Working at Hoffmann's

World War Two

Dispersal factories

Many new factories were built to reduce the risk of a total collapse of production if key factories were bombed.

- The Stonehouse factory was an offshoot of the Hoffmann Manufacturing Company based at Chelmsford in Essex. Major construction took place between 1939 and 1940. The new factory incorporated blast walls and steel shutters for the north-facing roof windows that allowed the building to be blacked out at night.
- Workers came from Chelmsford to work there as well as local men.
- Many women were sent there to do war work.

Irene Adey



In 1941, I was sent by the government to Hoffmann's who were making ball bearings. We worked from 7.30am to 7pm Monday to Friday and to 12.30 on Saturday, with some Sundays. At first we went into the air raid shelter every time there was an alarm, but it happened so often that they stopped it unless a plane was spotted.
They came round for volunteers to train at Chelmsford and then go back to Stonehouse to teach the people here. Four of us went, all women, we were there for three months all expenses paid. When we got back to Stonehouse we taught the others.
I was at Hoffmann's until 1943, when I had my son Colin. Later I went back to Hoffmann's and worked in the director's canteen till I retired at sixty in 1977.

Photo shows Irene in 2016

Rene Dowdeswell

Before the war, Rene Dowdeswell was working as a shop assistant at Mullins Drapery Stores in Stonehouse, while her sister Vera was a hairdresser in Stroud. When war broke out, they were required to do war work and they were assigned to the new Hoffmann factory in Oldends Lane. Vera and Rene worked in the ball bearing section. They had to do shift work which was especially hard.
While working there, they met Phyllis Pooley, from Barnstaple in Devon. Phyl was a turner on a lathe. She lodged in the Hostel in Bridgend. She didn't like to mention this as it had a reputation for 'loose women'! She walked from there along the canal to Hoffmann's.
They became best friends and Phyl's family invited them to stay at Barnstaple when they had some time off. The Pooley family were very kind to Rene and Vera and they stayed friends for the rest of their lives.
Rene's daughter Julie says, *"Our three families still have an enduring friendship after all this time.*
We would never have met lovely Phyl if it hadn't been for Hoffmann's".



Photo taken on holiday at Barnstaple, 1940s
Vera Dowdeswell, Phyllis Pooley, Rene Dowdeswell

©Stonehouse History Group

Working at Hoffmann's

Michael Coopey

. Left the Navy around 1958 to work at Hoffmann's.
. He became foreman of the Boiler House

He remembers: *Coal came by lorry, tipped into a bunker outside the boiler house and then a hopper fed up from a conveyer which took the coal up to the height of the boiler.*



Philip Ware, Adrian Shipton, Michael Coopey



When Michael retired in 1988 he was given this certificate in recognition of his 30 years service. He is now aged 91.



Michael driving the tractor engine for shunting out scrap steel, on the Hoffmann railway siding. 1960s

Below: the boiler house



Adrian Shipton

Hoffmann's factory relied on water from the canal particularly for feeding the boilers and steam condensers. Water came to the factory through a pipe under the field opposite, and was held in a big tank. This tank also received rain water from the roof of the factory, and any excess water could be returned to the canal through the same pipe.

The inlet to the pipe was protected by an open concrete enclosure with a perforated plate in one side that could be raised in a frame for cleaning. Each day, an employee from the boiler house visited the canal to check that there was no obstruction to the inlet and that the level and quality of the canal water was as it should be.

We had three filters that had to be checked. Water going back to the canal was filtered to separate out any oil that may have seeped into the water. If we found any oil inside we had to remove it with a scoop. We always claimed that the water we put back was cleaner than what we received.

Even though the canal was closed to boats, the water kept flowing and was used by Hoffmann until 1988. Most of the dam was removed in 2002 as part of the canal restoration.



Remains of the open concrete chamber protecting the inlet to Hoffmann's water pipe 2018. Cotswold Canals Trust



Remains of Hoffmann's dam and concrete spillway 2023. Courtesy Hugh Conway-Jones and Stroudwater History https://stroudwaterhistory.org.uk/

©Stonehouse History Group

Working at Hoffmann's

Sid Thew

Sid Thew worked at Hoffmann's from 1940s to 1980s in the Planning Office. He was a draughtsman. He was also a talented painter and calligrapher.

Sid took a number of photos/slides of his colleagues at work. His son David donated these to SHG in 2021.



Sid Thew

Barry Phillips remembers working with him.

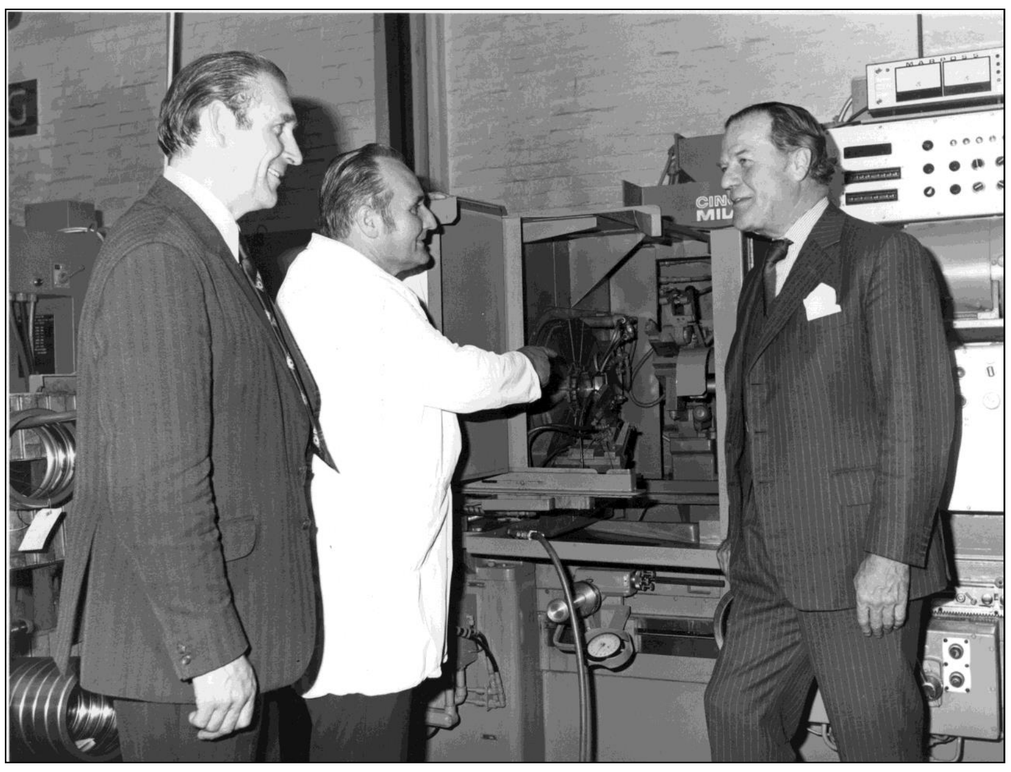
" I worked there for 20 years in the planning office. Some of our colleagues were George Wadley, Eric Marchand, Sid Thew, Jack Langford, Ray Horner, Eddie Watson, and Gordon Bell."



Photo from Sid Thew Collection shows
L to R: Don, Eric, George, Jack, Barry, Vi, John,
Front: ?, Jock

Kenneth Wilkins

Ken was born 13th Jan 1925. In 1941, aged 16, he worked at Hoffmann's until he joined the Royal Navy in 1943. Having left the Navy in 1946, he and his family moved to Park Road in Stonehouse in 1952. Ken went back to work at Hoffmann's and stayed there until c1990.



Kenneth Wilkins showing machines to MP Anthony Kershaw. At RHP.



24 inch bearing manufactured at RHP Aerospace for the EMI head scanner - shown here being passed through a demagnetiser. Professional photo taken for publicity or sales booklet.



THE BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY

MR. K. WILKINS

has qualified for the FIRST AID certificate

Valid for three years from:

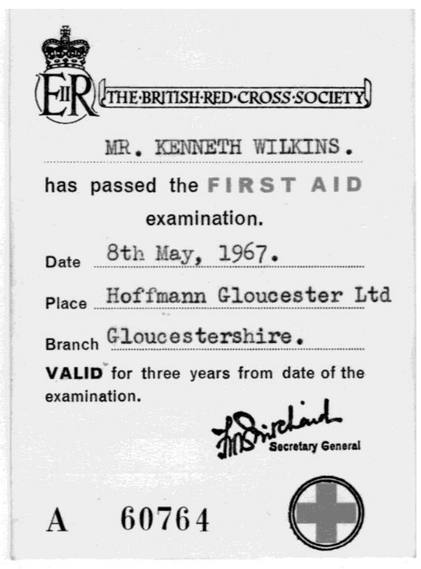
Date 6.4.82

Place STONEHOUSE

Branch Gloucestershire

A 53949

Director General



THE BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY

MR. KENNETH WILKINS.

has passed the FIRST AID examination.

Date 8th May, 1967.

Place Hoffmann Gloucester Ltd

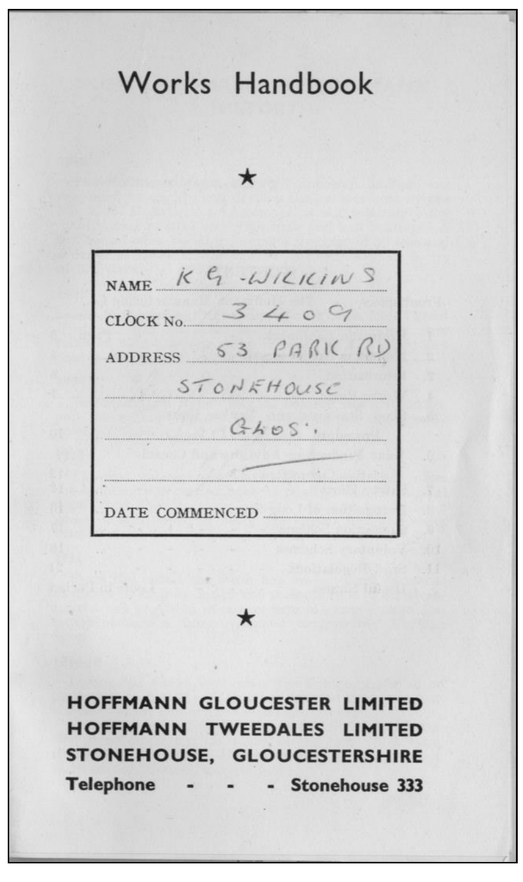
Branch Gloucestershire.

VALID for three years from date of the examination.

Secretary General

A 60764

Ken was a qualified First Aider.



Works Handbook

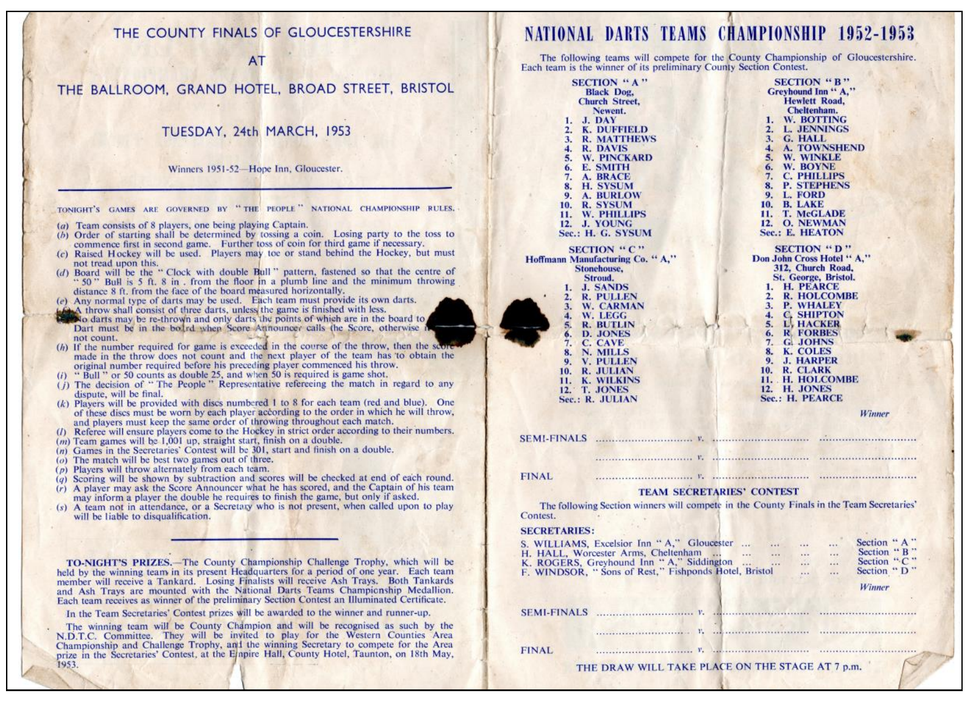
NAME K. G. WILKINS

CLOCK No. 3409

ADDRESS 53 PARK RD STONEHOUSE GLOS.

DATE COMMENCED

HOFFMANN GLOUCESTER LIMITED
HOFFMANN TWEEDALES LIMITED
STONEHOUSE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Telephone - - - Stonehouse 333



THE COUNTY FINALS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE
AT
THE BALLROOM, GRAND HOTEL, BROAD STREET, BRISTOL
TUESDAY, 24th MARCH, 1953

Winners 1951-52—Hope Inn, Gloucester.

TONIGHT'S GAMES ARE GOVERNED BY "THE PEOPLE" NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP RULES.

(a) Team consists of 8 players, one being playing Captain.
(b) Order of starting shall be determined by tossing a coin. Losing party to the toss to commence first in second game. Further toss of coin for third game if necessary.
(c) Raised Hockey will be used. Players may toe or stand behind the Hockey, but must not tread upon this.
(d) Board will be the "Clock with double Bull" pattern, fastened so that the centre of "50" Bull is 5 ft. 8 in. from the floor in a plumb line and the minimum throwing distance 8 ft. from the face of the board measured horizontally.
(e) Any normal type of darts may be used. Each team must provide its own darts.
(f) A throw shall consist of three darts, unless the game is finished with less.
(g) Darts may be re-thrown and only darts the points of which are in the board to Dart must be in the board when Score Announcer calls the Score, otherwise not count.
(h) If the number required for game is exceeded in the course of the throw, then the score made in the throw does not count and the next player of the team has to obtain the original number required before his preceding player commenced his throw.
(i) "Bull" or 50 counts as double 25, and when 50 is required is game shot.
(j) The decision of "The People" Representative refereeing the match in regard to any dispute, will be final.
(k) Players will be provided with discs numbered 1 to 8 for each team (red and blue). One of these discs must be worn by each player according to the order in which he will throw, and players must keep the same order of throwing throughout each match.
(l) Referee will ensure players come to the Hockey in strict order according to their numbers.
(m) Team games will be 1,001 up, straight start, finish on a double.
(n) Games in the Secretaries' Contest will be 301, start and finish on a double.
(o) The match will be best two games out of three.
(p) Players will throw alternately from each team.
(q) Scoring will be shown by subtraction and scores will be checked at end of each round.
(r) A player may ask the Score Announcer what he has scored, and the Captain of his team may inform a player the double he requires to finish the game, but only if asked.
(s) A team not in attendance, or a Secretary who is not present, when called upon to play will be liable to disqualification.

TO-NIGHT'S PRIZES.—The County Championship Challenge Trophy, which will be held by the winning team in its present Headquarters for a period of one year. Each team member will receive a Tankard. Losing Finalists will receive Ash Trays. Both Tankards and Ash Trays are mounted with the National Darts Teams Championship Medallion. Each team receives as winner of the preliminary Section Contest an Illuminated Certificate.

In the Team Secretaries' Contest prizes will be awarded to the winner and runner-up.

The winning team will be County Champion and will be recognised as such by the N.D.T.C. Committee. They will be invited to play for the Western Counties Area Championship and Challenge Trophy, and the winning Secretary to compete for the Area prize in the Secretaries' Contest, at the Empire Hall, County Hotel, Taunton, on 18th May, 1953.

NATIONAL DARTS TEAMS CHAMPIONSHIP 1952-1953

The following teams will compete for the County Championship of Gloucestershire. Each team is the winner of its preliminary County Section Contest.

SECTION "A" — Black Dog, Church Street, Newent.
1. J. DAY
2. K. DUFFIELD
3. R. MATTHEWS
4. R. DAVIS
5. W. PINCKARD
6. E. SMITH
7. A. BRACE
8. H. SYSUM
9. A. BURLOW
10. R. SYSUM
11. W. PHILLIPS
12. J. YOUNG
Sec.: H. G. SYSUM

SECTION "B" — Greyhound Inn "A," Hewlett Road, Cheltenham.
1. W. BOTTING
2. L. JENNINGS
3. G. HALL
4. A. TOWNSHEND
5. W. WINKLE
6. W. BOYNE
7. C. PHILLIPS
8. P. STEPHENS
9. L. FORD
10. B. LAKE
11. T. McGLADE
12. O. NEWMAN
Sec.: E. HEATON

SECTION "C" — Hoffmann Manufacturing Co. "A," Stonehouse, Stroud.
1. J. SANDS
2. R. PULLEN
3. W. CARMAN
4. W. LEGG
5. R. BUTLIN
6. D. JONES
7. C. CAVE
8. N. MILLS
9. V. PULLEN
10. R. JULIAN
11. K. WILKINS
12. T. JONES
Sec.: R. JULIAN

SECTION "D" — Don John Cross Hotel "A," 312, Church Road, St. George, Bristol.
1. H. PEARCE
2. R. HOLCOMBE
3. P. WHALEY
4. G. SHIPTON
5. L. HACKER
6. R. FORBES
7. G. JOHNS
8. K. COLES
9. J. HARPER
10. R. CLARK
11. H. HOLCOMBE
12. H. JONES
Sec.: H. PEARCE

Winner

SEMI-FINALS ..... v. .....
..... v. .....
FINAL ..... v. .....

TEAM SECRETARIES' CONTEST

The following Section winners will compete in the County Finals in the Team Secretaries' Contest.

SECRETARIES:
S. WILLIAMS, Excelsior Inn "A," Gloucester ... Section "A"
H. HALL, Worcester Arms, Cheltenham ... Section "B"
K. ROGERS, Greyhound Inn "A," Siddington ... Section "C"
F. WINDSOR, "Sons of Rest," Fishponds Hotel, Bristol ... Section "D"

Winner

SEMI-FINALS ..... v. .....
..... v. .....
FINAL ..... v. .....

THE DRAW WILL TAKE PLACE ON THE STAGE AT 7 p.m.

He also played for Hoffmann's darts team in the final of the National Darts Team Championship 1952-53.

©Stonehouse History Group

Working at Hoffmann's

Cliff Bliss

Clifford Edgar Bliss lived at Gainey's Well at the top of Stroud. In the 1939 register his occupation was printer compositor. He worked for Arthur's Press. On 9th April 1942 when he joined up he was a sheet metal worker.

In the Army he was a radio operator in a Sherman Firefly Tank and became a "Desert Rat". He was released from Army November 1946 but remained in the Army Reserve until 1959.

After the war in 1947 he started at Hoffmann as a machine setter and eventually became foreman supervisor. He was made redundant on his birthday in 1968 after 21 years at Hoffmann.

Cliff died in January 2006.



Cliff and Sylvia Bliss



Women workers at Hoffmann's c1960s.

Photo supplied by Jayne Sibley. Her mum, Muriel Lancey, is pictured front right.

Hoffmann Newsletter October 1962 - News from Stonehouse

Members of the Hoffmann Gloucester fire brigade were first on the scene of a rick fire at Glen Farm, almost opposite the works entrance in Oldends Lane, one Sunday morning recently. A hose was run across the road and, led by chief officer Joe Murray, they fought to keep the flames away from a fuel tank, and a cattle truck which was parked close by.

The works brigade continued to lend assistance when appliances from Stroud arrived a few minutes later. Although the firemen were unable to prevent serious damage to the rick and the cattle truck, the fuel tank was saved.

©Stonehouse History Group

Hoffmann's Social Events

GALA QUEEN

Hundreds of employees of Hoffmann's (Gloucester) Ltd. gathered in the canteen at the firm's works at Stonehouse yesterday to witness the parade of entrants for this year's gala queen contest, and the judging.

Nine competitors took part. Points were awarded for personality, charm and beauty. The judges selected Miss Mary Joiner, a 16-years-old brunette, who works in the gyro inspection department and lives at 3, Chapel-road, Stonehouse, as Queen. The four attendants chosen were Mrs. Barbara Stockwell, Mrs. Gloria Stark, Miss Cynthia Thomas and Miss Jean Tanner.

The queen and her attendants will take a leading part at the works gala day on July 9 and will tour the surrounding villages the previous evening.

The competition was organised by Miss R. Frost, and the competitors and judges were thanked by Mr. P. G. Porter (secretary of the works social and sports club).

July 1949



The Carnival Queen in 1945 was Mary Conboy and her attendants were Mary McCann and Thelma Lewis

Hoffmann's Gala Day

The Gala Day started in 1943 and continued into the 1950s.

There was a Gala Queen and a variety of games and competitions.

Hoffmann's gala day — the second of its kind—provided a varied and enjoyable programme for many hundreds of spectators. In addition to an ambitious sports programme, there was a fruit, flower and vegetable show, a fancy dress carnival, headed by Miss Holley, who had been elected by popular vote as gala queen, besides a baby show, numerous side shows and a concluding dance, at which music was provided by the Rafman Dance Band.

August 1944

WITH A RECORD ENTRY OF WELL OVER 350, INCLUDING MANY COMPETITORS OF NATIONAL REPUTE, THE 6TH ANNUAL GALA DAY AND SPORTS MEETING ARRANGED BY HOFFMANNS ATHLETIC AND SOCIAL CLUB, OF STONEHOUSE, PROMISED TO BE THE BEST OF THE SERIES, BUT THE EVENT WAS MARRED BY RAIN WHICH CAUSED A NUMBER OF SPILLS IN THE CYCLING CONTESTS. TWO OF THE RIDERS HAVING TO BE TAKEN TO HOSPITAL.

July 1948

Parties and Outings



Karen Lowen
My father, Ken Fryer, worked there for his entire working life. He was a Check Viewer.
As children we went to an afternoon tea at the factory held for families and also the annual Christmas party which I believe my dad was involved with a few times.

Liz Law (Nee Brown)
My dad Ray Brown worked there in the boiler house. Fond memories as a child being invited to a pantomime trip and open day. It would have been 1970s I think.

Sharon Day
I went to the pantos and Christmas parties. It was wonderful. It was free for the children of parents that worked there, which was great - we did not know that as kids.

Jude Anderson
I remember a coach trip to a pantomime and we were all given a bag of snacks for the show. Crunchy apple, crisps, sweets, and a juice box.

Lorraine Turner
My memories are of the wonderful Christmas pantomime that we attended as children, with tea after. All paid for by our parents, I believe, in the Hoffmann's social club. We would sing Ten Green Bottles on the coach to Bristol. Good old days!



©Stonehouse History Group

Activities at Hoffmann's

Sporting and other activities and organisations at Hoffmann's included football, rugby, cricket, darts, skittles, bowls, tennis, tug-of-war, Duke of Edinburgh Award, pot-holing, fishing, Hoffmann Fire Brigade, Christian Fellowship, Benevolent Fund and Freshgate Award for Girls.

The Stroud Wartime Football League started in 1942 and was composed of local works teams.

Hoffmann's were Champions in 1942-43 and 1944-43 and won the Hurran Cup in 1944-45.



We have enhanced the original photos of these two teams using AI.





Hoffmann's cricket team 1944
Thanks to Howard Beard





Hoffmann's bowls team c1970









Memories of Hoffmann's

Howard Beard
My father, Albert (Bert) Beard, worked at Hoffmann's factory from the early 1940s until retirement in 1966. I know that, during the war, he somehow combined his daytime employment with his duties as a Special Constable, which included watching from the tower of Rodborough Fort for incoming enemy aircraft.
My own memories are of Christmas parties given by Hoffmann's for employees' children, with food, entertainment and a half-crown coin when leaving at the end. For the 1950s this was a sizeable gift, in receipt of which each child was stamped with ink on the back of their hand to prevent them rejoining the queue and receiving a second coin!

Chris Harris
My dad George Finning worked there for 42 years, having come down from Chelmsford to work there during the war.

Liz Mooney
Both my Mum (Marlene Mooney) & Dad (Peter Mooney) worked there in the early 80s, I believe. My Mum was the first female to become an inspector of the bearings.

Lynn Finney
My dad, John Pyne, worked there for many years, mostly in no.3 factory. He was shop steward. I also worked there when I was about 17, first in the Personnel office, then in wages and also in the telephone switchboard room. I also worked the Bradma Adrema machine, printing wage packets and time sheets etc.

Fiona Brazington Colliver
My Mum, Eileen Harrison, was in the typing pool in the early sixties and my Dad, Arthur Brazington, was in the Tool Room circa 1956 - 1980. I remember the Open Days that they used to hold at RHP. My uncle, Pop Bennett was also at RHP.

Terry Burton
I worked in the general office 1961-1964. I met my future wife, Gail Davis who worked there 1960-1972 and we have just celebrated our diamond wedding anniversary!

Angie Shaw
My Dad, Brian Stevens, did his apprenticeship there and worked there as a toolmaker for his entire working life, 40+ years!

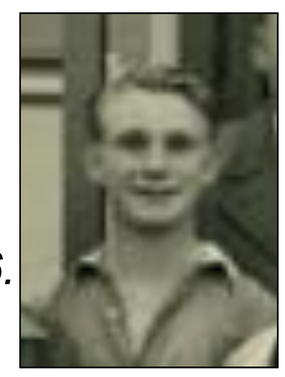


Photo shows Brian in the Hoffmann football team 1955-56.

David Bell
My Nan, Ethel Bell, was the nurse, my Dad Don Bell and my mum Jill Bell also worked there. My sister and me sold evening newspapers at one of the main gates.

Ali Driver
I worked at RHP for a few weeks in 1979 after university, sweeping the floor in the tool room. An old guy on one of the machines told me he had worked there for 42 years. I said, *"Wow! You must have worked all over this factory in that time".* He said, *"No - just on this machine and that one there".*

Chris Pescatore
I worked in the avionics part of RHP, along with my father on the quality control department. Lots of good memories

Andy Irvine
I worked there in 1967, in the etching shop which used acid to check bearings for faults. Once a month we used to empty and clean the two hot oil baths and replenish with fresh oil. On one occasion there was no new oil so we left a note on the switch to say - *do not switch on* as the security used to turn them on Sunday night so we were ready to run Monday morning. Unfortunately whoever turned them on didn't read the notice and the etching shop burned down.

Francis John Clark
I started there as an apprentice in 1965, I worked with a great bunch of apprentices led by Mr Cave and Mike Portlock. I was in the Tug of War team. I left in 1968 to join the Royal Navy. Joining up was a lifetime ambition. I would have joined in '65 but mum would not sign the paperwork.



March 1963

ABOVE: The new apprentices.

BACK ROW: Alan Day, Gerald Butler, Michael Daynes, Alan Hogg, Alan Hall.

FRONT ROW: Mr. A. H. Cave (App. Instr.), Michael Long, Eric Williams, Michael Cooke, Ray Blanch.

Photograph courtesy "Citizen."

Robin Loomes
Did my apprenticeship there, 1967-72.
Tony Cave was the instructor.

Jenny Underwood
Tony Cave was my dad. I have a few photos somewhere of him with some of the apprentices.

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