

Viv Howells
Memories of my working life
on
Swansea Docks
1953 – 1997

December 2022

Swansea Docks



North Dock (Parc Tawe Retail & Sainsbury's)

South Dock (Swansea Marina)

River Tawe (Roll on-Roll off Ferry)

River Tawe (Barrage - Marina extension)

Prince of Wales Dock (Langdon Road)

Kings Dock

Queens Dock

*To the magnificent engineers who designed and built Swansea Docks
and all those who worked to preserve it for more than a hundred years*

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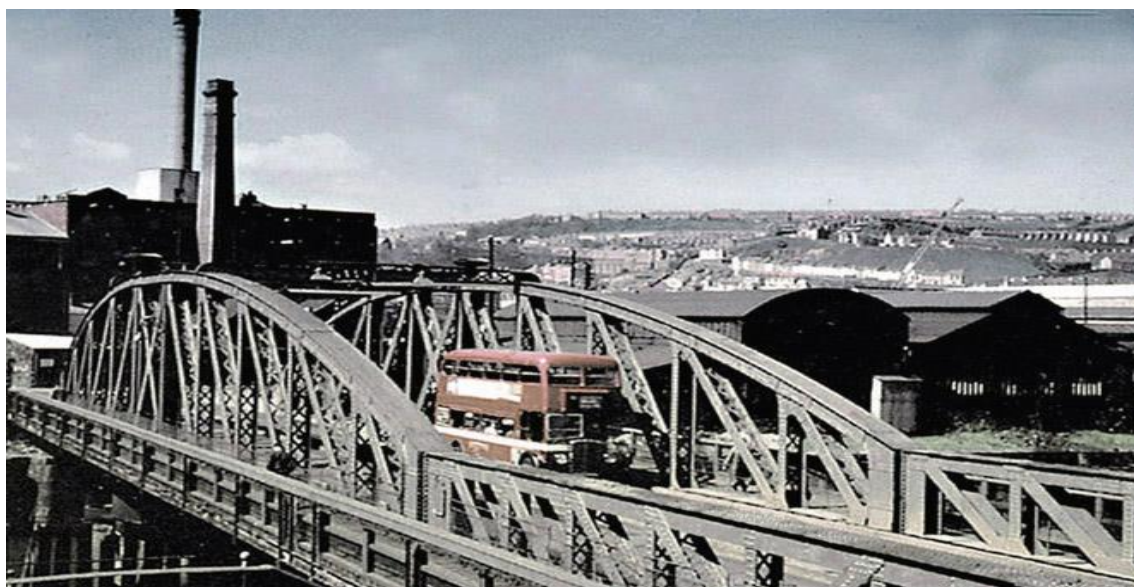
Ye olde Harbour Road Workshops

I started work as an apprentice fitter and turner with the Docks and Inland Waterways on Swansea Docks in September 1953 and for over forty years continued to be employed there. I consider myself very lucky to have seen it in its best days and later through periods of decline and great change.



The main workshops were in Harbour Road on the west bank of the river Tawe roughly between the two road bridges that now span the river. My wages were £2.0s.2d a week. The working day was 7.00 am to 4.48 pm Monday to Friday with a half hour for breakfast and an hour for lunch. During the next five years I worked in all areas of the dock gaining experience on the different types of machinery. The Machine Shop was Dickensian and had probably not changed much over its then near fifty years existence. Configured in two bays one covered by a gantry there were many machines large and small all driven by a system of overhead belts and pulley's the whole arrangement powered by two large electric motors. Each machine had two pulleys, one free-wheeling the other, when selected, to drive the lathe, etc. It was not until later that the first modern electric machines arrived "Cardiff" and "Colchester Student" lathe's a "Cincinnati" milling machine and a large radial drill. No clothing was supplied apprentices wore a boiler suit, other engineering staff what they turned up in, and it was several years before first industrial shoes were provided, and later wet weather jackets and hi-viz overalls. The Machine-shop had a Chargehand, Brychan Munday, three Machinists, Stan Charlesworth, Jeff Clements, Frank Cornelius, and three Apprentices, myself, Malcom Mages, Carl Bevan all supported by two Mates Johnny Griffiths and Ben Evans. We were all kept very busy. Frequently sheaves were brought in to be re-bushed in phosphor bronze and new shafts manufactured. Work was sized by calliper and a twelve-inch steel rule. This needed skill by the machinists who worked to very small tolerances such as "half a nat's cock". Lathe tools were of carbon steel usually from an old file which had first been forged into shape and hardened by the Blacksmith's. I remember one time I was able to acquire a piece of "Stellite" tungsten tool steel when attending the Technical College, from another apprentice, much to the envy of my colleagues.

Adjacent were the Blacksmiths with Chargehand Harold Hardy four blacksmiths, each assisted by a mate or "Striker", and one apprentice Colin Dyer who was warned off not to mix with the apprentice fitters as they could be a bad influence. It was mainly forge and anvil work, there was not a lot of welding at this time but became common later when the workshops moved onto the dock. There was one mate in this workshop who used to amuse us boy's by demonstrating how he could bite an apple when he had no teeth; another would place a red-hot piece of metal on his tongue. This workshop had a large steam powered hammer, with a man employed to raise and maintain steam. They also had a lot of work around the dock's; such as the repair of steel ladders and assisting fitters when required, one blacksmith was permanently stationed at the Kings Dock workshop. Beyond were the Boilermakers with Foreman Charlie Grey and Chargehand Hopkin Hopkin which employed more men. The Boilermakers, each supported by a mate or "Holder Up" were very argumentative, jealously safeguarding the historical demarcation of their work which continually caused friction with the Blacksmiths. The toilets were in the back yard and comprised of four cubicles mounted on a large tube which was open to the river. Of course no toilet paper was provided so everyone took a newspaper, (it was too dark to read), and periodically it would flush out. At busy times paper would accumulate and it was not unknown for it to be set alight in one cubicle when the adjacent one was in use. There was no mess room but in the Machine Shop were strategically placed old bus seats which were adjourned to at meal times. There had been workshop bomb damage during WW2 but the machinery was so robust that there was little sign of it. Foreman of the workshops, north and south docks, was Charlie Schenk.



River Tawe Bridge and Harbour Road Workshops

The Mechanical engineers

All dock engineering maintenance was, incredibly, run at this time without any transport. The foremen who each covered large areas were mobile on bicycles and around the dock materials were moved manually by handcart or sack truck. If a lorry was required it had to be borrowed from either the Stores or General Cargo departments. About 1955, the Mechanical Engineers acquired a small odd looking Karrier Colt lorry (driver Freddie Holt) which was replaced by a Bedford TK lorry with a "Hiab" hydraulic crane (driver Harry Darling). This proved to be very useful and dependable until many years later it was stolen from the workshop yard and never recovered. About 1959 a Coles 6-ton mobile crane (driver Dick Thompson) was bought and later replaced with a very much superior mobile crane with telescopic jib (driver Cyril Randal). Adjacent the entrance from New Cut Road, was the timekeeper's office manned by Ronnie Watchman assisted by Tommy Olson (ex. Swans). In 1961, due to road development, all the workshops were moved from the Harbour Road site to the vacated Western hydraulic pumping station. The Machine shop locating in the pump room and the Boilermakers and Blacksmiths sharing the boiler room, where they could keep an eye on each other. The mechanical department, which covered the North, South, Prince of Wales and Kings docks were supervised by one Chief Foreman, two Junior Foremen (all on bicycles) and working charge-hands. Fitters each with a Mate, maintained the machinery and the Hydraulic Repairers looked after accumulators, lock gate and sluice machinery and the hydraulic pressure ring main. There were also wire rope and chain examiners. Boilermakers and Blacksmiths worked both in the workshops and outside around the dock. The docks provided employment not only for Dockers (Stevedores) and Crane Drivers to move cargo, there were others who loaded coal, operated lock gates, crewed the dredgers, maintained the Per Way and manned the pumping stations.



To support dock operations were the mechanical maintenance engineers with workshops, usually in old war time air raid shelters, spread around the dock.

N shed (quayside cranes F and N sheds)

K.D. Mole (quayside cranes four quay)

Kings Dock (coal hoists 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

"The Chapel" at B shed (quayside cranes A, B, C, D, and G shed)

Hydraulic Repairers had a home adjacent the Passage Bridge

K.D. locks were covered by a fitter and mate on each tide

Prince of Wales Dock (coal hoists 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10)

South Dock (pumping stations, bridge, lock gates - North and South).

Other engineers, Electrical, Civil, and Per Way had separate arrangements, all supported by a very efficiently run Stores department, as well as a Medical Centre with qualified staff. There were so many people working on the dock that there were two canteens in the Kings Dock and one each at the Prince of Wales and South Dock's.

At the Harbour Offices were port and estate management, engineering support services, personnel office, cashiers, typing pool, and telephone exchange. General Cargo and Coal Shipping operational departments had their own offices.



Harbour Office's Adelaide Street

No smoking

When I was growing up smoking was a normal everyday activity, almost everybody smoked, and it was widely advertised and seen as the cool thing to do. It was not until about 1960 that it was suggested that it might be bad for your health. I well remember a TV programme when for the first time it was shown what effect smoking could have when a bucket of smoke damage lungs was produced, which was not a pretty sight, but it was so ingrained in society that even in the face of this evidence people would not believe the danger. In 1954 when I was a young apprentice working at the King's Dock workshops in order not to appear to be any different I decided I should start smoking. One afternoon I slipped away to a newsagent's in Port Tennant and purchased a pipe and some tobacco.



Returning to the dock I loaded and lit the pipe and quietly moved to mingle with the gang. I was immediately spotted and set upon by a colleague named Albert who roughly asked what I had and I proudly showed him my pipe. As it passed from me to him it dropped to the floor and broke. I was livid and accused Albert of doing it on purpose which he denied. I never did replace the pipe, or start to smoke cigarettes, in that one moment of fate I was saved a lifetime addiction, considerable expenditure, probably bad health and consequently may not even be here now.

Docks-ology

When I first started to work on the docks what struck me immediately was the language. It was mostly like the English I was used to but with special rules. Every sentence still started with a capitol letter and ended with a full stop, but in between there had to be a noun a verb and at least two words starting with an "f" and ending with "ing". The thinkers on the job informed me it was "docks-ology" and it proved to be the forerunner of normal everyday language now heard in public and on TV.

Engineering Executive

Keith Langdon became the port engineer in the late 1960's, a very confident and energetic man and a breath of fresh air when he arrived. He oversaw big changes on the dock with new roads, the refurbishment of the east and west piers, the development of the Ferryport and the introduction of fork lift trucks. He was very hands on and took an interest in everything and everyone. Later he was promoted to chief engineer South Wales Ports based at Cardiff. He was followed by Brian Flower, John Pope and Colin Shepard.

Bill Lewis was the mechanical engineer, a first-class man with long merchant navy experience, always approachable and very supportive. He was confronted at home by the police at a time when his mother in law was terminally ill in bed and was temporally suspended mainly on a misunderstanding. Died of lung cancer, no doubt as a result of his engine room service at sea. Followed by Kevin Hughes.

Jim Hanson was the electrical engineer and he had a son who signed for Everton as a goal keeper. The boy had an accident at home resulting in a broken toilet seat. Everybody knew of this and thought it hilarious, but someone was more kind hearted and mysteriously a new seat appeared in Jim's office. After a few days when there had been no explanation he took the seat home but this turned out to be only a short time before the police investigation and poor Jim was charged with receiving stolen goods. He was in very poor health and the charge was eventually dropped and he died shortly after. His successor was Graham Green.

Don Booth was the civil engineer, and had a very laid-back attitude to work. He resigned when the extent of the police investigation was revealed. Replaced by Ben Spanner later Colin Sheppard.

Derek Huxtable was the marine engineer responsible for the maintenance of the dredging fleet. A capable engineer and a good, honest and friendly man who understood how to get the best from an industrial work force. He was not touched by the police investigation and retired when his time was up.

Mechanical Department Foremen

George Jones was the chief mechanical foreman for a very long period prior to retirement in 1972 and emigrated to Australia to join his family. George lived in Dock House and later moved to the Prince of Wales Dock bungalow and as chief foreman covered all four Swansea docks – on a bicycle. It was often said Rome wasn't built in a day, George Jones wasn't there. He was followed by Jack Taylor, Cliff Harvey, John Harrington, Glyn Morgan, Viv Howells, and Brian Davies.

Electricians

Had a workshop in the old central substation, adjacent the passage bridge and later at the redundant Sulzer pumping station adjacent the Machine, Blacksmith / Boilermakers workshops. They had an extensive range of work, including overhead supply cables, pump control gear, maintenance of vehicles and plant, as well as domestic electrics in office buildings. They covered the dock 24/7/365 with an electrician and mate working the three shifts. Supervised for very many years by foreman Wilfred Rowe, supported by long serving chargehand Fred Tong, then later Dick Jones, Newton Thomas, Trevor Owen and Ivor Lewis.

The Civil Engineers

Were based at the Petolite Yard in the Prince of Wales Dock an area which included the redundant P of W Dock impounding station which had been fitted out as the Carpenters workshop. These engineers were under the supervision of Works Inspector Cameron James who operated from the Harbour Office in Adelaide Street later by Bob Rudderham and then Wally Phillips. These last two, in turn, occupied an office within the Petolite Yard and were therefore more "hands on". The civil engineering staff were responsible for the maintenance of all the dock buildings employing carpenters, brick layers, painter/decorators and a plumber, other staff that cleared drains and kept the dock estate tidy, they had several vehicles and a lot of plant including a JCB. They also controlled a diver with crew and barge. The carpenters would refurbish the timber fenders and heel and mitre timbers on lock gates at overhaul on the slipway. They worked to a high degree of accuracy as they were wholly responsible for getting the timber dimensions and profiles right. It could be several years before a refurbished lock gate would be returned to service and match up to the partner gate.

Wally Phillips was an exceptional character, small in stature but large in personality, without personal supervision of himself he had complete authority and dominated subordinate foremen, Dai Stephens, Denis Bond, Vernon Hudson and all civil engineering department staff. Albert Blackler the excellent chargehand carpenter was completely dominated by Wally and over a period the practice of the traditional "foreigner" evolved from a favour into "commissions". Everybody knew what was going on and inevitably someone who fell out with Wally took revenge by informing the police. All hell broke loose in 1981 when British Transport Police, who were responsible for dock security, arrived mob handed, and investigated all departments of the engineers.

See "Helping with police enquires" on pages 35 / 36 / 37

Swansea Docks – 1950's

At the start of the twentieth century during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, Britain led the world with the industrial revolution the development of Swansea's dock's being an example of quality and innovation. The construction of the locks and its gate and sluice machinery can be noted for its robust design and originality, with the design and workmanship admired by each following generation of engineers. In use for over one hundred years and built, with basic plant and equipment, dimensions were large but the accuracy was exact. The finish and profile of the granite Cill's and Quoins for the lock gates perfection.

The layout of the coal exporting appliances and supporting rail sidings were a major part of the port infra-structure. The sidings were designed with a gradient to the dockside so that once wagons were on site they could be brought forward for loading by gravity by one man with a brake stick. The Kings Dock Tannett and Walker coal loading hoists were the "Rolls Royce" of its day and were still working over seventy years later.

In 1953 the port area stretched from the western end of the South dock (now Marriot hotel) where there was a very large timber merchant's (Gregors) to the North dock basin with the still active Weaver's Flour Mill and dredged sand for the local building trade (now Sainsbury's supermarket). Then to the eastern end of the Prince of Wales dock (now Sinclair Motors etc.) as well as the very busy Kings dock. Also, but quite separate was the Queens dock which was very busy with crude oil imports from Persia (Iran) for the Llandarcy refinery. The original dock authority was the Swansea Harbour Trust and in 1925 was taken over by the Great Western Railway with control from Swindon. In 1948 when the railways were nationalised it became The Docks and Inland Waterways. Later known as the British Transport Commission, the British Transport Docks Board and with privatisation in 1983 Associated British Ports.

Most of the dock machinery was powered by hydraulic, sea water, pressure. It was generated at three power stations and maintained by several accumulators. The "Eastern" beyond the top end of Kings Dock, the "Western" on the river Tawe east bank adjacent the Prince of Wales Dry Dock. Together they maintained an 8" diameter, originally cast iron, later steel, ring main of sea water pressure, at 800 psi, twenty-four hours a day.

These stations were coal/steam powered but after fifty years' service were replaced with electric Sulzer or Chester pumps. When the new pumps were installed to power the K.D. lock machinery the local circuit was converted to fresh water and a return line installed. More recently it has been completely overhauled with new cylinders and individual oil pressure units giving remote control. The "South" power station at the South Dock, now The Pump House restaurant, supplied pressure for the south and north docks. Also, there were pumping stations that impounded sea water to maintain the dock level and facilitate the locking of ships in and out of the dock. The one at the South Dock is now the Yacht and Sub Aqua Club.

Coal was the major export, in the Prince of Wales Dock there were six coal loading hoists with seven more in the Kings Docks working two shifts each day.



Ships would queue up moored to buoys in the middle of the dock waiting for a berth. Canada was a major customer and in early spring time very large vessels would load up and cross the Atlantic timing their journey to arrive at the St. Laurence River as soon as it became navigable

after the winter freeze. A regular trader to pick up steel products was the well-known Alfred Holt Blue Funnel line and these large vessels would call weekly from Liverpool on route to China, Japan and other far east countries.

Loading cargo was very labour intensive, fork lift trucks were only introduced in 1968, and a large number of stevedores were employed. At the eastern end of the Kings Dock on Four Quay there were 7½ ton capacity grab



cranes powered by water hydraulic pressure which were always very busy mostly discharging Sulphur for the Vale works at Llansamlet and "Blend" Iron Ore from Australia or loading scrap metal for export. Elsewhere there were electric cranes of three or six ton capacity for general cargo but the major trade was tinsplate which was exported all over the world.

At the South Dock there were two coal hoists used to bunker the fishing fleet. They were fed from sidings on the north side of the Prince of Wales Dock at high level, crossing over the River Tawe, Quay parade, the Strand, Wind Street and York Street. Alternative rail traffic was over the Tawe road bridge along Quay Parade passing Weavers flour mill and the Dock Offices in Adelaide Street.



*Quay Parade & Weavers Flour Mill
Railway lines - high and low level - feeding the South Dock*

The Consolidated Fish Company had a base and workshops near the lock gates and operated a large fleet of deep-sea trawlers, fishing far out into the Atlantic Ocean, with a fish market on the south side of the basin. In my time the South Dock was very much in decline and there was very little cargo trade other than the fish and some seasonal potatoes. It eventually closed in 1971 and was mostly filled in only to be dug out again and new entrance lock gates fitted and reopened in 1982 as the Swansea Marina. The North Dock had been filled in some years before the war and later became the Parc Tawe retail park. The North Dock basin was only used by vessels to service Weavers flour mill, sometimes with quite large ships, and by dredgers landing sand for the local building trade. When filled in it became the site of the Sainsbury's supermarket. The river Tawe barrage was completed in 1992 and created the river moorings for small pleasure boats.



Loco on Quay Parade (towards South Dock)

Work life experience and random thoughts

Most memorable of my working life experience on Swansea docks was the comradeship with its robust adult humorous banter, larger than life characters, and the friendly atmosphere. Opinions were freely expressed with no limit from "Political Correctness". To me this was the real world.

Working conditions were basic, and no protective clothing was supplied. With the work spread over a large area and with a mainly benign office bound management, good practice relied on the teamwork of staff, the experience of foremen and input of long serving chargehands.

Some of the work was dangerous, there always is with moving machinery and hydraulic machinery particularly as it is mainly silent. Great care also needed to be taken also when working at height on quayside cranes or coal hoists. There was no such thing as "Health and Safety" or "Training" you just followed the guidance of colleagues that had done it before.

All areas on crane or hoist were reached by fixed vertical steel ladders to permanent platforms at various levels. Temporary access would be by the a "floating stage" (a wooden platform suspended with ropes but no handrail). Access down a sluice pit by wooden ladder onto a floating stage was particularly dodgy and it was only later that Kevin Hughes designed an access frame that allowed secure platforms to be set at various levels and safe access by a built-in ladder. Machinery could be dirty and particularly unpleasant when working down a sluice at the locks and as there was widespread water hydraulics frequently wet. An allowance of 6p an hour was paid for very bad conditions.

When winters were very cold all maintenance work was suspended and there would be 24/7 defrosting on the coal hoists, locks, four quay hydraulic cranes, and bridges with all hands working twelve-hour shifts maintaining braziers and duck lamps strategically placed to prevent machinery freezing.

The pay was poor but there were many opportunities to work overtime, in the evening at "time and a half" to standby general cargo evening operations or at "double time" on weekends.

I arrived in 1953 when the dock was as it had always been, but buzzing with activity. Coal was exported from six hoists in the Prince of Wales dock and seven in the Kings dock working two shifts a day. The 7½-ton hydraulic grabbing cranes at Four Quay were always very busy and there were 3-ton and 6-ton electric cranes loading steel and general cargo at A B C D G M F and N sheds.

The North Dock had been filled in before the war but the Basin was still operating, mainly for Weavers flour mill.

The South Dock was busy with the fleet of deep-sea fishing boats operated by Consolidated Fisheries who had a base alongside the lock gates. Other than the fish trade there was little other activity.

A big leap forward for the engineers came with the arrival of the Coles mobile crane, replacing and far exceeding the versatility of a steam crane on rails.



The civil engineers employed a diver, complete with barge, crew and steam crane. The diver's helmet was supplied with air from hand operated bellows by the crew on the deck of the barge.

The three hydraulic power station, Kings dock East and West and South Dock were all coal/steam powered each with its own staff of driver, stoker, cleaner (usually a light duty position) and a labourer who would discharge the coal wagons into the station bunkers.

All staff were male, white and local living, many saw war service, women worked in the Harbour Office. Nobody had a car and all walked or cycled to the clocking on points at the various workshops.

I heard tell of a middle of the night time breakdown when a blacksmith was required to assist and had to be called out. No telephones, or thought of a taxi, the stoker on the night shift at the Western power station was dispatched on foot to an address in Townhill who on arriving at the street had forgotten the house number.

There was a telephone exchange at the Harbour Office which also covered local main line rail services, but around the engineering workshops was only a primitive interlinked system.

My merchant navy "career"

When I completed my apprenticeship in September 1958 I was retained on the docks as a fitter but was due for call up of my National Service and having no choice in the matter was resigned to going to the RAF. However, when I attended



the medical examination the doctor who was on "ears" took rather a long time and decided that he should have a second opinion. On making enquires with my own doctor I learned the symptoms associated with hearing problems so that when I was examined

a few weeks later by a specialist I failed the test and did not have to do the compulsory two years in the forces and was able to continue working on the docks.

Ironically a year later in August 1959 after trying for several months to obtain a position as an engineer in the Merchant Navy I was offered a position by telegram on a Wednesday evening. I finished work, and was paid off, on the docks at lunch time the following day, bought the MN officers uniform that afternoon in Gainswell's the outfitters in Wind Street. I joined the MV Ashburton at Avonmouth docks on the Friday. The ship had just arrived and would be in port for several days to discharge its cargo. I needed a medical so that I could officially join the Merchant Navy and a few days later one was arranged. On the morning of the examination, for the first time ever, I became aware of a slight wetness in one ear. The doctor quickly spotted it and diagnosed a mild infection which he said would clear up in a day or two without the need of medication but promptly failed me. I was discharged from the ship and returned home sad and disillusioned. A few days later by chance I met my old docks mate Mog Griffiths in Swansea town centre who next day told the foreman, George Jones, what had happened and Mog was dispatched to tell me my job was still available. I returned to work on the docks after an absence of two weeks and remained there for the rest of my working life. Good luck in so many ways it might even have had a bearing on my life span if like so many others I had developed cancer from contact with asbestos.

Back on the job

On my return after the merchant navy fiasco I was again employed as a fitter, on Swansea Docks, one of my first jobs was to assist in the installation of the new Impounding Pumps at Kings Dock - completed in 1960.

Two years later I was sent on a ten-week Work Study course at Paddington, London. To attend this course I had to make my own arrangements for accommodation, but details of the course, which was not for another six months, were to follow. Sometime later foreman Jack Taylor was sent on a short appreciation course and I was very interested to hear what it was all about but Jack much to my annoyance told me nothing about the course but was more interested in telling me how he got to the school from Paddington station. Months later it came my turn to go and I was on a Sunday afternoon train going through Swindon when I realised that I had not been given my joining instructions or details of the college. I had to recall Jacks very boring conversation and his directions to work out where I was going, which fortunately I was able to do. Thank you, Jack.

On my return to Swansea I became a member of the team that set up an incentive bonus scheme for the mech. engineers. This was a good scheme as it introduced both planned maintenance and enhanced wages. When it started a year later I was appointed Planner/Estimator and responsible for the planning of work in the Machine Shop, for the Blacksmiths, and the maintenance of the Kings Dock lock machinery, a job I retained for several years. During this period, I began deputising for foreman Jack Taylor when he was on leave or he himself covered for George Jones the chief engineering foreman. In 1972 George retired and it was several months before Jack was permanently appointed in his place and I had every expectation to be promoted to Jack's position but because Port Talbot Docks was being closed and Cliff Harvey the foreman there would have been redundant he was appointed to the job. When Jack eventually retired I was promoted as the maintenance supervisor of the machinery at the Kings Dock locks, North Dock Basin the South Dock in Swansea. Also, the fresh water supply to the tenants at Port Talbot old docks, including the steel works, and minor items of machinery at the tidal harbour. At weekends I was also organising repairs, by all trades, to the dredging fleet.

Training

The ABP training facilities at Kings Lynn, introduced in the 1960's, were first class very well organized and set up with excellent accommodation and food. I went there several times, usually courses ran from Monday to Friday except for the NEBSS course which was for several weeks split over two periods.

One course was for two weeks with the first week being a visit to the French port of Le Havre. I remember how the French put great emphasis on the dock environment even having managed green areas with turf and trees within the port area. Most memorable of this visit was the night voyage from Portsmouth. It was rough, very rough, we later learned that a dredger had been sunk near our ship's passage in the storm with loss of life.



*Me back row centre, John Godden front row first right
Kings Lynn Staff training college*

The ten-week Work Study course in London at the British Rail Paddington college was hard work and included a five-week assignment at a wagon repair depot in Barry.

In the 1960's London was buzzing and it was imposable not to be caught up in the "Rock and Roll" atmosphere.

Qualifications



The Institute of Supervisory Management

This is to Certify that
by Order of the Council and in accordance
with Article of Association Number 6
Vivian George Howells
has after examination been elected a
Corporate Member

of the Institute of Supervisory Management
with the right to use the letters M.I.S.M.



1999

The Common Seal of the Institute of Supervisory Management
was hereto affixed
this first day of June 1968

in the presence of

[Signature] Chairman of Council

[Signature] Chairman of Membership Committee

[Signature] Secretary

Although I had left school without any qualifications during my time as an apprentice on the docks I attained the City and Guilds Certificate in Machine Shop engineering at the local Technical College. In the following years I attended several courses at the A.B.P. training college at Kings Lynn. In 1968 I passed the N.E.B.S.S. management examination which along with consideration for my supervisory duties on the dock qualified me for membership of the Institute of Supervisory Management (M.I.S.M.)

In 1976 when foreman of the plant and vehicle repair workshop I attained an HGV driving license and later passed the examination for the Professional Competence Certificate in National Road Haulage Operations.

After in-house training in general cargo handling I became qualified to operate quayside cranes, fork lift trucks, and Tugmasters, also receiving training in the use of breathing apparatus for emergency rescue.

Ken who?

During my long career on the dock's I no doubt, like everyone else, did my fair share of ducking and diving, after all it was the culture of the job. On four occasions I was taken in for questioning by the police, but never arrested or charged. You learn from each experience and the first time, in the early seventies, was a hell of a shock and I was badly shaken by a really awful experience.

One day on returning to the Planning Office I was told that the police had been looking for me and, in all innocence, I went to the docks police station to see what they wanted, and how I could help. I was taken into a small dark room and confronted by two large police officers, old fashioned and very loud. They proceeded to interrogate me with what was the normal technique at the time, full on and very aggressive. One was in my face while the other stood behind me at my shoulder and I was immediately intimidated. They thought they had information of a connection between myself and a known criminal, a man by the name of Ken, who thankfully I had never heard of, and that we had been jointly involved in a criminal enterprise. They pressed and pressed threatening me that I would be placed in a line up, he would identify me and I would be fast tracked to Swansea prison. They persisted in a very loud, belligerent and threatening manner for me to reveal the names of all the "Ken's" I knew and confirm my connection with them. There were a couple who worked on the dock that came quickly to mind and I even remember giving them the name of a boy I knew in school. I was still quite young and did not consider myself fully mature or mentally robust. My mind was all over the place and any secrets I held would have been easily revealed. I might have even confessed to something I had not done – it happens. They hammered away at me but after what seemed a life time, although they probably didn't believe me, gave up and let me go shaken and very stirred. I had great difficulty peddling my bicycle back to the Planning Office. They must have made further enquires and a week later one of the policemen stopped me as I drove down the dock road and apologised.

It was the first time in all my life to even speak to a policeman and it had been a very unpleasant experience, but was a good life lesson that was to serve me well in my future dealings with the police.

The poker incident

There was always an opportunity to do something for yourself, and anything that was not for the company was known as a "foreigner" and it was deeply ingrained in the culture of the engineers. Sometime in the seventies I was approached by a neighbour who was looking for support to raise funds for the charity Muscular Dystrophy through a sale of work in the local chapel. I suggested I might be able to help with some small decorative fire-place poker. Next day I spoke to one of the Machine Shop Turners, Ronnie Guy, and he enthusiastically agreed to make a few taking great pride discussing with me the design. We did not agree quantity and I left it to his discretion as to the spare time he had and the "availability" of material. A few weeks later he told me that they were almost all ready and to my shock and utter amazement showed me a stack of thirty-six (I think he had a personal connection with Muscular Dystrophy) and gave me thirty that were completed. I took them home at lunch time and placed them on the floor just inside our front door. That afternoon when Ronnie had finished the remaining few I collected them and left the workshop and took them to my car a short distance away. I was immediately confronted by a plain-clothes British Transport Police C.I.D. officer, the "notorious" Sergeant George Walters. He had observed me and wanted an explanation as he said he had seen me behaving suspiciously carrying metal to my car. Now I was really in the shit, this particular officer was well known on the docks as he had previously worked in the engineering department at Port Talbot docks and had gained the reputation that he would have arrested his granny given half a chance. I handed him one poker and explained what it was and what it was for, the chapel Sale of Work, the good cause Muscular Dystrophy, and probably for the first time in his career, after searching the car for anything else incriminating, he showed sound common sense and sent me on my way. If there was any doubt in his mind and he had decided to arrest me I would automatically have been taken to the docks police station and then my home would be searched which would have inevitably meant my fate was sealed. Luckily, I had got away with six but thirty-six would have been a very different matter. It's often said that no good deed goes unpunished, both Ronnie and myself would have had our lives ruined just for our good intentions but were saved on the day by that one out of character decision of police Sgt. George Walters. Thank you, George

Promotion

George Jones retired in 1972 and emigrated to Australia to join his family. George's retirement was quite an occasion, and was celebrated with friends, family and work colleagues, past and present, at a function in the Railmen's Club in Wind Street, professionally compered by Ken Hughes.



Mechanical engineering staff (George Jones retirement 1972)

In the 1960's there were big changes, General Cargo operations were mechanised with the arrival of a large fleet of fork lift trucks. Henley Hawk, Husky, and Hercules, and Coventry Climax diesel, and Lancer Boss battery. At the same time vehicles were being supplied to the engineering foremen and other departments and the Civil engineers had an ever-increasing amount of plant. To cater for the maintenance a new section was set up and located in the old Prince of Wales Dry Dock workshop. Fitters with motor trade experience were recruited and Harold Twells, who had RAF aircraft maintenance experience, was put in charge.

As foreman, Harold had a very difficult time with two of the new fitters, the Robins brothers, Sid and Ronnie. They had no respect for him, were very disruptive, and created chaos whenever they could to discredit and embarrass him. With little support it resulted in Harold suffering from depression and taking long periods of sick leave before he died in 1976. Management had been slow to deal with the situation but Bill Lewis then dispatched the Robins brothers to a small workshop at Four Quay, where they could not disrupt others. He then put me in charge of the section.

The Robins brothers did not like me any more than they liked Harold, and resented me for taking the job they thought should have been Sid's. I considered them weird but stationed away from the main workshop we maintained a workable relationship. There was never any question as to their ability and with the proper support they completely overhauled the whole fleet of Henley Husky diesel fork trucks, which at that time were over ten years old. When ABP contracted out the maintenance of the Fork Trucks I recommended Ronnie to be employed by the contractor, Sid had died.

I continued in this position until 1989 when there were large scale redundancies, with all the stevedores and crane drivers, and most of the engineering staff, leaving with voluntary severance. Engineering maintenance was put out to contract and I became the only mechanical department foreman with a small workforce and the responsibility for the maintenance of the Kings Dock lock machinery and the Ferryport.

All remaining engineering and office staff, including myself, were trained in cargo handling skills and procedures. I was a supervisor of engineering maintenance and Ferryport operations but was also driving 10-ton grabbing cranes at Four Quay loading coal, and 25-ton cranes at D shed discharging aluminium ingots. Many times I was a fork lift truck driver bringing cargo out of D shed to the quay side.

This was usually steel coil or boxes of sheet steel but occasionally there were 40ft. containers to be shipped with the 32-ton "Lansing" fork truck. We also loaded several car transporter vessels when new cars were brought to the port and had to be individually driven aboard. Everybody enjoyed this new work, which was completely different from our normal duties, not only was it "job and finish" but it paid the dockers handsome bonus tariff which greatly enhanced our wages.



Dirty tricks for dirty oil

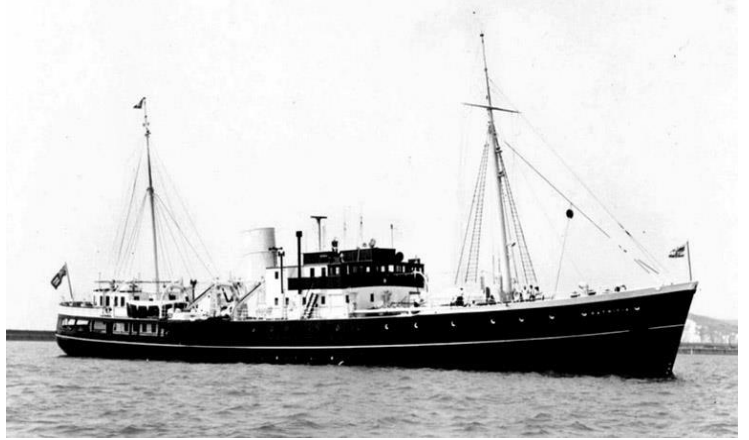
When vehicles, fork trucks and other plant were serviced in the workshop and undertook an oil change the dirty oil was collected and transferred to a large tank at the rear of the workshop. We were environmentally ahead of the game in the 1970's and even got paid for it when it was taken away.

One day a very personable Irishman came into the workshop and gave me a desperate hard luck story. He explained that he was part of a gang working on a road relaying contract in the Dyfatty area and the road surface laying machine had run out of oil. They were in big trouble not only was the job on stop but if it was not relit quickly the tarmac that was already loaded would solidify be very difficult to remove and the machine ruined. Could I please let him have a gallon of dirty oil to get things going again?

He was very good and I agreed to help and took him to our dirty oil tank and told him he was welcome to a gallon, no problem. He went to get a container and I returned to the workshop. After a few of minutes I returned to see he had brought up a large Transit van. Inside was a tank that completely filled the cargo space and had a system of pump and pipes that would enable him to suck out the entire contents of our tank which was obviously his intention and he was ready to start. I quickly sent him on his way ensuring that he understood exactly how I felt about him and his cheeky "con". A few weeks later we had a circular from British Transport Police that this "con" was widespread and to be vigilant.

R.A. Jenkins

When the south dock hydraulic pumping station converted from steam to electric pumps the empty boiler room was rented out as a workshop to a local firm of high-quality engineering machinists, R.A. Jenkins & Co. who had previously operated in York Street. In 1952 the Trinity House Vessel "Patricia" was in Swansea on a routine visit and as the royal yacht "Victoria and Albert" was not fit for sea, was next scheduled to take the



Duke of Edinburgh to Helsinki to open the Olympic Games. Unfortunately, the Patricia suffered a major breakdown in one of its two main engines and the much publicised and prestigious trip was at risk. Local Dry Dock companies declined to get involved because the urgent time scale and the complexity of the repair. Step forward Mr. R.A. Jenkins who designed and manufactured equipment that could be fitted inside the crankcase of the engine and repair the damaged crankshaft in situ. The repair was successfully completed and as planned the "Patricia" and Duke of Edinburgh were on their way to Helsinki. Mr. Jenkins received a personal letter of thanks from the "Elder Brethren" of Trinity House which he proudly had pinned to his office door together with a London newspaper report of the event.

Sadly, the firm of R.A. Jenkins has long gone and a few years ago I pursued this matter both with archived records in the Civic Centre library, the S.W. Evening Post and directly with Trinity House in a quest for confirmation but without success.

Typical shop floor banter

One morning before work had started a small group were talking informally in the Blacksmiths Shop when the subject of American history was mentioned. As the conversation developed Alan Norman casually said that one of his great-great-great grandfathers was killed at the battle of the Little Big Horn, a famous conflict between native red Indians and soldiers of the American government. As the Indians were the victors it became known as General Custer's last stand. Immediately John Evans was overcome with emotion and the thought that Alan's relation had been a part of American history. He very much over reacted and was totally aghast and excitedly expressed how he felt for several minutes. Eventually he settling down and sarcastically asked which side was he on, Indian or Soldier? Alan calmly replied that he wasn't on either side but had been camping in the next field and went over to complain about the noise when somebody shot him. Everybody laughed except John.

Contraband

I was not a smoker myself so I had no interest in cigarettes but was aware that sometimes they were available from crew members of a ship when in dock. These were very much cheaper than the equivalent bought at the local newsagent - supermarkets had not yet been invented. A very well-known ship that always had a supply was the Pieter S which had a regular run from Swansea to Belgium loaded with coal and returned to port every couple of weeks. Not only was tobacco freely available but sometimes watches as well. Fortunately, the drugs trade had not appeared and I never heard of any trafficking.

The contraband cigarettes were always available if you knew who to ask even in later years from the Swansea / Cork ferry crews.

Emergency treatment

Even after I working on the dock for over twenty-five years I had never needed to visit the Medical Centre. Then one day I got a splinter in my thumb and ignored it for several days until it became inflamed and very sensitive. I decided to seek medical attention and as I walked over the Passage Bridge my thoughts were perhaps "I'm wasting my time going here the local staff will probably direct me to the hospital A&E where I will receive a pain killing injection before the splinter can be removed". I entered and as I looked around was immediately impressed by the professional layout and cleanliness. Suddenly I was startled as Sister Jill appeared at my shoulder, yes, she said gruffly, and what's wrong with you? Sheepishly I showed her my thumb. Without further words she gently lifted up my hand to take a closer look. As she did, reaching into the breast pocket of her overall, she removed what at a glance was a small screw driver and in one swift movement she plunged it into the inflamed swelling. My heart missed a beat and I went into shock but fortunately the splinter had been instantly removed and with barely another word she sent me on my way. As I returned to the workshop I was speechless but can now reflect on the good treatment I received, no messing no anaesthetic, I was not even given a seat. Over the following years I got to know Sister Jill quite well, she was a prime dock character the perfect fit for her job and was loved and respected by all dock workers. When the crunch came in my hour of need lying injured on the deck of the Superferry she was a very welcome sight.

Thank you, Jill.

Years later she told me of this incident. Her daughter, and a friend who worked in the Neath branch of Lloyds Bank, were both going to the bank's annual function in the Castle hotel. At the last minute their lift to the hotel failed to appear and Jill was asked to assist. Although she was dressed very casually reluctantly agreed. On arrival at the hotel although intending only to drop off the girls Jill found herself in the foyer and was immediately accosted by an old acquaintance. After a couple of drinks, the friend took it for granted that Jill was invited to the function and together they entered the ballroom and sat at one of the laid-out tables. It just happened to be the top table and they found themselves sitting amongst the local gentry. Not having dressed for the event, with no make-up and looking totally rough (her description) Jill, as she does, fitted in well and conversed seamlessly with all and sundry and after enjoying a first-class meal. At each table setting there was an envelope that contained raffle tickets for the final draw of the event. Yes, you guessed it, Jill won first prize.

Cheers, Jill

DIY misfortune

Sid Osbourne was the chief general cargo foreman, and as a man who controlled the Dockers and Crane Drivers had considerable drive and personality. He lived in the Caswell Bay area and was constantly irked by a tree just outside the end of his garden which restricted the view from his property. He decided it had to go and borrowed a chain saw from the Civil Engineers to cut it down. Unfortunately he also badly damaged his leg and was rushed by ambulance to hospital. He was there for several hours but eventually patched up and allowed home only to discover that his wallet, which contained a very considerable amount of cash, was missing. Enquires with the hospital revealed nothing and he assumed that it had been stolen.

That was not the end of his misfortune as a short time later he received a summons from the Council for cutting down the tree.

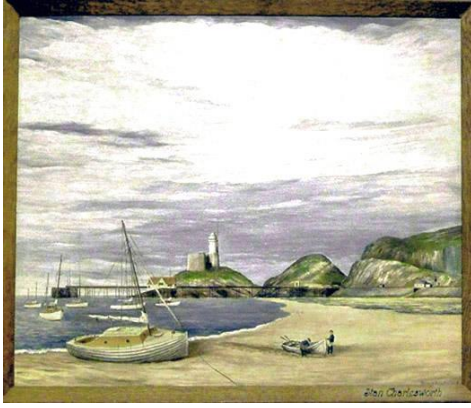
Fly tippers comeuppance

One of our fitters, who shall be nameless, fixed a tow bar to his car and bought himself a small trailer. He did this as he had rubbish at home to get rid of and intended to fly-tip it. (There were no council Recycling or Waste Disposal Centers at that time). One evening he waited until it was getting dark and set off up a local mountain accompanied by his faithful dog "Brandy". He reached his chosen site unhitched his trailer tipping out its contents. Brandy was getting excited and flying around inside the car and by sheer chance knocked the interior door lock. Most models of car at that time could be locked internally by depressing a small spindle that projected from the door frame just below the window.

Well there you are what was he do? Locked out of the car, up a remote mountain, at night without access to tools or any kind of support, (no mobile phones in them days). There was only one solution a heavy stone and smash the side window, a salutary lesson in fly tipping never to be repeated.

Stan's the man

Stan Charlesworth could not be idle, if work was slack he would be doing someone a favour by repairing a personal item. He was also a talented artist and had a favourite scene of Swansea Bay and Mumbles that he painted and loved to do one, on request, for a colleague. Not only did he enjoy painting the scene but would make a bespoke frame for each. Of course, I have one and although it must now be over forty years old still hangs at home.



He enjoyed lobster fishing and would forage over the rocks following the receding tide to low water at Port-Eynon, twenty miles down the Gower coast. His preferred time was in the small hours of the night, he would do this regularly and still be in work for a 07.30 start. It was a dangerous hobby as in the dark one slip on the remote greasy rocks and he would have been beyond help and swallowed by the incoming tide.

He got involved with his friend, Trevor Benjamin, in the refurbishment of an old ship's lifeboat, they named it "Kiwi". Stan spent endless hours working on items for the boat which was secured out of the water on the western end of the South Dock. Everything he did whether in wood or metal was to the highest standards of quality and precision.

He had no interest in the sea and when completed, after years of labour, never once sailed on her.

Another boat enthusiast was Hopkin Hopkin, the chargehand boilermaker. He made enquires at the ship breakers yard in the river Neath and bought a lifeboat that came from a ship that was being broken up. He managed to sail the boat on his own to the river Tawe adjacent the workshops and had our mobile crane to lift it out of the water. It was positioned on an old timber jetty and properly secured with props. For some years, I do not exaggerate, Hopkin could be seen at lunch time and for an hour after work in the evenings working on his boat. Unfortunately, it was doomed as one day a scrap metal merchant was burning up odd items near his boat and heat must have been transferred into the timber jetty. Hours later that evening it ignited and destroyed the boat. This was a disaster as the loss to Hopkin was more than could be costed in hours of labour and money spent, it had been a labour of love.

Smart arse “Yorkshireman”

When the Swansea Cork ferry started in 1969 it was equipped with a brand new, top of the range, “Scania” tractor unit to move unattended trailers on and off the ship. This was very much an OTT purchase as this vehicle was



built for the motorway not for a shipyard. It was difficult to handle and before long was involved in a serious front end accident and the whole cab structure was demolished. It was dragged to the rear of the workshop where it rested for a number of years. No attempt was made to repair as it would have been very expensive and, in any case,

remain unsuitable for its intended job. It was replaced with old worn out tractor units until the second hand Tugmasters were purchased some time later. One day about 1977, shortly after I took up the position of foreman of the vehicle and plant workshop, a “Yorkshireman” arrived and informed me that he had purchased it at scrap value and had authority from the Stores to remove it. The value was very much in the engine, transmission and other mechanical parts which were as good as new and would be of considerable value to a road haulage operator that was using a fleet of similar vehicles. It was no good to us we had no Scania’s. Shortly a team arrived with a lorry and with the help of our mobile crane was swiftly gone. It later transpired that this “wise guy” having agreed to buy the unit with the Stores manager had sold it to a local haulage company for cash, both prices unknown, and they were the people who collected it. In a smart move he paid the Stores from the money he received from the sale.

How this man, never seen before or since, knew of the vehicle and who at ABP had put a sale value on it is a mystery. Maybe whoever had authorised its original purchase was embarrassed and glad to see it removed. This Yorkshire guy was able by bluff and guile to complete in just a few hours a “buy and sale” without outlaying any of his own money and no doubt show a handsome profit.

The dredgers

Ever since the North and South docks were constructed in the nineteenth century dredging of the river between the piers and later the sea road in Swansea bay leading into the Kings dock was required and a fleet of dredgers were necessary to maintain access for shipping. Steam powered bucket dredgers, David Davies and later Abertawe, were supported by several Mud Hoppers to transfer the spoil to deep water far out in the Bristol Channel. In the 1950's and 1960's these were gradually replaced by diesel powered craft. Grab dredgers, the Kenfig, Ely, Orgmore, Rhymney, Aberavon, and suction dredgers Afan, Baglan,



Lavernock and much later Welsh Bay, Dolphin and Bluefin. Maintenance of the fleet was undertaken by ship's crew engineers when at sea and in dock repairs by private dry dock contractors. In the 1960's there was a change of policy and ABP

staff were detailed to repair the craft. A few extra men who had dry dock experience were employed, and as the fleet operated at sea from Monday to Friday this work was welcomed by the staff as it entailed mainly weekend overtime for four hours on Saturday and eight hours on Sunday at double time. My involvement was gradual as supervision of the work became the responsibility of foreman Jack Taylor who I replaced when he was absent. We had known for some time that none of the ship's engineers ever retired, they all died in service. The unsocial hours of working ten continuous "tides" Monday to Friday and the unhealthy, very noisy and hot, engine room environment was thought to be the cause. It was only in later years that it was realised that it was more likely to be the presence of asbestos. It was extensively used on the older dredgers to lag steam pipes and on diesel engine craft there was also extensive use both in the engine rooms and on the cranes, where there were large brake and clutch bands that produced a great deal of dust from their asbestos linings. In those days there was no knowledge of the danger asbestos presented and subsequently it was treated very casually. Sadly, in later years it undoubtedly claimed the lives of two of my very good friends, Viv Lewis and Gareth Evans, who each died young of lung cancer. Both did extensive maintenance work on the dredgers.

Blue light police chase

The dock's workforce was very rich with outstanding characters and personalities; one such was my good friend Gareth Evans. Everybody who knew Gareth had an amusing tale to recall, he was the sort of guy to whom things always happened. One day I was planning an afternoon visit to one of our suppliers, Watts Tyres in Skewen, and needed Gareth to accompany me. He asked could we divert our journey via his home in Ynysforgan and I agreed even though it meant a lengthy diversion. When we arrived at Ynysforgan he revealed an ulterior motive in that he wanted to return some motor parts to Pick-up-Spares in Landore. This was not at all what I had intended and felt he was taking advantage of my good nature, but although miffed I reluctantly agreed. As we drove back through Morriston there was a frosty silence in the van and to make matters worse we got caught in heavy traffic. I could see ahead that a JCB digger was moving slowly and causing the tail back. As we approached Plasmarl where there is a bypass and a choice of routes Gareth gave me unwanted advice on how to avoid the JCB. As we then proceeded I spotted a police car close behind with its blue light and headlights flashing and suspected it was because I was speeding. By this time I was already feeling bloody minded and told Gareth not for him to worry because I was not going to stop, and anyway I would only have to pay half the fine because it was his fault we were on this particular route and it was only fair he paid his share. He was not pleased but sank deep into his seat as I drove on anticipating no doubt with glee a ringside seat when we would be stopped and he would have a good tale to tell our colleague's on returning to the docks. After travelling through Plasmarl and Landore and passing Pick-up Spares when we got to Hafod I pulled in and the police car stopped behind us and I awaited my fate. The police officer approached opened the door and after forcibly complaining that he had been signalling me to stop for a couple of miles, for which I readily apologised, he turned to Gareth and pointing his finger said "You are not wearing your seat belt". Gareth went into shock, he repeatedly said "I'm so sorry officer" for several minutes, so much that I think the policeman was embarrassed. Fortunately, even though I had provoked him by not stopping he just gave us a warning and we continued to Watts Tyres then returned to the dock via Pick up Spares - it was one hell of a long and unusual afternoon.

Tragedy at sea

When I started work in the Harbour Road engineering workshops I knew an apprentice Boilermaker named Albert Dring who saw himself as a hard man and a local amateur boxer. After completing his apprenticeship, I did not see Albert again for over twenty years until one day, about 1980, he walked in to the workshop. Apparently, he liked fishing and had bought a boat it had some engine problems and he was looking for help. I got involved and was able to make a considerable improvement to the boats speed. Albert was delighted and I was immediately signed up as chief engineer. I wasn't too keen but had enough interest to accompany him on a few fishing trips and once returned home with a bucket full of mackerel.

One Saturday morning Albert contacted me with a view of arranging a trip that afternoon but I had something else to do and I declined. Albert then did his usual trip to Oxwich Bay and on his return leg observed a yacht ahead with the crew frantically waving to him. As he came close he could see that they were attempting to recover bodies from the water.

It transpired that a holiday maker in Mumbles had taken his young son and his son's friend out in a very small boat and had been swept by the tide around Mumbles Head and down channel as far as Pwll Du bay where it had floundered.

Albert brought his boat alongside the yacht to assist and radioed the coastguard. A Sea-king rescue helicopter soon appeared and put a paramedic down onto Albert's deck to access the yacht. Sadly, the two boys could not be saved, (I am not sure about the father). The lifeboat arrived and the bodies were taken back to Mumbles where the mother was anxiously waiting for news of her missing family - what a nightmare for her.

The fact that I was not present would not have made any difference to what happened, but I had been saved from a most harrowing experience.

Helping with police enquires

In 1981 there was a very dramatic incident when on arriving at work one morning to find the job swamped everywhere with a very large number of British Transport (Railway) C.I.D. police officers. We soon learned that several of our colleagues were already in custody having been arrested at their homes in early morning raids with others picked up and taken away for questioning on arrival at work. For many years staff had enjoyed a concession dating back to the docks railway heritage years where they were allowed to purchase, at very low cost, that included home delivery, a lorry load of sawn-off blocks of redundant railway sleepers for firewood. The system fell into disrepute and over time evolved to where it was not necessary to pay at all and then from sleepers to second hand wood but later, it got out of hand, with new wood making useful items, to order, even doors and windows. This involved the civil engineering department but due to the inexperience and naivety of staff when questioned the police were able to obtain information relating to a number of other unrelated and genuine "foreigners" in all sections of the engineers. During their investigations the police thrashed about with demented zeal and frightened many individuals who had not previously faced such an experience. Over a period of several weeks almost all the work-force were interviewed and the police were able to deceive people into confessing and revealing all what they knew. One individual was Albert Blackler, the chargehand carpenter, who because of his position and involvement "knew a lot". He was an excellent tradesman and a good man but was isolated by the police and became frightened and confused. He consulted his local vicar for guidance, who advised confession, and with police encouragement and the promise of immunity was fooled to provide a full history of all he knew. They played him along until he had no more secrets to reveal then reneged on their promise and charged him, much to the delight of the many colleagues he had grassed on. There was little resistance as the investigations progressed, staff were all in shock and just fodder with the police calling all the shots, the trade unions not appearing with advice or support. However, the police proved very inept when two years later they came to court to present their evidence and made a mess in the presentation of several cases, some in comical fashion, which resulted in acquittals.

My very good friend Basil Smith, who worked in the Machine Shop, was taken into custody on "day one", a Thursday, and his car left outside the workshop unlocked complete with ignition key. When we returned to work on the Friday the car was still there and no sign of Basil and knowing his family I telephoned home to find out what was going on. His wife was upset and explained that the police had visited her the previous evening and done a thorough search of the house. We waited all day for him to reappear until mid-afternoon when I ventured down to the police station seeking information. In the foyer was a counter and a smallish officer dealt with me from the other side. After I explained who I was, that I was in touch with his worried wife, and had retained the ignition key from his car I was told that he was in custody but would be released shortly. As I was about to leave he told me that I myself was required to attend the police station myself on Monday at 3 o'clock to be interviewed. I asked who I should ask for and immediately this "shorty" stood on his toes stuck out his chest and said Detective Inspector Stoppani, greatly emphasising each syllable. It was so funny, the next thing I hear myself saying "No trouble Monday then, there can't be too many of you working here with a name like that". It's very true, but dam I was mad, I now had to stew all weekend worrying about what they might have been told about me. Later I found out that the police had been very spiteful and had transferred Basil to the Swansea police station in Alexandra Road to be held in a cell overnight. Basil was well known to be a Port Talbot "Free Mason" and Wally Phillips, the Civil Engineer Foreman, must have got wind of it and probable thought if he was well in with Basil it would enable him to join. It was no secret that Basil had problems with a window at home and one day Wally said to Basil let's have a look at this window and they ended up at Basil's house at Margam. Wally surveyed all the doors and windows and before Basil knew it a large gang of civil engineers were making regular visits, measuring, manufacturing, and fitting a complete set of windows and doors. Time passed but when the police arrived there were so many people in the know that they quickly learnt all about it. Basil was suspended and during the two years wait to go to trial took voluntary severance, pleaded guilty at Merthyr crown court, and was sentenced with a substantial fine. Much worse was to follow as he suffered a very acrimonious divorce and left home, to return after a settlement with his wife was agreed, to find a large amount of gratuitous damage to the home.

It was horrible, he never saw his children ever again, birthday cards and Christmas present's he sent were returned next day to his door step. Not long after and living alone in Baglan he returned home from shopping and suddenly died, he must have only been in his forties. He was a very good friend caught in an environment that had got out of hand and was made an offer too good to refuse. I felt very sorry for him.

As more information was forth coming, I had a better view of what was going on and come Monday afternoon I had a tot of whisky to settle my nerves before presenting myself at the police station and was able to draw on my previous police interview experience to comfortably handle the situation. The officers did not frighten me but what started as a friendly and respectful chat with Mr. Howells soon deteriorated, as they became increasingly frustrated with me and turned quite nasty. I did not allow myself to be intimidated, remained unruffled, and didn't even once feel obliged to say "no comment". A week later I was sent for again to be interviewed this time by senior and experienced officers, DI Stoppani and DCI Miller. They made the mistake of trying to trick me claiming they had evidence involving me in the repair of the local police inspector's private vehicle in our workshop, which I easily refuted as it was untrue. After that they never gained the initiative of the interview but were like zombies with no humanity or understanding of the realities of life in an industrial workplace, all they wanted was arrests. They would have been delighted, and shown no mercy, to learn of any of my history of modest "foreigners" and favours both received and given by myself from and for others.

Many men including some senior engineering management staff, and even the local BT police inspector, were arrested charged and immediately suspended from work until their cases were heard at Merthyr Crown Court some two years later. Because of the delay several staff were able to take voluntary severance before appearing in court but Wally Phillips, the foreman of the civil engineers, was eventually sent to jail for twelve months.

“Our Lady of Lourdes”

During the investigation many things were uncovered, some from several years previous, one case involved the Machine Shop long serving charge hand Stan Charlesworth. In 1975 the marine engineer Derek Huxtable had gone on a pilgrimage to Lourdes in France and returned with two OTT altar candles which he presented to the Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church in Townhill. The church had no holders large enough so Derek asked Stan to design and make two holders, as a “foreigner” which he did with great pride and expertise. Like a true artist he signed each under the base only to be grassed on by someone while under police interrogation. The holders were recovered from the church, where they had been for six years, and the incriminating signatures found. Stan was charged, suspended from work and pleaded guilty in the Magistrate’s court. The case attracted a lot of publicity in the local press, and created much common sense sympathy, but thankfully he was not sacked and returned to work for many more years of good service.

The police had handled the whole investigation in a very shambolic manner. Overall it cost ABP a vast amount of money and soon after the British Transport Police lost the contract for docks security.

Keeping fit

In the 1970's/1980's "Squash" became a national craze with private and municipal clubs opening and several of us in the engineer's department took it up. Strenuous and good exercise it was enjoyable and sometimes very competitive. One of our group Nicky Jones would play each point as if his life depended on the result, he had more testosterone in his little finger than the rest of us had in our whole bodies. It was great fun for a few years but then reports appeared in the press of several middle-aged squash players, just like us, dropping dead in the changing rooms after a game. So that was the end of that.



One of my Squash playing docks colleagues Max Morris was also a very serious runner who had run several international marathons. He would regularly train by running around the dock estate in his lunch hour and over time he attracted others to join him, myself included. The circuit around the Kings and Queens docks was ideal, four miles long, level with little road traffic and could be easily be completed in the half hour dinner break. Later in September 1985 I considered myself fit enough to enter the annual Swansea 10K run from St. Helens to Oystermouth, and back, completing the course in the time of forty-seven minutes.

Some who only know me now, as an old man, have queried my time and sowed a doubt in my mind. I have been unable to confirm by referring to records at County Hall or on the web. Recently I was able to contact Max, who could run 10k in forty-two minutes, and he has confirmed that my time of forty-seven minutes is quite possibly correct.

My Landore nightmare

In 1983 I became involved when the “real” police investigated alleged misdoings at a well-regarded local firm, Shorts Auto Electrical of Landore with whom I had many dealings representing ABP over a period of years. They specialised in auto electrical and diesel work for industrial and commercial customers. Serving the motor trade in that era was very competitive, and like all similar companies, were generous with their Christmas presents and gifts of appreciation to customers. Malicious information was given to the police by a disgruntled member of Shorts staff after his brother had been sacked. This guy was a “Special” constable and was no doubt motivated by his wish to ingratiate himself with his police colleagues and to make trouble for the company as payback on behalf of his brother. After months of planning and secretly copying documents and collecting information he made substantial allegations that would involve several of Shorts staff and customers.

A few days later I became aware that the police were looking for me on the docks but I was busy and able to give them the slip and went home as normal at the end of the day. Unexpectedly that evening two C.I.D. officers came to the flat, and after a searching every room I was taken to Cockett police station for questioning. Even though they were confident that they had good information and incriminating documents as evidence against me again my previous experiences under interrogation held me in good stead and I was able to hold my nerve and respond calmly to all their questions. It was a really dodgy time for me because this time the police were extremely calm and professional. They told me that the allegations were being taken seriously and a really big case was being prepared. The national press and media had been tipped off and were asking to be kept updated. It had already made the front page of the South Wales Evening Post, before anyone outside the firm even knew an investigation was taking place. Eventually, as far as I know, no charges were brought against anyone, although two members of Shorts staff spent an uncomfortable long bank holiday weekend in the cells of Cockett police station. The disgruntled member of staff was never heard of again, but a lot of damage had been done to the reputation of a good local company, but it has recovered as I see it is still trading today.

“I think he’s broken his leg”

In 1969 ABP developed a roll on roll off ferry terminal adjacent the docks in the river Tawe with a tidal link-spa bridge. It was operated by a large force of dedicated ABP stevedores working the terminal for B & I Ferries. The service was discontinued in 1979 but restarted by Swansea Cork Ferries in 1987 by which time there were no stevedores employed at Swansea. It was decided to staff the terminal with some of the remaining engineering staff and three gangs of six were selected each working every third week to cover the 07.00 or 19.00 arrivals and



21.00 sailings whilst continuing with their normal duties each day. On the morning of Tuesday 4th May 1993, I was supervising the unloading of the “Superferry” after its early morning arrival from Cork. After the passengers, cars and

freight had been cleared there were several unaccompanied articulated trailers left to be brought ashore. Although I had two drivers operating two Tugmasters removing trailers from ship to freight yard but as I always liked to be “hands on” I jumped into the spare unit and drove aboard to remove the last trailer.

ABP had three Tugmasters which had been bought second hand, they were very old, and struggled to do the job. The main problem was the lack of air pressure in the system to release the brakes after connecting to a trailer, this requiring prolonged revving of the engine. After much complaining the management agreed that they would be refurbished one at a time at the manufacturer’s premises. The first one was at this time away being upgraded and, in its place, a temporary replacement unit had just arrived, which at first sight looked just as ancient as our own Tugmasters. This was the one that was available to me and I drove it on-board, reversed onto and connected with a trailer. I was careless as I subconsciously assumed that this unit was like our own. To speed the build-up of the air pressure I left the cab to connect the airlines to the trailer as was usual with the engine running and without applying the hand brake.

On attempting to return to the cab, which was very tight to the side of the ship, I found that the brakes had released and as there was an incline on the deck the whole unit was moving forward. I was instantly knocked off the cab step and fell to the deck to be crushed between the Tugmaster and the side of the ship. I found myself under the moving trailer with its bulbous rear wheels approaching. Luckily as even though already severely injured I found myself conscious, face up, feet to the rear and able to appreciate the situation. I reached up to grab hold of the trailer and allowed myself to be dragged by it until it stopped. I could have been killed not only by being run over by the approaching wheels of the 38-ton trailer, but if I had just been able to half enter the cab, by contact with the ships side as it ripped off the cab door. I was recovered from under the trailer by my colleague Bill Tomkins and a member of the ship's crew and soon found myself looking up from the deck surrounded by a circle of faces. I was immediately attended to by ABP electrician Mike James who from his training at previous employment, working in the coal mines, was very competent in First Aid. I remember him checking me over and turning away to inform those standing nearby in a loud voice "I think he has broken his leg" which I learnt later was a first aiders ploy to reassure the patient. I heard this and although in shock found it very comforting as my situation sounded straight forward and not life threatening. Jill the ABP nurse who was quickly summoned took over and I knew I was in good hands. I was taken to Morriston hospital barely conscious, numb with shock, accompanied by Brian Davies whose presence in the ambulance was very reassuring and much appreciated. I was very badly injured with multiple fractures of my legs and pelvis and also internal injuries. I spent the next four months in Morriston Hospital. For the first week I was in an induced coma in "Intensive Care" and then in a single room in K ward. I was in constant pain and besides various medication was connected directly to a morphine drip which I could boost with a hand control. All my broken bones were attended to on the day of the accident but took several weeks to heal and for me to become mobile. My pelvis had been shattered and was repaired internally with plates and screws. Three long screws on either side protruded about two centimetres and a construction, called a "Fixator", of rods and clamps was built like scaffolding onto them to stabilise my pelvis much to the wonder and amusement of my visitors.

I remember the depression, of the endless night hours, and dreamed of becoming mobile enough just to get out of bed go to the toilet and wipe my own arse. I saw the very best and the not so good of hospital care and suffered many indignities. I was discharged in September on crutches in time for a family wedding. I returned a few days later for a major operation to repair my urethra, an urethroplasty, which unfortunately was not successful. At home I was still very immobile and various adaptations were made to the furniture and toilet to make things easier and we were supplied with a wheel chair. Our first venture out, as far as Singleton Park just a short distance away, was a near disaster as even though I had lost a lot of weight Margaret found it very difficult to control the wheel chair going down Glanmor Park Road, which is quite steep. The return up the hill was a very hard push even when assisted by our daughter in law Jayne who we had collected from her home in Bernard Street, so that didn't happen again. Instead the wheel chair was collapsed into the boot of the car and Margaret would drive to the sea front and push me along the promenade. I had two catheters, one through the urethra and a supra pubic directly into the bladder from near my belly button both had to be replaced regularly to avoid infection which were not pleasant procedures. During the next two years there were many more difficulties with the supra pubic catheter and I had as many as twenty operations on my urethra in various hospitals. Eventually, thanks to my ABP private health insurance, I had a second major reconstruction in the not patient friendly Cardiff Royal Infirmary, all of which failed. In August 2015 a third urethroplasty at the BUPA hospital in Cardiff was successful. I was referred to the physiotherapy department at Morriston hospital which unfortunately turned out to be useless and thought swimming might be a good option. By chance we saw an offer in the Western Mail newspaper for a short break in the Copthorne hotel at Windsor which advertised a swimming pool, so we went there just to try out how I would cope getting in and out of the pool. It went well and I signed in to the Swansea Dragon Hotel Health Club and when the national pool in Sketty Lane opened in 2003 I transferred there. It had a 50m pool and more adequate parking. I continued to swim there two or three times a week until December 2018 when the deteriorating strength in my legs made it difficult for me to exit the pool.

Amateur astrologer's

During my initial three months stay in Morriston hospital, I was eventually moved into a ward. For a few weeks in the next bed was John Bebell a docks crane driver with a considerable lively personality. He was in for a hip replacement, and his company certainly raised my spirits.

One day Joanne a young nurse on the ward approached him and asked if she could have a look at his Daily Mirror as she wanted to see what the astrologer Russell Grant had forecast for her. John immediately berated her asking why on earth she wanted to know what he had to say when with himself and me in front of her she had over one hundred years of real-life experience to draw on. To our amazement she sat down and opened up about her problems at home. She was in a relationship and living with a boyfriend buying a bungalow together. But since setting up the home her boyfriend had taken to keeping fit in the Gym and Body Building, was probably taking steroids, and had lost interest in her. He had a bad temper which he took out on her cat and she asked for our advice. Immediately we agreed that she should cut her losses and kick him into touch and return to Mam, with her cat. Sometime after I was discharged John telephoned to ask if I had seen the headline of the Evening Post that evening. Apparently, Joanne had eventually done what we advised and the boyfriend had become enraged blaming her father and brother, followed her to her parents' home and attacked them both with a baseball bat. The newspaper reported that he was charged with serious assault.

Of course, it was "nothing to do with John and me" thank goodness our names were not mentioned, but from then on, I gave up giving advice as an agony aunt as I recognized I was no good at it and decided to leave it to Russell Grant and mind my own business.

Facing my responsibility

I initially considered my enthusiasm and lack of concentration the cause of the accident and felt guilty for the considerable damage that had been caused to the Tugmaster and the ship. Later I thought of the bigger picture, of the inadequate equipment we were given to work with and the pressure and distraction of the overlapping Ferryport duties on the morning arrivals with the responsibilities of the day job and felt that what happened to me could have involved any of the team. I was repeatedly approached in hospital by Bob Collins, the assistant dock manager who had overall responsibility for the Ferryport operation, with Ingrid Davies our personnel officer for a statement. They became very persistent and a bit of a nuisance. On one occasion Andrew arrived and caught them at it and told them to leave. I was completely open and honest as to what had happened but was in no state to be interviewed but the management were happy to conclude the cause of the accident was all my fault.

I was encouraged by work colleagues and my trade union, the TSSA, to make a claim for compensation and they appointed the Bristol solicitors Russell Jones and Walker to act on my behalf. I was very disappointed when a few colleagues turned away and chose not to get involved and to their shame a couple who I knew well made contradictory claims which I felt was to cover their own shortcomings.

Credit to the Dockers and Crane Drivers as their culture was much more fraternal, they were a true band of brothers who always fully backed each other whatever the circumstances. They were well organised, lead by strong trade union shop stewards, and could produce witnesses to any occurrence to confirm that there had been no fault by their unfortunately injured colleague.

Management cop-out - an example

Perhaps it is typical of managers to cover themselves when there's trouble or their short comings are in danger of being exposed. I remember an earlier time when ABP advertised a scheme, they called "Brainwave", which offered big money to anyone who thought up an idea that would produce savings.

When the suction dredger Baglan was operating it frequently had to stop dredging and come into port because its suction pumps had become clogged with the loss of dredging time and with the cost of idle crew and engineers doing repairs. On one occasion this happened three times within a few days when I was the duty foreman and responsible for the repair. I



investigated and found that the drag head on the dredging suction pipe, although partitioned, would still allow stones to be picked up that too big to pass through the pump. I decided what was necessary and had permission from Derek Huxtable, the marine engineer, to organise the remedial work. It proved highly successful and the pumps never clogged up again - ever.

I applied for recognition under the scheme with high hopes of a windfall, but was told that the operational improvement was the result of the dredger now operating in a non-stony area and no payment was made - pathetic.

Consequence

A barrister was engaged by Russell Jones and Walker and Margaret and I met him at his Cardiff chambers. We were told that the case would be heard in Bristol and estimated of the damages awarded for my injuries could be over two hundred thousand pounds, but it depended on how the judge would apportion responsibility and award costs. It was the law at the time that the value of both the medical and financial support I had received would have to be repaid first from any compensation awarded. ABP had paid me full wages for twelve months and half pay for a further year while I was off work. Likewise, the cost of both my NHS care and PPP private health insurance for my hospital treatment added up to a very considerable total. Also, was the uncertainty whether TSSA would be able to recover the court costs. Even if the claim was successful it did not make sense to proceed and the case was dropped.

I did feel aggrieved as I had suffered greatly, very nearly lost my life, and will be physically and emotionally impaired for the rest of my days just for giving of my best while doing my job. But then I am still here nearly thirty years later and every day I am happy to count my blessings.

As a result of my accident big changes were made, new Tugmasters were purchased, the number of men in each team increased, and new disciplined operating procedures implemented.

It was over two years before I was able to return to work and as I was unable to take up my former duties I was given a position in the Planning Office as assistant to Norman Ace the Stores Manager. As there was no longer a Stores he was responsible for processing orders and invoices for both materials and contractor services. When Norman later negotiated a voluntary severance deal for himself I took over his duties. I have to thank the port manager Ray Klink for this as I feel he was sympathetic not only to my condition but how I had been treated. This job involved the use of a computer but I was soon comfortable with it thanks to the tuition and support of Jeff Manning who had sound computer knowledge. I had excellent support and friendship in the office from my colleagues Ivor Lewis, Jeff Manning, Brian Davies, Norman Ace and Terry Duff with their constant banter and good humour. Jeff has continued to give me invaluable help many times since I retired whenever I had computer problems at home.

The Irish trip

Sometime after the accident we took a trip to Ireland sailing on the Swansea Cork Superferry to and as it was a ten-hour overnight trip we booked a cabin. The cabin was small with bunk beds but had a separate wash room and toilet. Margaret took the top bunk as it was about six foot from the floor and there was no way that I could reach it. As is usual when we stay at hotels we always leave the light on in the bathroom and the door ajar so that if we need to get up in the night there is enough light for us to get our bearings. After enjoying an excellent meal and hospitality from the ship's captain and crew, who were well known to me, we returned to our cabin. During the night I lay awake on the lower bunk when suddenly a pair of legs appeared from above and was immediately followed by Margaret, who had forgotten where she was, and landed with great force in a heap on the cabin floor. Although hurt and badly shaken she had not injured her head and no bones were broken. We then continued the journey in one bunk. The thought of what could have happened, of her being rendered unconscious with broken limbs, or a serious head injury at night in the middle of the Irish Sea was a nightmare we were lucky to avoid. From Cork we drove to Waterford and on for a couple of days in Dublin, then over to Galway for one night before returning via Limerick to Cork. After another night in Cork we caught the day time return ferry home.

Death in the dock water

One day, about 1973 I was on B shed wharf, talking to Harold Twells, when a car plunged into the dock opposite near C shed. The car floated silently towards us and I could clearly see the driver. After a few minutes of just sitting there he leaned over to the passenger door and managed to push it ajar, the car immediately sank nose first. That evening the Evening Post carried a brief account in the "Stop Press" and mentioned my name - not making it clear that I was a witness not the driver. I was required to attend the inquest where it was revealed that earlier that day the driver had called at an insurance office to confirm that he was covered by a recently taken out policy on his life. Sadly, over the years there have been several other cases of people coming to the docks and doing this to end their lives in similar fashion

Dock danger

The docks could be a dangerous place and I was not the only one to suffer in the tough environment. During my working years many men were badly injured and there were several fatalities. I remember when I was an apprentice at the



Harbour Road workshops two men were killed nearby on the River Tawe bridge. In separate, but identical, incidents just weeks apart, they were knocked off their bicycles by traffic and came in contact with a steam locomotive and shunt on route to the South dock.

River Tawe bridge – road lanes and railway track

Only shortly before my time on the docks a team of two engineers and an apprentice were killed at Four Quay when they were being hoisted in a tub by one crane to do repairs on the jib of another and they were tipped out at height.

Another time a man operating a hydraulic capstan on No.13 coal hoist, near where I was at the Kings Dock workshop, was killed when the control mechanism malfunctioned and the capstan would not stop revolving.

A docker was also killed in D shed by a Jumbo mobile crane moving cargo.



Jumbo mobile crane loading steel stillages

These cranes had rear wheel steering and were difficult to drive but never the less were delivered by road driven from the manufactures in Lancashire. One such got as far as Jersey Marine when it took the side off a bus resulting in the deaths of some of the bus passengers.

Swansea & Port Talbot Docks History

www.swanseadocks.co.uk

The origins of the Docks History website lie in its predecessor, the Docks Retired Section website created by Ivor Lewis who, after retiring from his post as Electrical Supervisor at the Docks in 1999. He set about organising monthly meetings of retired docks colleagues. There were also visits to various places of



interest such as the "Big Pit" Mining Museum, Blaenavon Iron Works, the St. Fagans National Museum of History, the Royal Welsh Regimental Museum in Brecon, the Millennium Stadium, The Cardiff Bay Barrage and many more. Always followed by lunch and a pint at a local hostelry before

heading for home. Ivor would upload photos and details of these visits and other group activities such as golf, bowls, snooker and ten-pin bowling, to the Docks Retired Section website for group members and other docks colleagues to see. As well as the monthly group outings, Ivor also organised annual Christmas lunches for past and present docks employees, and again photos of these events were uploaded to the Docks Retired Section website. Then in 2001 Ian Rogerson retired from his position as Administration Manager at Swansea & Port Talbot Docks and soon became involved in the group's activities and lunches, as did Jeff Manning who retired from his role as Planning Engineer/Operations Manager later that same year. Around that time Ivor was developing quite an interest in the history of Swansea & Port Talbot Docks, and soon discovered that Ian had been researching and writing articles in that field for many years. He also possessed a collection of books on the subject, plus photographs, maps and various documents relating to both ports. Ivor's view was that information of this type should be made available to the general public, and suggested a selection of docks history items be uploaded onto the existing Retired Docks Section website.

So began many years of work by Ivor, Ian and Jeff ably assisted by friends and colleagues, which resulted in the comprehensive Docks History website we see today. From those early days the history element of the website grew very quickly indeed, and was soon augmented by many items from photographer Gareth Mills' extensive collection of photos, books, brochures, journals etc., courtesy of the Mills family, who kindly agreed to our posting any number of items from Gareth's collection onto our Docks History website. Over the years Ivor and Ian would meet up with many other contributors, most notably Peter Hopkins (ex. Customs & Excise), Ron Tovey (ex. Alexandra Towing), Roger Jones (former proprietor, Cambrian Dry Docks) and local photographers Ken Dickinson, Gavin Williamson and Brian Murphy. Specialist knowledge of docks engineering equipment and appliances was provided by Viv Howells and other members of the Docks Retired Section group. Members of Ivor's original group of colleagues included Electrical Engineer Graham Green, Engineering Supervisors Viv Howells & Brian Davies, dock electrician Peter Lodwig, and the late dock fitter Denis Jones, Administration Manager Ian Rogerson who created much of the website's written content, Planning Engineer/Operations Manager Jeff Manning who provided technical advice & support throughout, and the late Terry Duff, Civil Engineer, Swansea & Port Talbot Docks.

Very big thanks are due to Ivor, Ian and Jeff for their vision and hard work in compiling and maintaining this web site. It is a significant historical record both of reference and general interest, their endeavour has been immense and is greatly valued and appreciated.

Good friends & colleagues

During my years on the dock's I worked with many fine men and formed close friendships with several. After my accident in 1993 many visited me in Morriston hospital, but sadly now are no longer with us, they all touched my life and I pay tribute to them.



George Jones and Gwyn Nicholls were father figures to me when as a boy I first went to work on the docks and I much revered and respected them. George was the chief mechanical foreman and lived in a bungalow at the Prince of Wales dock, he retired in 1972 and followed his family emigrating to Australia. Gwyn was the ports wire rope examiner a great guy, very down to earth and plain spoken, he died at home on a Saturday afternoon watching Wales play rugby on the television.

Basil Smith a machine shop Turner was a Free Mason from Port Talbot and we were very good friends for many years. He made me a model cannon (another fine foreigner) which I still have and cherish. He left the Docks with voluntary severance after becoming involved in the 1981 police investigations.



Phil Davies, was an excellent fitter, he and I were the very best of friends and shared many good times together following the Swans at the Vetch Field and Friday nights at either the Dockers club or the Flying Angel. Phil was a very good footballer and had trials with Cardiff and Newport and played for Haverfordwest in the Welsh League. He developed a very rare kidney disease and deteriorated over a number of years and sadly died in Morriston hospital. A lovely man, the best of friends, and a very very big personal loss to me, never to be replaced.

Harold Twells a fitter who had previously served in the RAF and replaced Jack in the Planning Office. Later he was appointed foreman of the new Plant and Vehicle workshop where he had a very difficult time and was not given the support he deserved from either colleagues or management. He was also the manager of the famous Mumbles Rangers football team.



Gareth Evans (right) and George Copham (left). Gareth was a close friend and an outstanding character. He was a good hard-working fitter and at night a sometime



part time taxi driver. He woke up one morning in 1992 to find his wife had died during the night in bed besides him. In 1996 after attending his daughter's wedding in Essex he was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer and died just three days later, while his daughter was still abroad on her honeymoon.

Another marine engineer killed by asbestos picked up while in the merchant navy and working on our dredgers.

Cyril Myles was a fitter's mate a good friend and colleague, he served in the RAF and was in France at the outbreak of WW2. He witnessed the chaos of the Dunkirk evacuation before being able to make his way back to the U.K. via Normandy. Fifty years later he was honoured by the village in France near to where he had been stationed. He lived into his eighty's then developed a brain tumour, endured many operations, eventually losing his eyesight.



Jack Taylor was a very private man but a dependable colleague, for some time working alongside me in the Planning Office. His sister-in-law was the renowned film actress Rachael Roberts who at one time was married to the even more famous film star Rex Harrison.

The “crazy gang” of hydraulic repairers worked as a team on the lock gate machinery and the hydraulic ring main and accumulators. Ernie Tovey, Cyril Allen, Frank Cotgais. Well known for their exceptional work rate in all weathers.

Not in picture, Jack Charlesworth, John Watchman, and Denis Grant.



Included in picture, Dick Thompson, Arthur Way, Hugh Bevan.

The “1950’s Four Quay gang” Ronnie Tebay, a Burma Star veteran, Bill Berry, Mike Wastell, and Bill Thomas all very colourful characters. They were my introduction to the adult industrial environment and the rugged dockside machinery.

Jack Gear the chargehand fitter at the Kings Dock Coal Hoists, lived in Manselton, was off work with a minor ailment and expected to return to work the following day but died in the night.

Howard Simons was a typical noisy Boilermaker good on the job, full of fun, with plenty to say. After leaving the dock’s, he became a welding instructor.

Danny Phillips, Ronnie Guy and Johnny Owen worked in the machine shop, they came to the docks at a mature age when made redundant at the Mannesman Tube Works, a real asset highly skilled and always willing.

John Bebell was a dock crane driver and very colourful character who for a time was in the next bed to me in Morriston hospital and I thank him for raising my spirits at a very dark time.

Willie Tomkin Jnr. was barely out of his teens when he started as a labourer for civil engineering contractor Thyssen. At first, he had difficulty adjusting to the working environment but turned himself into a highly regarded and valued worker. Died unexpectedly in bed at a very young age.



Alan Knight was the supervisor of "Thyssen" the civil engineering contractor, hard working very friendly and always obliging.

Stan Charlesworth the machine shop chargehand, a top machinist and also an artist, I still have a painting of Mumbles that he did just for me. A bachelor, after he retired he lived alone and woke up one morning feeling unwell. He went up the street to a phone box to call an ambulance to take him to hospital where he sadly died.



Jack Charlesworth, elder brother of Stan, a chargehand Hydraulic Repairer maintaining the ring main and lock machinery. Organised, hardworking, and dedicated. A lovely man always cool, friendly and very helpful.



Norman Jenkins was the Planning Office clerk, a real gentleman. After he retired we heard that he wanted to take up cycling to keep fit, so Basil and I "acquired" one for him and delivered it to his home in Bishopston. Unfortunately, he died suddenly a few days later before he had taken a ride.

Norman Ace was the Stores Manager when it closed and he transferred to work in the Planning Office. He was an ardent Swans supporter, a very quiet man but a demon behind the wheel of his car, when he retired 1996 and I took over his duties in the Planning Office.



Sammy Jackson to name just one of the many Hydraulic Repairers. They were the back bone of the mechanical maintenance department with dedication and commitment to the job.



Reg Stevens was the Stores Manager, he lived in Barry and commuted by train every day, once falling asleep on the way home he missed his station and travelled all the way to Paddington and back to get home.

Alf Logan the Stores Supervisor. He served in the army in WW2 and was captured in France and as a prisoner of war he was taken to Hamburg to clear up the bombing damage. He was able to escape and make his way to Spain to be repatriated. A good man.



Worthy Hall, another Stores colleague in charge of supplies received, quite a character and very friendly, was often teased that he was named after a Great Western Railway locomotive.



Viv Lewis was a fitter but also a first-class drummer who entertained in the local club scene. He loved the ladies and they loved him - both a gift and a curse. He was a heavy smoker and contracted lung cancer which was only diagnosed when he went into hospital for a routine hernia operation. He lost a lot of weight and died two years later.

Miss Bevan (Bess or Babs) was the dock engineer's long serving secretary and a very dedicated company servant. In her younger years she had a serious relationship with Arthur Evans, the engineering department chief clerk. When his wife died she moved in with him in Manselton only for Arthur to die not long after. After her retirement in 1980 she lived alone for over thirty years.



Don Harris was a top electrician always very friendly and helpful to everyone. When his ABP employment ended he transferred to the electrical contractor NEI where there was already an electrician named Don so Don Harris was thereafter known as Don-Don.

Dennis Jones a nice guy and a good fitter, sometimes referred to as Lord Lucan because of his ability to disappear. A founder member of our retired group he died after catching a rare disease from dog faeces.



Trevor Owen, foreman electrician, was caught up in the 1981 police investigations and had to attend court in Merthyr where I was happy to support him. He was found not guilty and able to return to work after an eighteen months suspension. An excellent electrician a good friend and another Swans supporter. In his later years he had serious kidney problems.

Eddie Reilly, the proprietor of a fork truck hire business in New Cut Road, was a very personable Irishman. He owned and flew his own aircraft but was sadly lost over the Irish sea when flying home from Ireland with his wife in bad weather.

Dick Thompson had been a Royal Navy sub-marina and drove the engineers mobile crane. Great fun, always full of humour with a joke to tell.

Russell Brown who after completing his apprenticeship stayed on to work in the Machine Shop. He was always happy and smiling, a willing worker and was with us for many years. He liked everybody and everybody liked him. For a time, we used to play snooker together in the Uplands on a Saturday night.



John Godden came from Capel-Le-Ferne in Kent, an electrician who worked alongside me in setting up the engineers planned maintenance scheme, he lived near bye in Manselton before moving to Killay. He died suddenly in St. Helens Road on his way home after watching a Swans match at the Vetch field.

Fred Loney, another ex. RAF man, his main job was the Profile Cutter in the Blacksmiths workshop but would spend a lot of his time assisting on FLT repairs. A first-class man, his wife was a successful business woman who opened the first boutique in Mumbles. Returning from a Caribbean holiday he was diagnosed with serious chest infection and all of us who had contact with him had to be screened. We were all clear but it picked up something serious on Sid Robins which was quickly and successfully treated.



Gordon Lovell was a very good fitter and a very very laid-back character, a mature bachelor who lived with his very elderly parents in the rural Cockett valley near Cefn Coed. He didn't smoke, drink alcohol or tap water, but brought to work each day a bottle of water from the stream near his home. He rode a motor bike that was so old it did not legally require a speedometer. It was assumed he would live to a very old age but died before retirement.

Brian (Nicky) Jones was a fitter and a very hard character who did not like authority. This resulted in him receiving a record number of red cards as a player for the North End football club.



Ken Hughes was a fitter's mate by day but at night he became a charismatic all-round entertainer. He had a strong stage personality, could sing and tell jokes and was a well-known popular night life compere around the clubs of Swansea.

John Edwards was the Patten Maker based in the Patten Loft in the back yard of Harbour Road Workshops. Later transferred to the Drawing Office at the Harbour Office and then Port Talbot docks. Excellent draughtsman and very good company.

Ivor Williams was a Painter and Decorator and a really lovely man. He had the misfortune to lose his wife suddenly and then suffer an illness that left him confined to a wheel chair. He had a horrendous second marriage.

Walford Phillips (Wally) a real larger than life character, small in stature but big in personality, was the foreman of the civil engineers, and was able to run the department as if it were his own private company. Quite rightly he became the fall guy following the 1981 police investigation and after his involvement in several trials at Merthyr served a twelve months prison sentence.

Cliff Harvey, a foreman fitter both at Swansea and Port Talbot lived for a time in Dock House, facing the sea and Tawe estuary, then moved to Mousehole in Cornwall when he retired.

The Blacksmiths - chargehand Harold Hardy, Sid Greaves both from Yorkshire. Sid retired to family in Scotland and lived to a really old age but became both deaf and blind. Tom Reilly and Percy (Laurel and Hardy lookalikes) it was mainly forge and anvil work until about 1970 when welding became more frequent. They were a formidable workforce.



John Evans, known as John the Baptist because of his deeply held religious beliefs, was very friendly and helpful. A welder in the Blacksmiths workshop ended his time on the dock with voluntary severance when the engineering department was closed. Rarely seen later but was very surprisingly learned to have been divorced.

Brian Davies was an apprentice fitter and turner, just a few years younger than me, on one occasion we went to London together to see the Swans play Leyton Orient. Sometime later he visited the Regency Casino in Christina Street with a few friends and had such a run of good luck that they ended up as the owners then moving it to new premises in Northampton Lane.

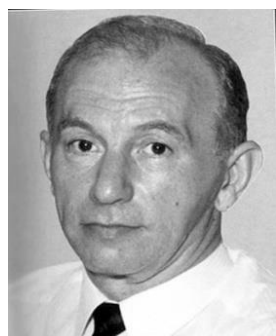
Terry Duff, the Civil Engineer on Swansea Docks, and a founder member of our retired group, had an outgoing personality and was very good company. Sadly, died suddenly in January 2003 on a golf course near his home in Bridgend only days after one of our monthly meetings.





Bill Lewis, the port mechanical engineer, had previously been at sea for several years. A fine man and engineer he was respected by all. He died in 2005, no doubt as a result of his engine-room service in the merchant navy.

Bob Collins was the assistant dock manager, a onetime failed parliamentary candidate, who liked to join us in the evenings to assist our Ferryport duties and then share a pint afterwards in the Flying Angel. He died while on holiday walking alone in the mountains of Italy.



Ray Klink came from Yorkshire, he was the same age as me, an ex. military police and a very professional Port Manager. After I was injured on the Superferry, and treated unfairly, he was very sympathetic and supported me with a job in the Planning Office. His retirement years were blighted by Parkinson's disease.

Keith Langdon was the highly regarded Port Engineer, he previously worked at Cardiff docks. Very professional he oversaw the refurbishment of the east and west piers and new dock roads. Reported to have died in his car when stopped at traffic lights on the Mumbles Road.



Bill King was the most respected and always approachable Dock Manager. He oversaw the transformation of the dock info-structure and major changes to cargo handling.

Retirement

I retired on 31st December 1997, and although I had willingly finished after working on the docks for over forty-four years I greatly missed not only the discipline of the workplace and the comradeship of many fine friends but even of all the machinery I had worked on. I had a very close and personal history with and memories of every fork truck, vehicle, crane, lock gate etc. and it was a couple of years before I was able to comfortably come fully to terms with my retirement.

In May 2003, ten years after my accident on the Superferry, I achieved a long-held ambition when Margaret accompanied me to walk the footpath to the



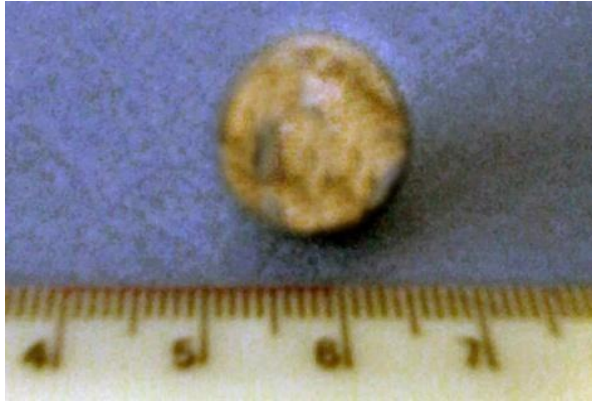
summit of Snowdon. We had prepared ourselves sensibly in both fitness and clothing but found it very testing, taking us three and a half hours to reach the summit.

As we got to the higher levels there was heavy mist and rain but that did not bother me at all as I struggled, with severe cramp in both my legs, just to put one foot in front

of the other. Margaret coped much better but I was really suffering and on reaching the café at the summit was in some distress and could not even sit down for quite a while. I was in so much leg pain our intention of returning on foot would have been dangerous and was out of the question. At that time of year, the train did not run to a timetable but would leave Llanberis when all the seats were taken, and was expected to arrive full. Then it would stay at the summit for a thirty-minute stopover before the same passengers would reload. Some people might choose to take the train up and walk down but as all tickets were returns until the passengers returned to the train it would not be known if there were any spare seats for the return. After a very tense wait we were thankfully able to purchase two tickets. Later, on arrival back at Llanberis station when I left the train I still had such little control of my legs that I unintentionally gave a very good imitation of the John Cleese silly walk on the platform, much to Margaret's and probably other passengers amusement.

Shot at in Swansea City car park

On the afternoon of Tuesday 8th June 2010, I drove Margaret into Swansea and parked in the Christina Street car park. After purchasing a ticket from the machine, we were about to leave when the passenger side front door window



suddenly shattered. Although there were a good number of cars parked in the car park there was only one other visible person, a woman who had also just parked nearby. My immediate thoughts were that it was a freak occurrence and had been caused by expansion of the window due to the very hot weather

and we promptly left the car park and went into the city to complete our business. On our return I cleared the broken glass from the seats and found the true cause, it was a 15mm ball bearing that must have have been fired by a BB gun from the rear of properties in the adjoining Mansel Street on the other side of the car park some distance away.

This could have had very serious consequences and was reported to the police who issued a crime number but took no further action.

TIA in Tenby

On Friday 13th June 2014 walking with Margaret on a sunny morning in Tenby without any warning I had a T.I.A. (Transient Ischemic Attack) or minor stroke, and instantly lost 50% of the sight in my right eye. Even though we did not understand what had happened or appreciate its seriousness we returned at once to our car parked in Penally and I drove back to Swansea and Stephen Evans the optometrists. We were sent straight on to the RACE emergency eye clinic at Singleton hospital where the event was diagnosed and the permanent loss of sight in my right eye confirmed. I was referred on to the stroke clinic at Morriston hospital where I had my carotid arteries scanned where I received the most excellent and reassuring attention and prescribed the appropriate medication to prevent a recurrence, but my vision could not be restored. As strokes go I was lucky as it had only affected one eye and I and was able to lead a near normal life. It could have affected my heart or brain of which I have only one of each at least I have two eyes. Not something I would wish for but appreciate it could have been so much worse.

I am now eighty-five years old and my ailments include one hearing ear, less than one eye, no sense of taste or smell, two hernias and two very dodgy legs with little stamina or stability. I'm monitored at cardiac, stroke, prostrate and eye clinics every few months, thanks to our NHS.

In addition to already taking daily tablets, for reflux acid due to my hiatus hernia, for my prostrate, and statins to control cholesterol. With additional medication prescribed after my T.I.A. to avoid a recurrence I am now taking a total of five tablets a day - 150 per month. Latterly have been added eye drops, for glaucoma, and tablets to control my thyroid, all delivered to my door without charge thanks to the Welsh Assembly, which I greatly appreciate.

Final words

I worked on Swansea Docks for more than forty-four years and reflecting on my time there consider it to have been exciting, sometimes testing, rewarding and a privilege – how lucky I was in 1953, when just a boy, by sheer chance to step into these pages of history.

Old people get slow, dodderly, and can be a nuisance both in company and in public places, then with failing eyesight and poor hearing they become invisible and irreverent. In spite of my physical difficulties as a consequence of the 1993 accident, that have constantly bothered me but not stopped me leading a near normal life, it was quite a shock when recently after being retired for over twenty years that I suddenly realised I really was old. Attending the hospital, a doctor talking to a colleague about me on the telephone referred to me as an eighty-year-old man, bloody hell - that hurt.

Because of my deteriorating eyesight at the end of 2019 I gave up driving and stopped attending the Liberty Stadium to watch the football. I find it very difficult walking, steps are imposable without a handrail, and recently my stability and mobility have worsened. I cannot walk without support and do not venture out of doors alone. My eyesight has continued to deteriorate and I have difficulty reading the newspapers and increasingly am aware that my memory can let me down. Highly immobile I have to use a Zimmer frame to safely move about at home. Out of doors my mobility is very limited and recently (2022) I purchased a mobility scooter. It is only now that I can reflect on and appreciate the extent of the damage also done to my mental state as a result of the trauma of the 1993 accident and compare the way I was before to the time since. Then I held a responsible position, frequently working seven days a week, supervising men of various trades, and every day making decisions to organise work, sometimes under considerable pressure. I dealt directly with contractors and suppliers, including the purchase of replacement vehicles, and took it all in my stride. I also conducted myself with confidence when interrogated by the police both in 1981 and 1983. I used to regularly visit the Vetch Field to support the Swans with a large group of work colleagues and others and had a considerable social life at the Conservative club in Walter Road to play snooker on Thursday evening's and the Dockers club on Friday's where I also had many friends.



I compare myself to how I have been since the 1993 accident starting with the very difficult time I had on holiday in Spain in 1995 and the unwelcome distress I experienced on Snowdon in 2003. I can be extremely, embarrassingly, emotional, when seeing anything sad or excellent. I recognize that I showed a lack of nous when dealing with a double glazing salesman at home a few years ago and also on other similar occasions. I also lacked spirit and determination in expressing my view of my 1993 accident when faced with alternative opinions, which I knew to be false, but allowed to prevail.

But there again perhaps this is normal old age behaviour and I have just evolved into a typical grumpy, sad, old, fart - however a lucky one.