conveyor belt which emerged from the earth in a coal transfer facility adjacent to the boiler house. My admiration for the men who won our fuel in those days stems from that particular trip as an apprentice.

My apprenticeship continued apace and another landmark occasion came when I was included in a group of apprentices on a Trainee Induction Course, the venue being Electricity Hall at Buxton, the renowned spa town in the Derbyshire peak district. Electricity Hall itself was an imposing former gentleman's residence with all that implies in the way of fixtures and fittings. As the name suggests, the surroundings were opulent, or what passed for opulent in the post war years of austerity. Certainly, I had not experienced such a degree of luxury living as it seemed then. The days were passed in lectures, discussion groups and forums touching on all aspects of the industry and I remember a visit and talk, followed by a question and answer session, from our then NW Divisional Controller, Mr. Andrew Cooper, a man of great distinction in the industrial field. Our leisure time was passed in the well-stocked bar, with snooker, table tennis and so forth available on tap so to speak. Towards the end of my apprenticeship, I was posted to my home town station at Bradford Place, already mentioned above, where at that time, my father was still on the technical staff, in post as Shift Charge Engineer. There I concluded my Articles of Indenture which were subsequently presented to me at a ceremony at the Whitworth Hall in Manchester. Inevitably, my future was clouded in those days, as it was for most of my contemporaries, by the prospect of National Service. That was to be my next significant change of lifestyle.

NOW WE ARE TWENTY ONE. (With apologies to A.A. Milne).



The Royal Air Force was my next port of call. I was almost 22 years old at this stage but since my time therein is not relevant to the supply industry, I will not linger on my experience in its ranks except to say firstly, that I enjoyed it considerably and secondly, that they made use of my technical background to some degree by training me to operate and maintain the ground radar facilities which equipped the control tower of a V-bomber station in East Anglia. I might also mention that,

having risen to the heady heights of Senior Aircraftman, and having already on entry been designated "potential officer material," I fleetingly considered perhaps staying to carve a career in the military field of engineering but the keyword there is "fleetingly".

Demobilisation, two years later, found me seeking new pastures in electricity supply, even though I could have become re-employed in the north west. I liked the idea of moving on from my old haunts. Among my applications, was a post in the East Midlands Division as a General Assistant Engineer at the Avon Generating Station, Warwick. This was a plant which had formerly been under the ownership of the Leicestershire and Warwickshire Electric Power Company, a subsidiary of the Balfour Beatty group, prior to nationalisation. Suffice to say that I was interviewed, found to be up to scratch and offered the position. It was at this time also that I married and fairly immediately found myself to be a prospective dad. A respectable time later, my wife presented me with a son and heir and grown up life began in earnest.



My time at Warwick was invaluable in the sense of experience gained and responsibilities developed. The variety of plant and equipment on site was extensive with the local Area Board (East Midlands E.B.) system being connected via three separate sets of busbars at 6.6kv and 12.0kv together with the 33kv outdoor ASEA overhead busbar substation to which both the generation output and the 132kv grid connections were established. The station plant consisted of four turbo alternators (2 x 6MW; 2 X 15MW) of BTH manufacture and coincidentally of similar design and operating characteristics as the plant at Wigan. The various interbus transformers and connections, albeit the property

of EMEB were the responsibility of the station senior authorised operational staff who issued safety documentation to EMEB personnel as requested by EMEB district operational senior staff. This meant that there was ample opportunity to gain varied experience as a junior engineer so I found myself in the ideal environment for career development as time passed. My main responsibilities at first were in the Efficiency Office with the routine monitoring of station performance and production of the usual data for submission to Divisional Headquarters in Nottingham but ample opportunity was afforded to assist in the wider aspects of operations and maintenance. The operational significance of Avon Generating Station was vital for security of supply; with 2 x 30MVA grid transformers supplying a demand well in excess of 100MW on peak in winter, as I recall, plant availability was of the essence. As I gained experience, over time, I passed through the Control Engineer, followed by Assistant Charge Engineer posts. It seemed that I was destined to remain there longer than I originally anticipated as a vacancy seemed to occur just as I began to think a move was desirable for career progress. This pattern was repeated when finally, a Charge Engineer vacancy most unexpectedly occurred very shortly after the last one had been filled only some two years or so previously. My application was successful and I progressed to my first Senior Authorised post.

The responsibility of being in the position where “the buck stopped” constituted a severe learning curve. I was pretty well versed by then in the technical aspects of the plant and complex grid and distribution setup. However, the matter of industrial relations and what was then generally referred to as “man management” was something that only raw experience could impart, allied with invaluable advice from my older and more experienced colleagues. This was a period (the sixties) when trade union activity was very much an issue to be faced on the shop floor. Together with the worst winter for many decades, (1962/63) my life became somewhat hectic at work and I recall this as the time when, professionally speaking, I “grew up” over a very short period of time. That winter, the Midlands Region (Birmingham) grid control, in common with their counterparts around the country, were desperate for every last megawatt at morning and evening peaks and voltage reduction became a routine operational tool for the duration. It was probably the most severe winter since the notorious 1947 freeze which I remember as a young boy. I recall also then that there were supply interruptions, (load shedding in the parlance of the day), due to lack of capacity. The situation in 1963 was very similar. I do not remember whether we actually disconnected on this occasion but certainly we ran for lengthy periods with two stages of voltage reduction applied. It was a literally physical fight against nature to prevent items of equipment in exposed locations from freezing solid and to ensure plant was maintained in readiness for the morning peak. On the domestic front, I recall that it started to snow gently on the afternoon of boxing day covering the lawn of our recently acquired house. I did not see it green again until March!



Also, the situation with respect to industrial relations was volatile to say the least with various occasions when working to rule and threats of stoppage of work could flare up and needed to be managed at that level as they occurred. In this regard, and to be fair, I must say that I was thankful that the shop steward who was most influential among the operational industrial staff was one of the old school who was generally sensibly realistic and I learnt that, managed properly, he could become one of my most significant assets as an aid to peace and calm on the shop floor. This indeed proved to be the case and I developed a great deal of respect and admiration for his approach which I would certainly describe as helpful. This was not always so with some of his peers!



I can call to mind also occasions when technical staff were invited to volunteer to man plant in their own time in place of industrial staff working to rule. Not everyone approved of this course of action but, whatever the rights or wrongs of the situation, Birmingham Grid Control were always very grateful for the megawatts. During one such episode of “stand in” operators when I was the Charge Engineer on shift, one of my colleagues who happened to be a railway enthusiast had volunteered to drive the electric locomotive ferrying the wagons of coal from the railway mainline sidings down to the station tippler, a distance perhaps approaching half a mile and assisted (with my permission) by a young General Assistant Engineer. He, (my Charge Engineer colleague and an older man than I), had a high old time and it was his idea of heaven. With the maturity of age however, it occurs to me that I would almost certainly have been in serious legal trouble if anything had gone amiss. Mercifully, it didn’t.

During this time also and for operational reasons already mentioned, it was deemed necessary to reinforce the capacity to supply the local demand which covered an extensive area of Warwickshire and the East Midlands. To this end, a project to double the grid transformer capacity onto the bars at Warwick commenced. This was of course a major undertaking and one in which the senior staff of the station, the CEGB Transmission District and the Construction people, (not to mention the EMEB whose distribution plant was connected in close electrical proximity), were heavily involved. I cannot over emphasise the value of this experience in my working life. The other side of that coin though was of course the fact that, after completion of this project, the Avon Generating Station became much less necessary to security running and “out of merit” operation was greatly reduced. Overall, I would certainly regard my time at Warwick as the fundamental basis of my career and look back with more than a little affection on those days.

BACK TO THE NORTH.

At length, I sought a return to the region of my earlier days and with my East Midlands experience behind me, secured appointment to the NW region's Hartshead Generating Station near Stalybridge in Cheshire, although only just, as it was very close to the Lancashire border being quite adjacent to both Ashton-under Lyne and Mossley, both of which were Lancashire towns regarded generally as being “near Manchester”. Hartshead was a somewhat larger station than Warwick with reference to installed capacity. It was ordered and commissioned initially as a combined undertaking by four adjacent smaller local authorities combining their resources. These were Stalybridge, Hyde, Mossley and Dukinfield. Together, they brought into being the SHMD Tramway and Electric Power Company. It had been commissioned in I believe the twenties and expanded during the thirties and forties. It consisted of six Metropolitan Vickers turbo alternators: the LP sets being the original 3 x 14.5MW machines driven by the refurbished Babcock CTM boilers, now converted from their original chain grate coal firing to corner burner oil firing. The later three sets were also Metropolitan Vickers of 30MW capacity, also driven by six Babcock chain grate boilers of much later design. This gave the station a “book” capacity somewhat in excess of 130MW but in practice, due to the age of the three older LP machines, a limit was placed on actual output and from memory, I seem to recall our readily usable capacity was around 125MW to 130MW perhaps if max. gen. conditions were required. My post there initially was as Assistant Charge Engineer but with the possibility as I sensed of some upward mobility in reasonably early course. However, I remained in post only just in excess of three years as I became aware of the opportunities afforded by the System Operation developments resulting in three tier operation. Whilst at Hartshead, I made the most of the experience available but it somehow didn't impart the sense of satisfaction that Warwick had done. Perhaps that feeling was born of becoming a rather smaller cog in a rather larger wheel. There did not seem to be the opportunity to “drive” any given situation; everything seemed to happen according to “the book”

with less scope for individual input. Perhaps I am a little unfair in these thoughts; perhaps I was restless for a change of environment after something approaching twenty years in power stations. At all events, that is what happened.

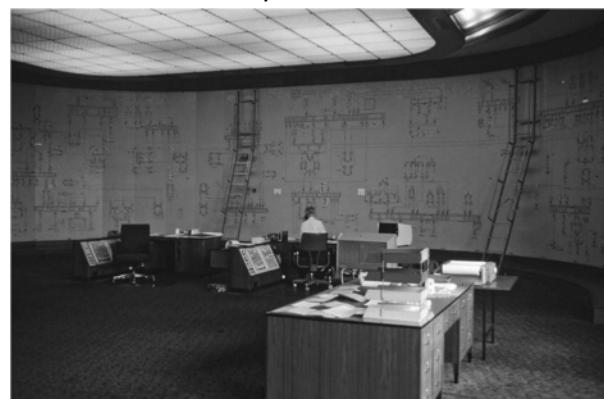
I must say though that in my personal life, my time at Stalybridge saw the addition of another son to my family so my sojourn there was not entirely without its high spots.



SYSTEM OPERATION.

With the superimposition of the 275kv and later 400kv supergrid on the existing 132kv network, the opportunities afforded by the expansion of system operation staff became of interest to me. I put the requisite applications in place and was ultimately appointed to a post in the last group of five engineers designated Assistant Control Engineers at Manchester Grid Control Centre known locally as "Roseneath", that being the name of the mansion type of house which had been acquired as the location for the control centre upon its move from the Didsbury HQ back in I believe 1958.

"Roseneath" was situated in Bramhall which is a somewhat upmarket village, which regarded itself rather as being "in Cheshire" (which it was) than "near Manchester" (which it also was). I believe back in the days when it was first mooted as the location of an "industrial development", there was some local consternation which these days would be dubbed "nimbyism". Of course I had no knowledge of this at first hand but if it existed at all it was evidently overcome, although I must say that I was always conscious that annoyance to the neighbours and unnecessary noise was a big "no-no", and especially so at night. I was also told, I cannot recall by whom, that a reason for "Roseneath" as a choice of location was its physical proximity to a major GPO landline underground junction which was a convenient circumstance from the telecoms aspect.



The "three tier" alteration of the disposition of the "Roseneath" facilities had begun when I arrived there. The existing set up was: the Area control room was in use as usual. The plan was to construct and equip two further rooms: the final configuration being a "Mersey" district room with operational responsibility for the 132kv system and connected generation to the west of the region including the Wirral and North Wales whilst its counterpart to the

east of the region fulfilled a similar function and was designated the "Pennine" district. At the time of my arrival, the original Area room had an additional function, doubling as the Mersey district loading desk. The switching function was also operating both supergrid and Mersey 132kv systems, albeit of course from separate desks. The Pennine room had already just commissioned and was on its own in its new surroundings, Control Engineers having been recently appointed. The immediate future development was to commission the second new room as the Area room, exclusively taking care of the supergrid and connected generation together with the nuclear generation located in North Wales. There was also a relatively small output from the original nuclear plant at Calder Hall owned and operated by the Atomic Energy Authority on the Cumbrian coast. This was the only station on the system which told grid control what it was doing rather than the other way round. The loading engineer programmed the Calder output as it happened. When Area was established on its own in the new room, Mersey would be left to take care of itself in the original control room. This state of affairs meant that my group of new appointees had the advantage of spending time becoming acquainted with procedures and getting to grips with our new function in the grand scheme of things. For almost our first year, we manned the desks, (Mersey in the first instance),

under supervision and I must say that in my case at any rate, I was glad that was so. Most Fridays were devoted to lectures from various functionaries, planning engineers, district engineers local managers et al. I found this period invaluable in acquiring knowledge hitherto outside my previous experience, particular instances being the characteristics of EHT overhead conductors, line protection and tower construction. When we finally were driving the system after the departure of the Area people, on our own, as Mersey District Assistant Control Engineers, we had thus been very thoroughly briefed.

Certainly in the very early weeks of my grid control incarnation, I seriously felt that I had taken an ill-advised career path. I found the change from the generating station environment hugely demanding and considered at one stage whether to try to reverse my choice in some way or other. However, I received sympathetic advice from senior colleagues, some of whom assured me that my inner sentiments were not uncommon and that I should not act hastily and that I would get to grips in an acceptably short time. This in the event is exactly what happened and looking back, it seems almost as though the confidence arrived overnight although I am sure it was a more gradual process. At all events, I grew in confidence and sought and obtained experience in the Pennine district then subsequently the Area control room wherein I eventually became established as an experienced assistant in both loading and switching functions in all three control rooms. This widening of exposure to the whole system and particularly at Area level stood me in good stead when a restructuring of the staffing in the late seventies was brought about by economies imposed by government requirements. A number of vacancies occurred at first engineer level which were the subject of course of fierce competition. I was successful in my application and found myself responsible as senior in a district room and also at a differing time still operating in the Area as Loading Engineer which function was elevated to First Engineer status as I recall. I was also able to function as assistant on the Area switching desk for significant periods so my experience remained widely spread which I considered an important factor.

One highlight of my time in the Area was the occasion during the industrial troubles of the early seventies. This must have been, from memory, when the government imposed a three day week together with deliberate supply interruptions in order to conserve coal. Arriving on shift one Monday morning to pick up the Area loading function from my weary colleague who was more than pleased to see me, I could hardly get to the desk for TV personnel, cables strewn on the carpet, cameras set up in the most inconvenient spots and an atmosphere far removed from the usual quietude of total control. The situation on the system was in the usual state of controlled crisis and no one had much time to pay attention to our intruders. Indeed, I was not alone in questioning why it had been permitted but that decision was way above my pay grade. I recall being vaguely aware at some stage of a man with a hand-held camera slowly circumnavigating the loading desk but had neither time nor inclination to pay him any attention. However, I was rewarded later that evening by the sight of myself at work on the local early evening TV news. I must have been recognisable for only perhaps thirty seconds or so but was subsequently amazed at the number of friends and relations who rang to let me know how impressed they were...well mostly impressed I should say! I seem to remember also that the clip of film was used as introductory footage on a national newscast a short time later...thus were my efforts brought to the attention of a grateful nation!

Another circumstance which stands out in my memory was towards what turned out to be the end of my working life. This was engendered by the takeover of the original grid network (132kv) which had become basically an EHT distribution grid. It was taken over by the local electricity boards the North West E.B. and the Merseyside & North Wales E.B. (NORWEB and MANWEB). The two boards involved treated their new functions very differently. Hitherto, they of course had no technical staff

with experience of operating or maintaining 132kv equipment. MANWEB's solution was to set up a totally new group of experienced engineers mainly recruited of course from the ranks of the CEBG. Indeed, one of our Roseneath colleagues was appointed as its first head. This made for a fairly seamless transition.

NORWEB on the other hand decided to train some of their existing staff with a view to eventually getting them authorised to manage their hitherto unfamiliar function. Their immediate problem was that they wished to carry out a wholesale refurbishment and extensive re-routing of a large part of the 132kv system in the extreme north of the region known as the Cumbria Ring which involved some new construction and re-stringing. The terrain was largely rural in nature and indeed parts of it bordered the Lake District National Park. System Operation in Manchester were approached for assistance with the safety switching and documentation necessary to this project and our Control Manager sought volunteers to come out of the standard shift rota to dedicate their efforts exclusively to this work for an anticipated twelve months. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was no immediate rush to volunteer as people mulled it over and considered its significance. I however, at that time had only recently returned from five months sick leave, having had a coronary bypass at a time when they were not as common as they later gradually became. It suited me very much to volunteer my services for the Cumbria Ring control role as there were no night shifts and no weekend working. I chatted briefly with a colleague who had also expressed an interest and with whom I was on amiable terms and thus likely to form an amicable working partnership. Our offer to take on the function was snapped up by local management and we embarked on what I consider to be one of the most interesting and enjoyable periods of my working life. Our attendance on shift was limited to morning and afternoon shifts covering 0700-2300 hrs. over a five day week. As far as the Cumbria Ring was concerned, we were monarchs of all we surveyed: an interesting project; no nights; no weekends; occasional booking of a pool car for meetings at the NORWEB office in Kendal, a beautiful part of the country, where we were treated to the best NORWEB had to offer in all respects. What was not to like? Sadly of course it didn't last beyond the year. The planned timetable for the project ran to perfection, an unusual circumstance in itself. Pretty well exactly twelve months to the day it commenced, the job was completed. My colleague and I were re-incorporated into the standard rota with subsequent consequences for my health which my medical adviser eventually asserted were enhancing the probability of seriously adverse cardiac consequences. When he mooted the possibility of my seeking to transfer my activities to less onerous duties under less demanding conditions, I informed him that I could seek early retirement whereupon he strongly advised that course of action with assurances of his full support.

In short, that is what ensued and thus ended a career which might never have happened but which I am pleased to have pursued for all the years. It was extremely fulfilling and even today, thirty years on, my recollections impart a sense of having made a useful contribution during my working life. If asked what memory remains most prominent at this remove, I would say unhesitatingly: the people that I met and called my colleagues; their dedication, their integrity and their competence. Some became close friends and one or two I count among the most inspiring people I have met.

The present industry and particularly System Operation is unrecognisable from those bygone days. I am proud of the small part that I played in it.

GFH.



8th March 2018