

Dave's GEN

Titled in the memory of the late Dave Fairhurst, our former editor & compiler



**A link for members of the former London Test Section,
who were based on Studd Street**

Re-published & more on www.ltssac.org

Photos & more on <http://inspirebte.yuku.com/forums/65/LTSSAC>

February 2015

Well, that's Christmas all done & dusted!

The White Swan reunion was well attended, with plenty of chin wagging, gossip and catching up done with this lot and more!



Lots more photos here: Control+click to view

http://inspirebte.yuku.com/topic/534/LTSSAC-Meet-11th-December-2014#.VOES_SwwC1w

On the home front, as we were going to be away for Christmas, we decided to have Val's sons and their families over for a pre- Christmas meal. We could manage ten for dinner with no trouble. It was difficult to say 'No' when both her daughters and children, said that they would come too. But another seven was going to make things difficult, so we put the boys off. The girls arrived and for sleeping arrangements, we were consigned to the caravan. Not too bad – at least it was quiet!

For Christmas Val & I acted out our own version of the Nativity. Although we were staying at Val's daughter's house, we knew that there was going to be 'no room at the Inn', so on Christmas Eve, we took the caravan with us and parked it across their drive. A bit more comfortable than a stable and when we retired to bed, all of the little 'Angels' were on the other side of a door. We slept well!

On Boxing Day, we departed to the Hertford Camp site, where we stayed until the 3rd January. Temperatures dropped to minus 5 degrees over night, but modern caravans are cosy with their heating systems, so all was well. A fish tank heater in the water container, kept that from freezing, so that was good too. How the camp site can justify almost £25 a night in a muddy, when not frozen, field is beyond me. But there you are, if you want it, you have to pay for it!

The Joe Baker Old Boys meet was on 20th January at the Greyhound pub in Christchurch, Newport. Only four of us there this time, Ron Tattam, John Little, Claris and myself.

Correspondence & Contact

A big thank you for all the Christmas cards, good wishes and donations received. We are now a bit flush with money for posting out copies of Dave's Gen and have enough for a good few years.

Cards and messages were received from:

Ros & Pete Perry, John Neil, John & Joan Sutton, Ron & Rene Tattam, Reg Hooker, Dick Wakefield, Derek & Kath Crane, Ian Boniface, Brian Bale, Ron Cooper, Claire Towler, Terry Griffiths, Alan Williams, David & Elizabeth Walton, Ted Blanden, Joan & Michael Stanton, Keith & Janet Rich, Jim Beard, Steve & Lorraine Dickens, Les Knightson.

From Michael & Joan Stanton

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you and your family and we hope you are looking forward to the festive season.

What a surprise, (I don't think!!) that Studd Street has been turned into a block of very expensive flats. It is in a very good location to get to Central London. There were some people that treated Studd St. As their place of residence all those years ago, washing, sleeping, changing to go out and some had their own little gardens. There was also the various tea and luncheon clubs such as Sid's basement Club. Group 40 Penthouse Lunch Club, the old Penthouse Restaurant and in summer the Roof Top Solarium, amongst the LMS Paint Samples Various. It sounds so good I want to go there for a holiday!!

I am still enjoying life in Spain, but the last couple of months the weather has been following the UK, it has been raining, the Alicante Drought is now over and the temperature has been dropping below 10 degrees at night. Unheard of on the Costa Blanca!

From Ron Cooper

December 1984, I retired from BT – 30 years so far, of having a BT pension. Any other ex-colleagues this number or more? It maybe of interest to know. Our Bill Sargeant must have well exceeded this number of years and Frank Helmore – well done!

I was at Waltham Cross a few weeks ago, when this gentleman, with a familiar face, came up to me. "Hello Ron, how are you? Have not seen you since you retired." I could not remember his name and did not like to ask.

Then another time, the same thing happened outside the Post Office in Hoddesdon and I mis-took him for a member of the Fishers Green Sailing Club and spoke about sailing and my daughter Julie. No wonder he looked confused, as he was another retiree from Studd Street. SORRY!

Anyway, I am still swimming fairly regularly. However I find 2 lengths (50 metres) and a short rest, enables me to complete 10 lengths front crawl, 10 lengths back stroke and only 2

lengths breast stroke. That's the stroke that really tires me. *(It's the butterfly that gets me Ron! JT)*

Sorry Ron, I've had to leave out Petey the Snake. Blame Ian Boniface!!!- JT.

From Les Knightson

Thank you for all your hard work in producing and emailing Dave's Gen. I am surprised at the breadth of the activities of the retired members of LTS.

From Jim Beard

Thank you for the October edition of the 'Gen', it's good to be kept in touch with those far off days.

From Ted Blanden

Thank you for Dave's Gen and all the news therein. Best wishes to you and all surviving 'I' Branch members.

From Brian Bale

Many thanks for the bi-annual Club Gen.

It's sad to see people dropping off the radar, with no new blood coming through, but it happens when sections / businesses close.

From Ros & Pete Perry

Thanks for keeping the Gen going.

Doug Fairhurst : has offered to send out CD copies of photographs he has taken at the quarterly meet ups at the White Swan. If anyone would like a copy, contact myself in the first instance, although Doug has said he will bring some with him at the next meet up.
John Tythe

From Roger Glover

Accenture pensioners please note, as this happened to me.

31st October 2014 : Another bundle of bills, statements, Virgin offers, pizza adverts are piled up under my letter box.

After a pre-sort one plain white envelope took my interest, as on the rear I read 'If undelivered please return to: PO BOX 19 Chesterfield'.

After a quick think, I guess that this is from the BT pension people. After ripping it open and removing the contents, I feel better as, for once recently I was right, it was from Accenture.

A summary:-

Accenture are the administrators of the BT Pension Scheme and we are required by the Trustee and the Pensions Regulator to carry out regular checks on the status of members so that we have up to date records. Therefore we need you to help us by confirming the details overleaf.

In order to verify we are contacting the correct person on our records we would appreciate it if you could complete the form on the next page entitled Appendix 1 and return in the envelope provided.

The completed appendix should be returned to the above address by 22 November 2014. Failure to respond within this timescale may lead to the suspension of pension.

By way of some re-assurance we as the Scheme Administrators and BT Pension Scheme Trustees have been directed by the UK Information Commissioner to ensure member's records are correct. We are in the process of contacting all scheme members to meet this requirement.

If you have any difficulty dealing with this request, please contact the Accenture Pensions Attestation Department, by telephone: (UK) 01246 457279, by email: BTPSAttestation@accenture.com or write to us at the above address. If you contact us please quote our reference.

Yours sincerely

Attached was a two-part form.

Heading:

Important:

This form must be completed in the presence of someone who is of a professional standing within the community (other than a relative), e.g. Postmaster, Bank Manager, Doctor, Pharmacist, Librarian, Faith Leader (Priest or Minister), Justice of the peace or care Home Manager, Job Centre manager or Police Officer.

Please note that most professionals will not charge for this service.

Section 1: *is about me* : Name, DOB, NI number, Address with places for date and signature.

Section 2: To be completed by someone who other than a relative.

Thinks! It's still October and the form needs to be back by 22nd November so it can wait.

17th November: I'd better get this form completed. Doctor? No. Haven't seen him in 5 years and he's a new guy. Librarian? No. Haven't been there in over 10 Years. Sod it!

18th November: After a phone call, the next day I completed the form in the presence of an ex-colleague who is a JP. As I had the return envelope with me I considered putting it in the post on my way home, however, I decided to and made a copy and to post it the next day.

2nd January 2015 (Friday at about 5:30pm): Time to pay the credit cards and other bills, when I noticed that the bank account looked thinner than I expected. On investigation I noticed that December's pension has not been paid.

5th January (Monday 9:30am) : Phone Accenture to find out that neither (?) of the forms had been returned. They said that a form was sent in February (I did not receive it) and the second in October which I posted but they didn't receive. Luckily having the completed copy, I rescanned the copy and e-mailed it and got confirmation that it was valid whilst on the phone.

7th January : Pension paid into account

8th January : Phoned Accenture suggesting that they instigate a system where a confirmation of receipt of a completed form will be sent within 14 days of receipt. Also a warning should be sent that the holder's pension will be withheld at least 14 days before it is expected.

12th January : From Accenture:

"I will have your payments reinstated and paid as soon as possible. I would anticipate the money being in your bank tomorrow but will come back to you to confirm the date.

I will also put your suggestions forward re send a letter confirming receipt of members form's and a further letter to inform members that their pension is to be suspended."

So chaps, watch out for those letters / forms.

"As an aside, I did a bit of web searching about 'BT Pension Attestation' and came up with this gem:
Re: BT Pension Attestation Form by el tel » 10 Mar 2014 13:33

I worked in the insurance industry and in the 1970's one of the major insurers were computerising all their pension records and discovered they were paying a pension to someone who was 115 years of age. The individual lived on a remote island in Scotland and were receiving a nominal pension paid annually from the company.

The company sent an Inspector to the address and when taken into the living room noticed a rather macabre object sitting on the mantle piece , it was a pickled thumb sitting in a jam jar. it turned out the client was illiterate and he used to confirm receipt of the postal order for his pension by his thumb print.

When he died his family had cut off his thumb and continued to receive his pension. True story!"

Roger

Studd Street News

Dave Coles sent me an email saying that the Studd Street site was on 'Silent Witness' the BBC TV series. I had recorded those two episodes and a short scene was filmed under the covered roadway and another on the roof, where one of the characters falls off into one of the wells, well it's all one big well now!

John Tythe - Benenden Visit.

We were out exploring in Kent and I had the thought to have a visit to the Benenden Hospital, once known as the PO & CSSS and now The Benenden Healthcare Society Ltd, (AKA Benenden Heathcare & Benenden), membership is no longer restricted to just BT, PO & Civil Service employees, it's open to everyone.

What we discovered was that the hospital is undergoing a £45,000,000 re-development, so we were unable to have a proper look see. So, we just had a wander around the church and the once immaculate grounds and then lunch in the restaurant.

I took some photos and there are some videos on You Tube for those who are on line:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B29ALybbF6s&list=PLG88RtIs-hdehrt8Z7wA8IVmRbPgxsDr>



Ian Boniface has submitted his reminiscences', so get yourself a slice of cake and a cuppa and settle down for some nostalgia: Make that a big slice of cake and a large cup!!!

The TO Years :

Returning to Studd Street

On my return to Studd Street, after National Service in late 1950, I was employed as a technician 2A examining Post Office Factory repaired switchboard jacks and indicators in what was known as the TN room. So back to the commuting journey of about one and a half hours each way! I had to use three alarm clocks to ensure I had time to get ready to leave home at 6.30. My pay was £6 per week plus 6 shillings technical allowance.

The work involved examining and testing every item submitted, making a list of all the faults found and then arranging for the factory personnel to collect faulty items, repair them and resubmit them for further examination. A record had to be kept of the results of these examinations and the items rejected. Items returned for rework were known as ringed rejects. Those of us doing this work were convinced that the system encouraged the factory workers to do very little to repair the items, just submitting them to us so we could give them a repair schedule for those needing more than just a clean. After a few months on this work I was moved to group 25, where we tested and examined new components, such as resistors and capacitors.

The system for apportioning work was by test reports. Each test report was annotated with the time in which the job should be completed. This generally reflected the time necessary reasonably accurately. At the end of each week, one was expected to have 'got your time in'. In other words all the test reports you had completed had to add up to the time available. There were exceptions of course. One such was the time allowed on test reports for the thousands of carbon resistors that I had to check on Group 25. You were supposed to carry out 100% inspection, but to examine and measure them all would have taken weeks. The time on the test reports only allowed a simple check the quantities and the use of unofficial sampling methods, just taking a few from each batch to check.

Technical Officer in Training

After about six months, in the late spring of 1951, I was invited to attend a selection board for training to become a Technical Officer (TO). I did not think that I had much chance of being successful as there were too many Technicians who had been in the job for years being interviewed, but I was selected and started a year's training.

The TO training course involved reinforcing the training given as a youth in training but in more depth. As well as the overview of the work of the Section and understanding of all technologies employed in the telecoms network and postal machinery. There was an element of specialisation. In my case transmission was the area to which I was directed.

One of the first elements of the training was being sent to the Post Office Central Training School (CTS) at Stone Staffordshire, for a six-week residential Transmission course. I was to go with a certain Cyril Seabrook who I was told could be very difficult to get on with. As it happened, when one got to know and understand him, Cyril was not as difficult as he seemed and our first meeting resulted in a career long friendship.

The course consisted of intensive lectures and practical work and ended with an examination, the result of which together with a report of your practical performance were sent to your branch. The other members of the course came from all over the Post Office Engineering Department and so you also learned a lot about how other parts of the system worked and made many new friends. Stone Engineering training school was a very large organisation and consisted of three separate sites one which consisted of an estate of bungalows in which the staff lived (married quarters), Howard Hall where the students were housed and another site which contained the classrooms and practical laboratories together with the administrative offices. The three sites were several hundred yards apart and I believe that it started life as a United States Army base during the Second World War. Howard Hall consisted of a number of single story blocks of bedrooms with bathrooms, wash basins and toilets in a separate wing. Each bedroom housed two students so you had to get on well with your room-mate.

The accommodation blocks were some way from the dining rooms which were in purpose-built single-storey buildings which also housed the television and radio rooms together with snooker and table tennis rooms and a cinema. I think there were something in the region of six or seven hundred students, maybe more, studying many different subjects and so the organisation of the place was pretty impressive. The working day was very strictly timed and no deviation from the timetable was allowed. To ensure the time allowed for the tea breaks was not exceeded the times were staggered so that only a limited number of students had to queue at any one time. Each lecture room or practical laboratory displayed a prominent notice showing the time in minutes it took to get to the tea room and you were allowed that time in addition to the 10 minute you had to queue and drink your tea. It sounds as though it was very regimented, but it worked well.

There was plenty to do in the evenings with a large social club for pub games and of course drinks and a real pub in the village (Yarnfield) called the 'Labour in Vain'. There were lounges for quiet reading, radio rooms and television rooms. In those days there were only two TV channels so only two television rooms were necessary. There were several snooker and table tennis rooms each with a number of tables. There was the cinema where recent releases of films were shown. I saw my first Bond film there, 'From Russia with love' As this was in the summer, the lighter evenings enabled us to explore the countryside around and we did quite a lot of walking. Most of us went home at weekends in coaches laid on to take people to the major cities. Each Friday the coaches were waiting in the car park when classes finished, so you had to take your case with you to lectures after lunch. The London coach terminated just around the corner from Victoria Station and left on a Sunday night at 10 PM. This meant a late arrival back in Howard Hall, but at least you could doze in the coach. The coaches from London used to stop halfway for a break at an all-night cafe on the A5 called the Blue Boar. Sleepy passengers would stagger out of the coach to be greeted by a waitress who had so much make-up on her face that it looked as though it would crack if she smiled.

Back at Studd Street, the rest of the year was spent learning in more depth the workings of the Section and we spent time on the more advanced Groups. I also revisited the Joint Examiner Group which was now at Kidbrook.

At the end of the TO in training course I was promoted to TO in July 1954, and found myself employed in the AC (Alternating Current) room and having to work for my living again. The work involved the precision measurement of all sorts of products used in the transmission of speech over the local and trunk networks. The group was also responsible for the testing of privacy sets which are often referred to as scramblers. It was interesting work and the atmosphere of the group was very good with all the other TOs and the AEs in charge being very helpful to me as a rookie.

Further Training

After I became a TO I was sent on further transmission courses at the Central Training School, first, in 1955, it was a seven-week course on carrier principles and carrier systems. I found this subject very interesting and it built on the knowledge gained in the basic transmission course I had taken earlier. Again I met people from all over the country and made new friends although most of them lasted only during the course due to distance and the different paths our various jobs took us. Some of them I had contacts with later in my career.

On this visit to Stone the coach service to various destinations to take us home at weekends had been suspended. Apparently this was due to the railway company complaining that the service was unfair competition. What now happened was that individuals would get a group together and hire a coach for the journey. If you were unable to get a coach to London the journey by train was quite difficult because we were about 3 miles from Stone and the train to and from London went from Stafford so you had to get to Stone first to catch the bus to Stafford.

Then in 1959 I attended an eight week coaxial systems course at the CTS. I think my wife thought I was trying to get away from her and our growing family but she cooked and sent me cakes. At the end of the coaxial course I was sent for, with a couple of others, to see the head of the Telecom Transmission Courses Department who offered us jobs. We were told that we would have to apply when we got back to our units but we would be welcomed at Stone. At the time I was living with my Wife in a caravan, being unable to afford to buy a house and so having discussed the proposal with my Wife I applied, as accommodation came with the job. The next thing I knew was a summons for an interview with the Engineer in charge of staff. "Why do you want to leave us" he said. I explained that there were two reasons, one I thought that the job would be interesting and it would further my career and the other was the matter of my family accommodation. He then told me that they would not release me and told me that was the end of it.

Contractors Works

The system in the 50s was for staff employed at Contractors works to be supplied from Studd Street for twenty week periods on a rota basis and after a period of probation my turn came up to be 'sent out'. My first outstation was at Siemens Woolwich, which was near where I lived so was very convenient. Siemens produced mostly switching equipment and so I found myself having to examine and test selectors and relays. By this time the Division had introduced formal sampling methods and so this was my first exposure to these. One of my first jobs was to examine uniselectors. The firm produced two types of uniselectors at the Woolwich factory and the sampling plan required a sample of 10 to be taken at random from each batch. If two (the acceptance number) or less in the sample were faulty the batch had to be approved with just the two defective items being removed. There was apparently an

agreement that the sample although theoretically taken at random should reflect the proportion of the items in the batch. It just so happened that the proportion of the items manufactured of the two types was 8 to 2, therefore the sample had to be 8 of the more numerous items and two of the others. I noticed that my predecessor invariably found 2 faulty items in his sample and therefore approved the batches. I found the same in the first batch I sampled but noticed that the faulty items were the two from the less numerous items. I did wonder why our boss had not noticed this when checking the sample sheets but being a new boy I decided to deal with it myself. The next batch I sampled I took three of the suspect items all of which were faulty so I rejected the batch. This resulted in my being accused by the Company shop Foreman of cheating and he complained to the Assistant Engineer in charge of us who called me into his office to ask me why I had not observed the agreed procedures. I then had to explain that all that the items were faulty and that I was not prepared to accept them in that condition. He checked up on this and found I was right and so told the Company that in future our sample would be taken at random and not in proportion to the batch make up. This reached the Company's higher management and the items were withdrawn while an investigation took place to ensure that they were no longer producing faulty items. As my experience grew I was to find that the practice of trying to get rubbish past the Customer's Inspector was quite widespread among a minority of manufacturers. In the case of Siemens it was only the one department that this seemed to be happening, as I spent time in several other departments where there was no sign of such malpractice.

Why do some Companies try to cheat their customers?

It got me wondering, why do this? Surely when the customer comes to use the items they would complain and the Company's reputation would suffer. Indeed so would ours as we were the Customer's Inspection Department. I discovered much later in my career that not all users did complain, they either avoided using those items that were known to be faulty or used an alternative, or even repaired the items themselves. Only if all else failed did they complain. It was sometime later that I came across this kind of thing again and I was to discover that it took as many forms as there were the manufacturers who tried it on.

Sometimes as at Siemens it was just some lazy or crafty Departmental manager, but in the case of other examples it was embodied in the post of Chief Inspector, whose main job seemed to be to knowingly get unsatisfactory product past the Customer's Inspection. In most cases, this meant a battle of wills between us and the Company's Inspectors. We were well aware of the dangers and soon got to know who could be trusted and who couldn't. One supplier, who I dealt with, admitted to me that it was a waste of effort trying it on with us so they diverted product that they knew we would reject to other, less fussy, customers. I do not think he meant it to be complimentary to us. During my career I dealt with, often through my staff, many hundreds of manufacturers and the vast majority were proud of the products they produced and wanted to insure that their customers were pleased with them. Unfortunately quite a large minority were responsible for getting British Industry a bad name.

I found myself trying to analyse what it was that made the difference. It seemed to me that the problem had to be down to the attitudes of the Management of the Company. Why would they not want to protect the reputation of their firm? In looking at the mechanics of what happened it emerged that in most such cases, Management were putting downward pressure on middle Managers to maximise output and the Inspection Department in many Companies was under the control of the Production Manager, whose main responsibility was quantity. It was more than the Chief Inspector's job was worth to hold up production. In cases where the Chief Inspector was independent it happened far less frequently, but in all cases it seemed to come down to the strength of character of the people concerned.

Blackheath, an outstation of an outstation

After a few weeks of this, I was sent by the AE in charge to an outstation of Siemens at Blackheath where I was to work with a much more experienced TO. That TO was George Waldron who was another colleague who was to become a friend right until retirement and after. The Blackheath factory produced specialised items for switching equipment and was managed by two foremen. Apart from the two foreman most of the staff were women and I found myself spending a lot of time sitting in a room full of, mostly young women. For reasons I never really understood some of them would pour out all their worries and concerns about their boyfriends to me. On my first day when we went to the canteen for lunch the lady in charge very politely asked me if I was entitled to a subsidised lunch. When I asked what the conditions for that were, she said that I had to be under 18. I was about 23 at the time so I had to decline and pay the full price. George was very amused.

It did not seem long before my turn came to an end and I was back in Studd Street and in the AC room again. I spent the next few years alternating between Studd Street and various contractors in south-east London, TMC, St Mary Cray, STC Footscray and of course Siemens Woolwich and Blackheath.

Siemens, the social side

Siemens (later renamed Siemens Edison Swan) was a very large site on the banks of the Thames. In those days many large ships passed up and down the river continuously all day, but it was not too pleasant to watch them as the river stank. There were quite a number of TOs on the staff at that time, I think about 12. On one turn there would often be serious discussions (arguments) on the events in the news of the day and any other subjects which anyone wanted to raise. These discussions would continue from break to break during the day and one of our number, who shall be nameless, would often strongly argue on one side of the argument and at the next break would argue equally strongly for the other side. It was often some time before this was noticed. Often arguments were unresolved and the practice was to ask the Old Codgers a column in the daily Mirror to give judgement. This was always very tongue in cheek and sometimes the disputes were 'manufactured' so that their advice could be sought. During one warm summer a group of us would often spend lunch breaks swimming at the Shooters Hill lido. This was made possible as one of our number could take us there in his Ford van.

Another fond memory was a cafe in one of the roads running down to the river next to the factory where we sometimes went for our morning break. They served very nice bread and dripping which kept us going for the rest of the day.

FMVFT Equipment

During one term I was employed with another TO, Ben Cox on a contract for frequency modulated voice frequency telegraph equipment (FMVFT). This was equipment newly developed by Cable & Wireless and manufactured by Siemens the contract arrangements were complicated as we were buying the equipment from Cable & Wireless and the arrangement was that Cable & Wireless would inspect it jointly with us. It worked well and we formed a good relationship with both the manufacturer and Cable & Wireless staff involved. Ben told us how he had been a member of the Special Boat Service in the Mediterranean during the war, which involved periods of extreme boredom hiding in secret coves while their passengers were creating havoc onshore behind enemy lines.

TMC St Mary Cray

When I first went to TMC in 1956, our office was in an old garage at the edge of the site, outside the main factory. There was an interesting alarm system in the test room to alert us to visitors. It consisted of a radio, which was always on when Mr Jefferies was not there. The mains supply to the radio was fed via a home made trip switch on the outer door, so that anyone opening the door would break the circuit and switch the radio off. I doubt it would have met today's health and safety rules.

I cannot say that I enjoyed my first tour of duty at TMC. The AE Jack Jefferies was also in charge at Dulwich and STC Footscray and so did not spend all his time at St Mary Cray. The senior TO believed that no one should be in the test room when the AE arrived except first thing in case of an early morning visit and so he insisted that we should spend all our time in the factory. It was all right if you had jobs to do in the factory, but my job also required a lot of work calculating results of the measurements taken in the factory and recording them on prescribed forms. Once the measurements had been taken I had no further reason to be in the factory. When I explained this to the senior TO he said I should find somewhere to hide and suggested behind the air raid shelters on the edges of the site. This I refused to do and insisted on staying in the office to complete my work. thus incurring the wrath of the senior TO.

There were nevertheless a number of incidents which relieved things during that time. After all this time I cannot remember the exact sequence of events, only incidents, but this turn coincided with my marriage and one of my colleagues, Frank Skinner, who will appear later many times in these chronicles, was very concerned that I should not make the same mistake that he had and have three daughters. I'm not sure how he thought I could control the sex of my offspring but he did provide me with the means of preventing any pregnancies on my honeymoon!

The strange case of the man with a wooden leg

Jeff would often pay early morning visits to ensure that we were all keeping good time. During the winter the senior man would have an electric fire facing his desk with the cord plugged in to a power point across the passageway leading to Jeff's office. On one occasion one of our fellow TOs was late and pretending he had not realised that Jeff was in his office started a long explanation of why he was late. The story was that he had taken pity on a hitch hiker and given him a lift in his sidecar. Unfortunately the man had a wooden leg and he could not get him out of the sidecar. Having gone through the rigmarole he pretended to realise that Jeff was in his office and rushed in to apologise for being late. That was when the cord of the electric fire took part in the proceedings. Our colleague tripped and finished up on the floor by Jeff's desk to roars of laughter from the rest of us.

On another occasion the same colleague found himself in trouble again. Jeff wanted to speak to Frank Skinner but no one knew where he was. Jeff said he knew where he'll be and walked round to the back of the building where there was a wedge of ground we knew as Skinner's corner, named because Frank was known to have a sleep there. During his lunch break of course. When Jeff entered the space Frank was not there but our unfortunate colleague was. He was doing his homework for evening classes and he was so surprised that his papers were scattered all over the place. I do not know what was said, but our colleague was not at all happy that he got into the trouble that he believed should have been Frank Skinner's.

Kolster Brands Foots Cray

In 1957 I spent several turns at Kolster Brands (KB) Footh Cray, STC Footscray. KB division, had the contract for producing Medresco hearing aids. The Post Office were contracted by the Medical Research Council (Medresco) to manage the contracts for hearing aids and so there were two TOs stationed at Footscray to test and inspect the factory's output. On my first turn there, the other TO was Frank Kehoe, a very experienced man who had taught me all about photometry during my youth in training days.

When I first became involved, they had been developed into much smaller devices than earlier. This was due to the development of cold cathode tubes, but they were still quite bulky. They consisted of the receiver (microphone) and amplifier in one case, a battery case to provide power and the earplug. The receiver and amplifier case clipped to the wearer's clothes and the battery case connected to it by wires was held in a pocket. The earplug was also connected to the amplifier by wires. There were two types of hearing aid, normal amplified sound and bone conduction. The bone conduction aids were attached to the mastoid bone behind the ear and worked by vibrating, thus allowing people with inner ear damage to regain some hearing. They were not at all comfortable for us with normal hearing to test and required quite a bit of practice to be able to check them.

Transistor Hearing Aids

During what was possibly one of my last times at Footscray, transistors had been invented and the powers that be decided to give a trial contract to STC to produce 500 transistor hearing aids for children. These would be much smaller than the standard aid being contained in one smaller case to include the power supply, but still with earplugs on a cord. This contract was given high priority as the government had promised, before they were even designed, for them to be released before Christmas. The transistors were very expensive and so a safe to store them was installed in our test room which was taken over to produce the aids under secure conditions. In the event, despite the pressure from above, 'questions in the house' (of commons), only 100 aids were produced for release in time for Christmas. They were nevertheless well-received and further developments led to the aids available today.

Kent Mouldings

The Kent Mouldings division of STC was also on the Footscray site. I on one of my turns at Footscray Kent Mouldings were given a contract to make models of the new Post Office tower. These were very much over specified and consisted of many small parts. The whole thing was only about three or 4 inch is high and the restaurant at the top had to rotate like the real thing. The whole project was a flop, as apparently very few of those produced actually sold.

Odd work in the AC room

Back in Studd Street my experience had continued to develop. In my last term in the AC room I was given a job which at first sight did not seem in keeping with the group's normal work. The AE Bill Corrin, gave me the test report for 500 switchboard lamps rated at a quarter of an hour. I asked him what I was supposed to do with these and with a grin he said measure the impedance - (inductance and capacitance). Apparently one of the scientists at the Post Office Research Department needed something that had very very low impedance for some project and he wondered if these lamps might provide what he needed. It was thought that we might have the means to measure such small quantities. I was given sole use of the bridge room to conduct experiments to see if such small quantities could be measured. Bill and our other AE George Howlett both helped with suggestions and I was left to try various

methods to see if I could get a result. There was no certainty that anything could be measured as it apparently had never been tried before. I spent about three months experimenting with all kinds of bridge configurations before I was finally able to obtain some positive results. I cannot remember if the result filled the need of the Research Department, but I was asked to write up the methods used for future reference before I went back out to Contractors works.

Moving up to the Coaxial Group

My next assignment in Studd Street was the co-axial group where I spent many happy hours servicing or rather rebuilding video amplifiers.

At that time the popular pastime was building radio receivers and audio equipment. Someone had found a source, of reasonably priced (if bought in bulk), kits for building a Jason FM receiver. Being only married for about a year and lacking the means to buy all those things that seem to be necessities these days, this seemed to be the solution to our need for a radio so I joined the group that bought the kits. It was a very successful product and while it needed some modification to make it function to our satisfaction, there was plenty of technical know-how in the Test Section to develop the necessary modifications. The Jason was only a receiver and so it needed an amplifier to make it really useful. The next project we all undertook was therefore to build an amplifier. It had to be a 'high fidelity' amplifier as that was the latest craze at the time. There were a number of published designs available and the one chosen was the 'Mullard'.

The Amplifier

The Amplifier was a two part design consisting of a pre amplifier and a power amplifier together with a separate power supply. This meant many dashes down to Soho at lunchtime to buy the necessary components and other bits and pieces needed to build it. This also involved running the gauntlet of being propositioned by the various prostitutes standing in doorways around the area. At that time I was getting a lift to work which got me there at least half an hour early so I was able to do much of the construction at my bench before the time to start work at eight o'clock. We were able to save quite a lot of money by making some of the more expensive items from scratch such as the output transformer which was designed by one of our colleagues. One of the advantages of working at the Test Section was that we had all the test equipment necessary available to adjust the finished items. As a result many of us ended up with a very good hi-fi amplifier. The only problem was that the housing of all this was not good enough to make good piece of furniture being rather a do-it-yourself job from scraps of wood. As a radio it served us well.

Clissold

Next I was transferred to the holy of holies, the servicing group based at the old Clissold telephone exchange where we had the top floor. I found something of an atmosphere as the staff there seem to think they were special and did not welcome newcomers. My job was servicing outside broadcast equipment for which there was very little information and I struggled a bit until the most unlikely member of the staff, Tom Pearce came over and gave me some help. He was the most experienced TO on the Group and had a reputation as being aggressively grumpy, but he helped me a lot. There were four AEs in charge at Clissold and I am afraid that none of them were any help at all. Tom helping me broke the ice and after that I was accepted by the others although I must say that some of them hardly spoke to me all the time I was there. Not even to complain about my cooking.

Cooking duty

There was no canteen at Clissold but there was a kitchen and we took it in turns, in pairs, to cook lunch for everyone. Everyone paid a fixed sum towards lunch and the pair on cooking duty had to buy the ingredients, prepare and cook a meal. There were about 14 TOs and the AEs did not do lunch duty and so every seven working days you were cooking for 18 people. The quality of the meals and the cooking tended to vary somewhat, depending on who was cooking.

Back to TMC

In 1958, by the time I had been at Clissold for about six months, I had settled in and was quite happy with the job. Then one Thursday I got a call from the secretary of the union (whose day job was running the staff rota) asking me if I could go to TMC St Mary Cray next Monday. I said no thank you and thought that was the end of it but he rang back shortly afterwards and asked me why I did not wish to go. I told him that I had not been happy with the situation the last time I had been there. He obviously understood my concerns and told me that things were very different now and the AE had asked for me in particular. I allowed myself to be persuaded and spent the next three years at TMC (the rest of my career as a TO).

A new senior man

Arriving at TMC the following Monday I found a completely different atmosphere. New accommodation had been provided for us by this time. Our test room and office was now in a self contained annexe with direct access into the factory. Much better and the senior man was Jimmy Green, who became a great friend. A very welcoming Jeff explained that TMC had been awarded a contract to design and manufacture band economy equipment for the Transatlantic cable (TAT1).

TAT 1

This was the first cable to carry conventional speech channels to America and due to the bandwidth available, the number of channels it could carry was very limited. The band economy equipment was designed to squeeze 25% more channels onto the cable by restricting a channel to 3 kilocycles rather than the normal 4 kilocycles (now Kilo Hertz). The Engineer responsible for the design of the equipment was a certain Dick Barton and the plan was for me and one of my colleagues to form a team with two TMC inspectors and Dick to carry out the test and inspection of the prototype and then the production equipment for both ends of the system. The colleague who worked with me was to be subject to the rota system while I was to remain to provide continuity for the Post Office. The contract was given high priority and so the long hot summer of 1959 saw us working seven days a week and evenings.

A boost to my confidence

Not long after we started testing the first 3 Kc/s system we had carried out most of the main performance tests and things seem to be going well. Dick Barton tended to be very quick to take measurements and say that is fine and move onto the next. I was able to keep up but would have liked more thinking and checking time. Then we did a test and Dick in his usual way said that's good and tried to move on but I realised that something wasn't quite right and stopped the testing. Dick started to argue but I was not at all sure what was wrong, so I said "I'm going for a tea break and when I come back I will expect you to have looked into the matter". I did go but I went to the office to pore over the specifications to confirm my concerns. When I got back Dick was very excited, "you are absolutely right" he said and

explained how the fault occurred and what he was going to do about it. That little episode boosted my confidence no end and thereafter Dick treated me with much greater respect.

The filters

One of the important features of the band economy equipment was filtering as the technology required very precise separation between channels. Specially designed filters therefore had to be produced and these gave rise to quite a few difficult manufacturing processes. There were very large numbers of these filters and because of the sensitive nature of the contract it was necessary for us to check them at several stages of manufacture. In fact it was the company's test and inspection staff who actually carried out the tests and we had to check that each one had been through all the stage tests, as it was not possible to carry out many of the checks after the next process had been completed. The company did not seem to be very good at ensuring that all the filters were checked at each stage, so I was given the job of keeping records of all the tests carried out. This was not that difficult as all the filters had serial numbers and so it was simply a case of creating a chart with columns for the serial number and each check. It was surprising how the items travelled through the process at different rates and so without the charts, you could not be sure that a process had not been missed.

A whiskery problem

One feature of these units was to cause problems during manufacture and indirectly some years later. The cases, which had to be hermetically sealed, were silver plated. It was known that under the conditions inside the case fine whiskers of silver could grow and make contact between the case and printed circuit. Sheets of Paxaline were therefore stuck to the inside surface of the case to prevent this happening. It did not work and investigations found that the whiskers actually grew through the Paxaline. The solution was not to stick the Paxaline but to leave it free to move such that when the whiskers grew they were broken and could not penetrate the insulation. This worked and caused no problems until some years later Post Office Engineering staff took some out of stock for some reason and reported them as faulty because they rattled. When this occurred I happened to be responsible for investigating defective stores reports and so I knew why they rattled, but had quite a job convincing the Engineers that that was how they should be.

A change of AE

Part way through the project Jack Jefferies was promoted and was replaced by Frank Skinner who had been promoted sometime before.

Assistant Engineer Promotion Board

About two years into this stint at TMC I was invited to attend a promotion board. Part of the process of accepting the invitation was to indicate your mobility, that is, in which parts of the organisation you were prepared to work. I think there were three or four alternatives including the Cable Test Section. I ticked all of them! A few days later, on one of his regular visits, Mr Mullard the engineer in charge of contractors works outstations, asked me into the office for a chat. He said he was worried that I might not realise what would be involved in working for the cable test section. I said that I had enquired about the work and felt it would be quite interesting and the travelling involved did not worry me. The date for the board arrived and it was the second Thursday of a fortnight's holiday. I decided not to ask for it to be changed as we weren't going far and I could come back for the day. As was my habit, I gave myself plenty of time to get to the interview. The interview was at an address in Wood Street in the city of London. I found the street and started walking along it, there were no buildings there, the area was a bomb site from world war 2. I wondered if there was another

Wood Street in the city. I found a policeman and asked if he could help me, yes he said, the building you are looking for is the only one left standing just before the Wood Street sign. So I arrived very breathless just in time. I need not have worried because they were running late and so the board secretary sat me down and gave me a cup of tea to calm my nerves.

I passed along with, I think, nine others all of them senior to me, so I was last in the queue for a post. When I got the result, Frank Skinner, always the optimist; said that I had only passed because I was the only candidate to express a willingness to go to the Cable Test Section. The upside was that I would not have to wait for all the others to get posts, as there were at least two vacancies in Cable Test Section which they wanted to fill urgently. So I waited expecting to get the call.

Nothing happened and after a year all the others had got posts and I was the only one left. Then I was promoted to the London Test Section and they started filling the Cable Test vacancies with very reluctant competition entrants. I wondered if I should read anything in to these events but I was rather pleased that Frank Skinner's gloom and doom proved to be baseless. I was a temporary AE for a while, filling in for people on leave but it was not long before I was given a substantive post on the Technical Control Group.

No longer with us.

No one is 'Late', so that's good!

March Meeting 2015

The date of the March meet up will be on **Thursday 19th March**, at the Wetherspoons pub, the White Swan, in Upper Street, which is about 100 Yards from Highbury and Islington Station.

The White Swan is open early for breakfast, so you can arrive then and stay all day. They have reasonable food, cheap beer and plenty of room for us to circulate in. See you there!

Dave's Gen : Contact

If you have an e-mail account, or access to one, and would like to have Dave's Gen by this method, just mail back to davesgen@virginmedia.com with your email address & your name, if it's not obvious who you are from the account name.

You may send in copy, and also update and make changes to addresses and telephone numbers, if you wish to, by sending to the same e-mail address.

Alternatively: My home address is: 17 Parkstone Avenue, Old St. Mellons, Cardiff CF3 5TY
Tel. 029 20 777 455 Work: 01443 878 878, although following tradition, I'm still quite often, not at my bench!

Thanks for reading.

Please keep in touch, one way or another.

My best regards to you all.

John Tythe