

MEMORIES
of
PLUMSTEAD



recalled by
John & Rose Rourke

Produced by and from the property of Rob Harknett
For the the AJS & Matchless Owners Club also wd-prewar-ajandmatchless e- group

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Y N T. 1900

10. THE SIZE OF OPERATIONS FOR AN INFINITE SET

4. PROBATION - 12 MONTHS

1. Machine number used for production of all

14. TEACHERS WERE GIVEN INFORMATION ABOUT TOP DRESS

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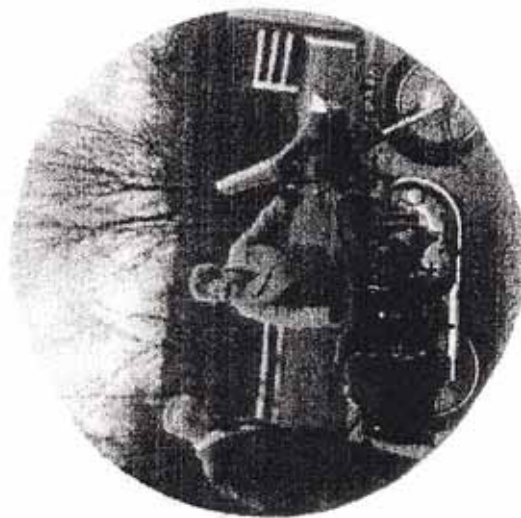
PAGE 45 LINE 26 EXACTLY 22 PER WEEK LESS THAN MY PREDECESSOR

3- FACTORY HANDS' ROYALTY - UNFLATUNATELY FOR THEM NEGOTIATE

DIO / HENR TOLZ 10/20/78

MEMORIES
of
PLUMSTEAD

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John & Rose Rourke



H.A. COLLIER AND SONS LTD. (1) - LATER ASSOCIATED MOTOR-CYCLES LTD.

PRE-1928 - LEARNT FROM HEARSAY FROM PEOPLE WHO WERE THERE, OLD PICTURES IN OFFICES, OLD NEWSPAPERS, ETC. UNFORTUNATELY NOT IN MY POSSESSION

The original Company of H.A. Collier and Sons (Harry Arthur) was founded by the old Mr. H.A. Collier whom I understood was an ex or retired engineer employee from Royal Arsenal Ordnance Factories of Woolwich, South East London, the year about 1885. I believe at the Arsenal he was a very Senior Supervisor Engineer. He lived in a large house in Herbert Road, Plumstead Common, - stabling, coach house, etc. etc. Married, with two sons, Mr. Harry and Mr. Charles (Charlie) heading towards their teens.

The old man started in their joint spare making spare wooden rollers for local housewives old iron mangles. Exactly when I don't know, but Mrs. Collier died and before long Mr. Harry Senior remarried and a third son, Mr. Bertram Collier (Bertie) was born towards or just after turn of the century. More of all 4 later.

When Goodyears brought the first pneumatic tyres and tubes and the old solid tyres had gradually been superseded on Push-Bikes, Mr. Harry got in very early on and forsook mangle rollers for a number of push bikes, hired out to the Bloods of Plumstead for 1 old penny per day. The few became many and before long they, Colliers, had made and fitted an engine into a pedal cycle. Details of this engine and its drive to rear wheel as far as I'm concerned are lost in mists of time. The first hybrid Matchless was Dad's, and Harry Jnr. and Charlie followed onto the Kings/Queens Highway. All this was created from shed/workshop in grounds of Herbert Road. I believe success with these transports came early and easily. Shed became or took over some of stabling/coach houses. I believe with success came and the district saw 3 Colliers and others around the area, there were nearly riots and the Colliers were extremely unpopular. See note on this later.

DEDICATED TO ROB HARKNETT
AND
TO MATCHLESS AND A.J.S. OWNERS EVERYWHERE

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS FOR YOUR PATIENCE,
UNDERSTANDING AND TOLERANCE

WITH ALSO DEEPEST
APOLOGIES FOR ERRORS, OMISSIONS, MUDDLE.

PERHAPS AT TIMES FLIGHTS OF FANCY AND MOST OF ALL
AN OLD UN'S MAYBE SLIGHTLY FAULTY MEMORY.

BUT IT IS AS WE REMEMBER AND BELIEVE TRUTH

JOHN AND ROSE ROURKE
NOVEMBER 1987.

The gang of 3 were joined with up to 4 dozen enthusiasts - prophets of things to come. Later I came and in some cases a friend of the 6 who were Mr. Bert Colver, Mr. A. Heather, Mr. Fred W. I, Mr. A. Brooker, Mr. Larry Strecker and Mr. Bert Bassett. Complaints in Herbert Rd and Mrs. Collier (2) caused and created a small factory in Massey Rd, Woolwich and the nine were in business and Matchless was born. All were engineers, enthusiastic motorcyclists, businessmen, also at this time also men's eyes were following the birds in flight and minds were stirring - not least was Mr. Harry and Mr. Charlie. 2 more names came on pay-roll, Mr. Charles Wensley and Mr. G. Timberlake. Growth of the new industry and the dawn of the poor man's transport had dawned. I understand from Bert Colver later to me Bert? Production was 3/4 Matchless per month. Working week 80/90 hours per week inclusive of Saturday and maybe Sunday. Wages top 22 shillings or today £1.10p although all married men and in some cases up to 4/5 children. According to Bert they lived well and were considering passing rich. More of some of these gentlemen later. Although I don't know much of this period 1900 plus 1914, from Bert Colver although the old man didn't want take off, the 2 boys couldn't wait and flying or rather Collier non flyers appeared on Plumstead Marshes. Dad's dream was the growth of Matchless and by 1909-10 on he also saw like many more that war with Germany was more or less inevitable. Bert Colver, Larry Strecker etc. constructed motorcycles and sidecar in British Army Scarlet and Gold with Gaiting machine guns located in the box. 1910-11-12 saw Mr. Harry Jnr. and Mr. Charley's joint names on the new Island of Man Tourist Trophy Motorcycle Races this is recorded fact. I saw old photos in their offices with their triumphs. Bikes square or round petrol tank hand operated oil pump belt drive (similar to broad belting) 28-30 inch wheels. Riders uniform an ankle length leather coat with double breasted lancer front. 3 inch leather belt. Peaked cap back to front. Knickerbockers, Long turn over top woollen stockings. Lace up brown boots. Leather Gauntlets halfway up the arms. Fur collar. Silk Scarf. White Loops and Loops of Belting. Medicine bottle of oil another petrol spanners and they were ready for starters flag and where no man had been before speeds of about 30 m.p.h. Remember not on track but on public road designed for horse

drawn traffic. Not long after man first flew - the Wright Bros. at Kittyhawk, USA in 1903. The Collier Brothers got off the ground for all of 60 feet and 10/12 feet off the ground, but after some 1/2 dozen with varying success their flying carriers end in a pile of ex orange boxwood, varnished bed linen sheets and fly fishing line. This witnessed by Bert Colver, G. Timberlake and Fred Will. This was on Plumstead and Erith Marshes now today Thamesmead Estate. Engine was Matchless what else 3 tier wings. Plumstead again were shocked by the Colliers disgusting exhibition no shoes socks and worst of all horrors of horrors NO SHIRT OR VEST. Disgusting, the Colliers were no gentlemen and had let the side down.

Here perhaps a description of the 3 men would not come, as I saw them in 1928 Mr. Harry Senior and Mr. Harry Junior - one description will serve for both father and son looked more like brothers iron grey hair - very thick pebble lens spectacles both 6 ft plus tall, thick bushy eyebrows beating Dennis Healey, great big Prince Imperial moustaches, gold Albert watch chains across substantial waistcoats big Hunter watches. Pretty well only difference between father and son were Senior, due to age I guess in 1928 75 to 80, stick not only useful aid for his walking, but only poking people with to emphasise his words, always thought I might get across my bum. Always in frock coat, stiff shirt, collar and cuffs. Pin stripe trousers and to complete ensemble buttoned boots with grey spats. Mr. Harry always high buttoned jacket, dark blue serge suit means stick spats, etc. Mr. Charlie same uniformed in dark grey. Each man ALWAYS carried about their person 36 inch folding steel rule, 1" and 2" micrometers, a piece of super fine emery cloth and a silver pill box sized for engineers marking blue. At time trio tour at others just 2 brothers or separately. Nothing absolutely missed their eyes even the old man's. Procedure when I saw em was procession or would arrive at departments start then halt and wait no matter how long until Department Foreman joined up, then proceed through shop. God help anybody who was working without blueprint and instructions highly visible no drawing growl "Where's your drawing boy?" Boy whether you were 6 or 60. Boy it was. Didn't matter what they were looking at,

if they didn't think it was satisfactory none of them was above taking coat off up shirt sleeves and you'd be shown how they wanted it done mind no difference turning drilling grading press work filing welding brazing it was all one to them. Least you could expect was for your work to be checked very accurately indeed and it was always the wrong un they picked up to check. If it was a finishing operation especially ground, rubbed all one way with superfine emery against grit & grain of grind. It had to be dead on near enough NOT GOOD ENOUGH BOY ITS GOT TO BE RIGHT. Dirty hands bothered them not bit - mitts can be washed. If grinding favourite comment "What do you call this Boy? Grinding? I've got a dog at home who chew it off better than that". I was very often when I was on Grinders tempted to reply "Why the hell don't you bring him on the job then" but silence was the soul of discretion. Mr. Charley 5/6 years Mr. Harry's junior was the one to be really scared. About 6 inches shorter than Dad or Big Brother he always had a genial expression on his face BUT had a really stern serious character allied to a really acid scathing tongue which fooled very many people until they were really bitter hard. In later years when I'd progressed in the Company found out Charley was a Golf Nut. No matter what the trouble was - whisper golf or let him catch you making an imaginary swing the sun shone and his wrath was diminished to practically nil. Very handy this was to know and in later years when he learnt that as a kid in the country I'd caddied on golf course and had seen some of the great players Ben Hogan, Bobby Jones, etc. etc. and that I knock a ball around a bit Mr. Charley and I nearly only nearly became mates. Their joint view of machines in factory was if machine is stopped for any reason whatsoever its a pile of junk and not earning money. In case I'm giving the wrong impression of the Colliers if they weren't loved at least they were respected within the factory. The reason for the emphasis is that in the neighbourhood they were neither loved or respected at all. To understand the aversion one must understand some of the history of Greenwich, Deptford, Woolwich and Plumstead. Deptford going back to before Henry 8 was the birth place of the Royal Navy with at the same time the foundation of the Royal Arsenal Ordnance Establishment to provide the fire power for the wooden walls of Heart of Oak from the

Royal Forests of Greenwich and Blackheath, etc. Woolwich also at same time became testing home for guns of the day and so Royal Regiment of Artillery was born - "The Right of the Line" and Senior Regiment on parade of the whole British Army. At one time up until approx 1934 or so started their service at Woolwich Garrison. Officers at the Royal Academy, now in the Barrels and every Gunner finished his time in the service in the same establishment from whence he started. Greenwich in Henry's daughter Elizabeth made Greenwich Queens House, now National Maritime Museum and her palace on riverside, the Royal Naval College, of today. The area even up to my had many famous associations, Peter the Great of Russia worked in Royal Dockyards at Deptford and Woolwich, Nelson and Lady Hamilton lived for some time first off Deptford High Street. I myself remember very well the Young Prince later King Farouk of Egypt as an officer cadet at the Royal Academy once the equal of Sandhurst Military College. A very stern handsome complete with his scarlet tad boach? He was of familar sight in the area in my day. From all the foregoing it will come no surprise that thus in the whole area employment was in connection with Royalty or Governmental establishments also that on the other side of the River Thames lay the East End - tradermongers, cockneys, Epping Forest and Dick Turpin, etc. etc. or south of the River was the Thames and the preserve of Victorian and Edwardian middle and upper crust. The establishments provided more or less the only source of employment, with subsequent picking and choosing so that when Colliers and Matchless came into being they and their employees, their dirty noisy smelly machines, none was welcome, but by the same token this attitude wasn't all loss for the Colliers (A) It got up their nose and engendered in them and others a determination to succeed, (B) it enabled the Colliers from the start to impose their wages, conditions, etc. etc. on all who came into their orbit. They weren't popular, so to hell with everyone - in the Plumstead Factory we RULE and don't you dare forget it. Even to this very day, witness the article John Pilbeam Keat September 1987 re Somerset Drive and Matchless Drive. Just imagine how much worse was the horse and carriage mob reacted in early 1900's. I don't believe it was exaggeration when I was told

later at times nearly riots conditions, at best open hostility prevailed.

Very sorry about all the guff and there's more to come but swear motorcycles will appear from time to time.

BACK TO PRE 1914 MATCHLESS HISTORY

Old man Collier was one that War 1 with Germany was on its way so the Scarlet & Gold machine outfit became Khaki with twin engine and Vickers water cooled weapon. The engine was the Model H. (HARRY? I don't know but guess). The War Office sided on project and on motorcycles to replace the horses for despatch and message carrying. With this early approval, Colliers and Matchless were well past the start line. Machine Gun Corp's - Royal Signals amongst other early makes them and Matchless supplied the iron work. Model H's I believe a few can still be found in museums and exhibitions. The factory expanded as did the work force up to around 200 mark production was in weekly figures just over double figures 1912, 1913 and 14 when it jumped up the graph to approx 20-25 per 7 days. On top of bikes was shells, bullets and from Colliers flights? With creation of Royal Flying Corps about 1915 also brought bits and pieces to Plumstead. Prosperity had arrived out of which came the most advanced MODEL H of its day - a five speed forward gears and 2 reverse speeds. I don't know how many monsters were made or with commercial success, BUT I ACTUALLY SAW 2 of them working from the factory and the first time in 1928 I saw a motorbike with big box loaded alongside rider going forward quite normally - stop and THEN GO BACKWARDS - ROUND A CORNER, ETC. Great big bow horn handlebars about 2 ft. 6" long by 9" wide footboards, mudguards big and wide as a car. Great big brass head lamp - acetylene. Whacking great barbed/water tank and TOLD YOU THAT THERE WAS MOTORCYCLE BITS HIDDEN WAY auxiliary oil and wick front and back lamps, either from or train or Hanson Cab, pulling power was phenomenal, pull a house down. When I saw it was the drop back box, used to take up to 8 complete packed, ready for road bikes from factory to Woolwich Arsenal Station or

deliver the 8 anywhere required within 50 or so radius of factory. The other H had a big flat back platform alongside and what this could carry is no one's business. Platform was about 20 ft. long and I saw what believe 1½ tons of steel rods aboard. Bundles of 1" diameter x 20' rod, 10 to hundle and 25/30 bundles chained fore and aft. When my mince pies clapped on these two my eyes dropped on the floor and the hair stood on end.

BACK TO GREAT WAR AND AFTERMATH

As stated prosperity had arrived not only bikewise and sub contracts work but also re-equipment of factory. Government expense of course proceeded apace and 1918 and the feverish happier twenties and all's still well - green light and Colliers attitude like Henry Fords philosophy ruled "They can have a Ford Tin Lizzie" in any colour like they like SO LONG AS ITS BLACK. Although this attitude reigned BUT along with many more the climate was changing in many many ways. Unemployment was rising - returning servicemen were bearing the brunt ex high ranking officers door to door salesman selling vacuum cleaners etc. etc. Lloyd Georges "Land fit for Heroes" was in process of becoming a bitter myth. As the ex serviceman who KNEW there was a great big world where men went farther than they could walk or a horse could carry as their parents had, from their birth-place, with unemployment up and up and actual largest in the land what was working man's CHEAP transport so that if there was a job to be had - he could get at it. As bitterness spread and situation worsened manufacturers WOULD NOT come down from cloud nine, but went on to 10 onwards. More power was the panacea. Everyone was so happy the war was over so all was still well? I don't know about any other marques of the day did, but this attitude still persisted at Plumstead to my time 1928 and well beyond as will be seen later. At Plumstead an example the Model X, before its time for solo machines - later gained limited fame as power horse for Morgan Sports. As I say I can't say about the opposition, i.e. B.S.A. Velocetti - new Imperial Rudge, Whitworth, the water cooled Yowling Scott and the Belgian FN German BMWs not leaving out A.J.S., etc. etc. Names from which came the pre-war competition,

to Matchless. Power Power was abroad everywhere, i.e. Brough Superior, Vincent HRD more of both later first personal also HRD much later. Unfortunately Plumstead saw the Matchless as an arm of the whole automotive industry instead of seeing the industry as a separate entity as the poor working man's cheap transport so that instead of economy comfort weather protection predominating prices rose for that time £40 to £60/£70 old money. Petrol consumption - true only 10 old pennies per gallon = 2/- shillings today 10p., but in economic climate of the day as today - a factor I think you suffered enough of my theorizing on to personal history - I know - Oh my Gawd more guff, sorry.

BORN 3rd January 1914 son of Retired (1918) Police Inspector and my mother won't bore with detail here but must touch on it from time to time as my life and AMC and what went before too closely intermingled for me to separate.

(1924) Saw the 3 of us installed as contry publicans at Peltdown in Sussex, just 4 miles off main London to Eastbourne Road.

1925 - 1926 or so

Saw my first contacts and love-hate affair with Matchless-A.M.C. One day in the summer into our pub for 3½ pints of bitter came a young R.A.F. uniform. Hat strap under chin - nothing remarkable except R.A.F. were rarities in Sussex BUT when I 10/11 year old got outside stood a BROUGH SUPERIOR ALPINE. Gleaming nickel plated big tapering patrol engine to me looked as big as the pub. As I gaped and gaped out came RAF blue and a voice "Want a ride on back son". I couldn't speak only nod. "Get on then". He was already sitting on great big leather tractor type saddle engine was already roaring. Half scared to death toe tips just touching ground, bum just clear by 1/4 inch of rock hard solid rubber 6 x 3 inch pillion (I can't recall how Brough was started up must have been kick start it definitely wasn't pushed). A roar and BROUGH and RAF was about 1 mile or 2 up the road. ME flat on my back in mud and muck. RAF realized he'd lost a passenger and

came back and this time Bum on block feet on two metal pegs and a gentler take off and I was in heaven or what was good enough for me. Later from my schoolmaster I learnt of Arabia who had joined the RAF as Aircraftman Shaw. What speed we went I've idea I know I could breathe and it felt like 300 m.p.h. to me. Not much later Colonel Lawrence Shaw on his Brough crashed and he was killed instantly at very high speed. Now its well known Lawrence was one of the early famous gays so whether my ride was because I was a nice little boy - being me I should think its highly unlikely. Next door to the pub was a cottage whee 15/16 year old farmer boy - Harry Thorpe who suddenly startled Sussex with his little B.S.A. forerunner of the Bantam. King Elvis never ruled both young male and FEMALE population like this young cow-hand. I became his shadow, also, 4 miles away on the main road lay Maresfield Camp - like the RA at Woolwich the Depot for the Royal Corp of Signals. Our pub was in bounds and Peltdown Common was a training ground for budding despatch riders. Young Signals Officers under civilian instructors including I suspect although I've no proof - but see later reference to the great trials expert Hugh Viney. It was marvellous how many lifts a boy could get off of soldiers for borrowed from the bar paper packets of 5 Woodbines or Weights cigarettes (two pennies) or even more so a bottle of beer sometimes even a whole day at Maresfield Camp no pillion - straight on back mud guard over rough terrain, through ponds, rivers it was all in. Flat on my back was quite a familiar position didn't matter if I fell off one bike there was always another one close behind and if they all had gone there generally a signaller on horseback or a wagon about or failing all else there was always the two flat feet. My parents never knew where I was, at school, more often not. My Dad was seriously ill for 2/3 years before his death in 1928 with cancer. He was mostly drugged to the limit and my mother with affairly busy pub to run 7 days a week pretty well on her own had enough on her plate so that I was very nearly as free as a bird and two dogs, cats, rabbits, my own 2 ponies. If I asked for money "You know where the till is". Money meant little or nothing to me then all to come an abrupt halt in 1928.

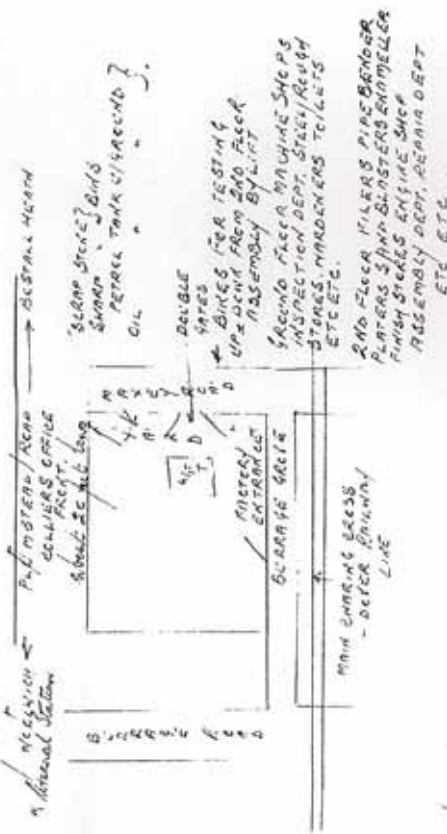
For that 4/5 years till then the Kings sons never had a bitter or happier time than I. Although motorcycle was my dream I had to make do with a push bike. Sturmeys Archer 3 speed Dynamo - off back wheel, etc. etc. pump saddle bag. Brand new £2. 5s. Od. (250p) to take me - when I got there 7 miles away my village (Fletching - Sheffield Park - Blabill Line) school even there motorbikes. My youngish Head Master owned NOW HERE'S ONE NO ONE'S EVER HEARD OF A. ALLDAYS AND UNIONS.

Yes I give my oath this is the right name. The Head Master told me it was one of no more than 25 made with links with William Norris (Lord Nuffield). Before I life school at Xmas 1927, the Head had disposed of his Alldays and Unions bike for the same make 2 seater complete with dicky seat car. Boys at school fought to clean his bike it had a solid brass fuel and oil tank plus hand oilpump and boy could it shine even the sun couldn't compete. His car also had same material for bonnet and 3 inch high radiator steam and screw tap. Sorry for all this but 1928 is close but I think its relevant. Xmas 1927 saw me at home and WORK was on the agenda. My Mum and especially my father should never have let within a 1000 miles of a pub. An over genial happy go luck devil may care Irishman liked his drink gambling my mother knew then what I didn't one way and another £20,000 she'd inherited in 1917 was all gone the pub was in debt as was Dad, who in spite of all his many faults was a good father and whom I worshipped - if I wasn't in trouble, she knew that with him gone there be nothing at all left. His 28 shillings a week Police Inspector's 28 years service would stop the moment he died. Neither policeman or publicans were insurable occupations so no widows pension. Pre-Welfare State.

I inflict the foregoing on you as some explanation of the follow on. After leaving school at the Christmas I helped in the pub as Dad was just a vegetable upstairs in bed. Once a lady and gentleman came in for a drink, this be early spring, of 1928, I served them and as the prospect of being a farmer's boy didn't fill me with joy and they obviously weren't local by the car (Rover) parked outside I asked "Did he know anywhere I could get a job". He asked me if I understood decimal system and fraction and after going into a huddle with my

mother, I was ordered to write in my best joined up writing to H. Collier & Sons Ltd, Plumstead, London S.E.18.

Who the heck H. Collier and his sons were or where Plumstead S.E.18. or what they did I hadn't a clue, but it was in London and they don't have farms up there. I knew that for sure, it was in the East End of London I'd been born and left at 4 years old. What the reply to me essay was I never knew all I knew that on May 24th 1928 at 6.00 a.m. I was on the train on my own, en route to the Big City. Best suit a double breasted jacket and waistcoat, a vivid plum colour, boots and a Henry Tweed cap complete the world conquering ensemble. Now these Colliers and London would learn something. Surely they'd have the flags and bands when I arrived. At Victoria surprise surprise no one took any notice - never mind wait till I reached this Plumstead place wherever it might be. Somehow I found Charing Cross, but didn't know that there was 2 Woolwich Stations, Dockyard and Arsenal. With not a clue which one I wanted, of course, I had to get out at the dockyard - 3 1/4 miles from where I should have been, but eventually on weary legs I arrived at factory entrance - 2 hours standing at attention and eventually a big very smart man interviewed me (Mr. Bert Bassett) later, I learnt Works Manager. At the end I was told "Go home boy and we'll write to your mother". Still I didn't know what H. Colliers made - no one had told me I'd been in Burrage Grove - Massey Road was where the motorbikes were. The factory was a 2 storey break edifice thus



Hope above gives roughest idea of the Matchless ? of the day.

Eventually reaching the pub past 10.00 p.m. tired after another 1 mile hike from Uckfield to Paltdown hungry and more than a little fed up. I didn't want a motorbike only my bed. As you see from Colliers letter on following Tuesday the 27th May saw me once more off to work - suitcase - little un, overcoat weighing a ton, 2 cheese sandwiches about fl for my lodgings 5/- for my aunt for my night's bed and breakfast 2/- for a Lybro Boiler Suit and for wine, fast, women, show horses and song one whole silver joey sixpence. Wednesday, 28th May, 1928 dawned wet windy and real brass monkey weather. 5.00 a.m. saw me en route from my Aunt's to Matchless complete with all my impedimenta. First Sea Voyage across Thames on Woolwich - thank God free tariff otherwise I'd have 2 choices. Walk on water or swim. 9.00 a.m. saw me taken through factory doors into the noisiest dirtiest stinking location. My idea of Hell.

Before entering into this lot I'd signed that I'd read, understood and agreed to obey 6 double foolscap sheets of Rules and Regulations, this took all of 1 minute flat, around my neck on a chain had been hung a red metal disc, stamped with Bourke J. Clock no. 227. This was my toilet disc and must be worn and visible at all times whilst on factory confines. Toilet time 5 minutes morning and afternoon. Pass through turnstile, give disc to a one armed, black bearded old man who recorded time out and return time when you got your disc back. Excess of 10 minutes per day were totalled up weekly and over total of 5 minutes reported to Works Manager and if persistent suspended for 3 days no pay and Doctors Certificate required before you were allowed to restart. More of the "Rules of Workforce" later but above tells you queues at turnstiles or a long journey through factory and oh my you were pushed. How many never made it is unknown. 9.10 p.m. saw me on 4 inch duckboard trying to mill dome end on brake rod foke ends space drawing. All brakes rod operated 9.30 a.m. saw me in first aid room having 3 stitches in a dome end finger - stitches in iodine pad and bandage in place back on my duckboard 10.30 a.m. siren went. Good as I thought work is shorter than a schoolday and started to get off duckboard until roar of "Where

Hell do you think you're off to how Twitty - I think that was in among all the other terms of endearment GET BACK TO WORK I got. The siren that was smoking time if you had fags and matches on you. If not go without because your jacket, etc. etc. had been hauled up into roof at 7.55 a.m. and there they stayed except for emergencies until 12.29 p.m. dinner time. 7.55 a.m. you were supposed to be at your machine with it running to warm up - overalls on etc. ready to start performing before the sound of 8.00 a.m. siren had died away. Timekeeping 7.57 a.m. clock on time. 7.59 a.m. 2 minutes late, 1/4 hour wages stopped. 8.00 a.m., 3 minutes late 1/4 hour loss of wages. Up to 8.05 one hour loss. 8.10 a.m. Days Pay. 8.15 a.m. Go home and next day report with clock card in hand don't clock watch. Works Manager had seen you and given permission to rejoin. If you had to wait all day too bad just another day's wages up the swanee, next day same procedure until you got clock card signed. A.E. Bassett Start Permission Granted. My milling career interrupted before dinner time and I was taken by Millers Foreman - Stan Ward up to factory entrance to meet my new landlord - Exhaust Pipe Bender 1 of 2 such Jack Lockyer who to me looked like a Black and White minstrel as pipes were coated with red rust coloured deposit and filled with a black tar - pitch black mixture supposed to stop wrinkling of bends in the cold bent pipe. I was told to meet Mr. Lockyer outside factory entrance promptly at 12.30 p.m. complete with suitcase overcoat and rest my kit for him to take his home, my new lodgings. After 12.29 p.m. when jacket, etc. etc. reappeared from heaven and washing or cleaning you wanted to do - clock out first and clean up. Not for me. Trotting alongside Jack 2 1/2 miles to Plumstead Common 76 Bramblebury Road, 2 corn beef sandwiches and a mug of tea and jog trot back to factory by 1.25 p.m. Same penalties in force for 1.30 p.m. prompt start and milling on and on until as 14 year old I had to knock off at 5.00 p.m. Dome Ends for me posed problems too fast or heavy feed of cut hand which either a cutter broke or jammed up or Foke End ripped out of fixture vice fairs. As I'd never seen a factory before let alone a milling machine I wonder why by 5.00 p.m. I wasn't a skilled miller, if any of above disasters happen - Setter had to come and reset job - not a popular pastime. He lived with me. At 5.00 p.m. that first day

outside factory entrance no Jack Lockyer he was up on 2nd floor on overtime until 8.00 p.m. I hadn't a clue where I'd been at dinner time only to a house with a brass kerb at front door so at 8.30 p.m. or so I'd been collected and deposited at no. 76 to a dinner cum supper of Irish Stew and Cocos.

I was told for 30/- per week lodging money per week, I could share a bed with old Welshman, I was to be in 9.30 p.m. latest - Taffy after pub session who insisted on sleeping on inside of bed and at midnight or after couldn't care less where his feet landed. Breakfast at 6.30 a.m. Washing under cold tap in kitchen, kettle on coal stove was Jack's shaving and teapot. No towels or soap Sunlight Carbolic supplied - but I'd be lent some for first week at rental of 1/-.

Outside toilet at bottom of garden. No fairies only me. My career was well and truly launched and I didn't think much of it or of motorcycle manufacturing. I'd thought I'd only got to walk in and ride out again to world speed records. Donnington, Brooklands, Pendine Sands and Isle of Man. Parry Thomas, Roulton, Sunbeam, Campbell, Bluebird wouldn't see which way I'd gone and reality I hadn't seen a motorbike nor smelt - better than Brent or Chanel No. 5. Castrol R. At 30 per hour 8 - 12.30 1.30 - 5.00 Monday to Friday, Saturday 8 - 1 p.m. total 45 hours less any stoppages plus compulsory deductions. H.S.A. Hospital Saturday Red Cross. Take home pay = roughly, 10/- old money or 50p per week so was on my way to fame and fortune. So with fl. 10s. 0d. or today £3.12. There wasn't much of no.1 and even less of No. 2. My mother had to send me fl.2s. 0d. every week = fl.00 lodging 2/- for stamps to write home Baths (Public at Woolwich or Plumstead) Bus fares to get to them twice a week - some hopes she had of cleanliness being next to godliness. That 4 pence meant pictures twice a week. About this era work force was including me about 250/300 with an output of approx 60/70 machines a week Model R = 250 cc or 400 cc side valve Silver Arrow the Big X twin and one or two H's and the Monobloc Silver Hawk the top of the Heap of Matchless but just under fl00 and well before its time only 75/100 Silver Hawks were ever built. Dynamo lighting and kickstarters had become standard instead of acitylene or oil and pushing also chain drive was ousting

belt. I had discovered where the bikes were - upstairs on 2nd floor and the yard in Massey Road also the Festers (Gods) Tommy Neill Reg Barber Fred Mill and Ted Friend See 1949 Owner Club's calendar for June 1988. So started my downfall as a milling expert bikes were too dear so I was missing pretty well all the time Reg Barber Fred Mill didn't make boys welcome. Either a clip round the ear or a good swift kick in the pants. Ted Friend ignored you but Tommy Neill was the teps. He'd let you push an inland out yard and if he was on his own or had a liquid lunch give you a ride on back mudguard. His goodness ended at Christmas 1930 time when after celebrating the festive season Tommy rode a 400 cc Silver Arrow for about 3 hours round and round on coping stone edge of 2nd floor roof before getting off and then gracefully passing out with a beaute smile on his handsome face.

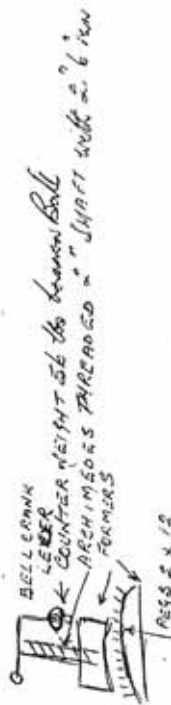
After the crowds and fire brigade had gone and Tom had rejoined the human race, after Colliers had assured themselves the Silver Hawk was undamaged Tom departed if not exactly in a cloud of glory, he went.

Later Squadron Leader Thomas Neill DFC and Bar returned from 8th Army Western Desert Bomber Command to become Chief Mechanic to Tom Farndon Speedway World Champion at New Cross (Old Kent Road) Speedway and remained to me and my wife free entrance to New Cross right up to its death about 1955 and a few months after its closure Tom passed away after a heart attack as he had lived gracefully and bravely. RIP Tom.

After a short spell on gear cutting millers and rear wheel chain sprocket tooth cutting it was decided my milling career was over - I was missing too much so I was transferred as far as possible from the yard and 2nd floor right other end of factory to Hardening and Heat Treatment shop under a hardening genius Charley Danyon, a short barrel of a man. Components for hardening work first, clayed up, that is the portions not requiring hardening. Threads etc. etc. were wrapped in grey fire clay moulded in soft wet clay set aside for drying out then a few hours later packed neatly and carefully on 24 x 12 x 12 fire boxes, 1/2 inch cast iron. These components were laid and packed in a Charcoal-Scintilla mixture when full crankpins bearing big end sleeves etc. etc. did was fire clayed and was ready to be loaded into big gas ovens white hot already as each pot loaded well in excess of 60-70 by time stripped to waist pouring with sweat at temperature in

summer about 110 - 120 degrees roughly 120 pots if you hadn't as I often did passed out to be revived by a bucket of cold water you knew you'd done a days graft. My first resentment was all claying and packing was done by Charlie Danyon his 2nd in command Harry Alcock and 2 10-20 year old outside Hardeners where it was comparatively cold. I didn't appreciate then that the preliminaries were the most important part any mug could and did load in and when told to unload pots and stack up to cool 100-150 red hot pots made quite a hot time pile in the old town, in each pot there was one with the test rod inside, when Charlie Danyon, after anything from 8 to 36 hours cooking said test piece you fish inside test pot with 4/5 ft. long tongs until you find test piece and after testing by Charles by spitting on it, you were told either unload or give her another hour or 1 1/2 hrs. All this Charley estimated by peering through a spinning spy hole cover for no more than 30 seconds, no ?epameters then, and he was hardly ever wrong. Another beauty was oil quenching thick black smoke and stink. Thank God you'll see why in next few lines why I say that, other high lights in Hardeners, but in my short career as a hardener I did get time to graduate up to cool far end of shop where the small electric ovens and the fun job was cyanide hardening - that because if you had any component with an hole in it, for skin hardening, such as the new oil pump shaft and after you'd wire strung 20/30 together and if there was slightest dampness in anyone of string, the most satisfying bang and a shower of molten cyanide drops beat any fireworks display ever made. A 14 year old never gave a thought of the danger of blindness or cyanide burns which always and could only be cured by weeks of mercury oxide ointment I thought it funny to see grown men jump out their skin and taking cover. Damn fool but my come uppance and lesson was very very near. Protective Clothing - What protective clothing? What's that? Amongst my other jobs beside pot loading and unloading another couple of goodies (1) Tank Strips, Hat Contouring and Saddle Tanks were pressed out on a 850 ton press in two halves. Panels then seam welded to each open side with attachment lugs top and base. The tank strip 2 inch wide 1/8" thick by about 2 ft. 6 inches long with 24 - 1/8" c/sunk holes in 2 rows of 12 each. These strips were loaded on iron flat plates 8 per tray 24 trays to keep going once tray loaded it

put in oven about 10/12 trays per load through ever open oven door about 9/12 inches using the 5 ft. tongs. First thing in morning wasn't too bad trays were comparatively cool. While first load was cooking to cherry red you'd just about got the 2nd dozen set up. So pull first tray to door ledge and singly pick up each strip from oven to next door. Bell crank lever hand operated. Press on which was mounted fixture thus



Drill was fit strip on pegs tricky with 5 ft. tongs, then bottom handle below cannon ball counter weight and putting your whole weight behind swing, duck cannon ball whizzing round at speed and when top former fit hot tank strip grab handle to stop rebound and keep banging top former down until strip had cooled down enough to retain correct curvature then remove from bottom former and pegs if strip would come off stand blacken strip on its side one curve inside next. Had to be hot enough to mold but no blisters or burns on metal. The next item on agenda was flattening rear wheel chain sprocket. Formers on press were replaced by big 6" thick steel plates procedure as before but banging flat wanted all your brawn and then some. This was the job that abruptly ended my hardening education. One afternoon with about 100/150 sprockets dark but still B lot in piles along press one of the 18/19 year olds Lofty hit me behind one ear with a catapult fired lump of orange peel with result I forgot to duck whizzing 1/2 cwt cannon ball which smashed into other side of my head and I sprawled on the pile of sprockets everywhere could scramble off em everywhere I touched burnt, trousers the lot. Thank God for Charlie Danyon with one hand he grabbed me by my hair and one heave dunked me in oil tank. Right under. I don't know how long he held me under - I passed out and when I came to there were 6 of em smothering me all over missing nowhere

with mercury oxide ointment. If I didn't smoke from oil quench I most definitely sizzled like well done sausage and stank. Then Charlie dumped blanket covered me on a flat trolley alongside a completely unconscious Lofty. Charlie had laid him out stone cold. I was with one punch even Mike Upson can't match through the factory like an express train galloped Charles with his load - me to First Aid Room, Lofty chucked out still out into gutter clothes and cards on top. In first aid I was stripped naked - not a long job and swathed like an Egyptian mummy in ice cold cotton gauze wrapped back in blankets and loaded into box trolley. Model reversing H and taken not to hospital back to my lodgings. Where luxury - laid on a camp bed. Doctor was called gave me two tablets an injection and that was me spark out for 48 hours solid as this was late in week when I came too was told by my landlord that I needn't go into work on Saturday but to be there on Monday morning bright and early as Mr. Williams Barnes Welfare Officer wanted to see me before I started work now the miracle I hadn't got a mark or blister on me anywhere. Whether it was Charlie Danyon or fate that saved me to be hanged I don't to this day know but I do know I thought it was all down to Charley and quenching oil bath also that I shall never forget nor the supreme lesson I've learnt. Don't muck about it can be dangerous especially at work and above all its no Bxxxx use being sorry after an accident - try and be sorry first before it happens and theres a very good chance one (accident) won't happen at all. After the rest when I arrived at factory office on Monday morning I was informed that before starting work that Daddy Barnes (Bill Barnes) Welfare Officer wanted to see me so into his sanctum I went - Sit down John. Have a cup of coffee John. Now John about your lucky escape and question of your clothing etc. You must realize John if you insist on claiming it will mean you'll be questioned by the Factory Inspector and you might find yourself in trouble for sky larking about at work, and after all John, the management have generously decided that you will not be stopped wages while you been away and perhaps it would be best if no more is said about the matter also it has been agreed perhaps you're not suited for the Hardeners so you'll be working from now on in Inspection Dept under Mr. Timberlake. Thank you sir it doesn't matter a bit about my

clothes. I could wear my one and only other pair - the plums but I was going to be an Inspector - finding fault in other people's work. Yippee. Was I heck - instead I was given a barrow to push taking components all over the factory. OK by me if there was anything to go to Engine or Erecting Shop I was just the man to take it there. It was simply amazing how long and often I had to wait to get in the lift upstairs and down again. Oh yeh. That one worked quite well until Fred Neill was put in charge on Engine Shop and the foreman of erectors Archie Ilsey both whispered in Mr. Timberlake's ear then the lift suddenly became an express non stop. Still all went reasonably well for my barrow and I for a while. Here I transgress again to explain that output was very very seasonable indeed. The Motorcycle Show used to be held in November and with a lot of luck on orders there factory was busy sometimes very much so - the men overtime some departments a night shift then towards late spring early summer quite a fall off and most July, August, September saw short time at times down to a 3 day week - sackings lay offs especially if you were 16 years old or over. These were on the big money? So always every September 5 days holiday - unpaid of course. The first September holiday was for a memorable one in my working life. 2.00 a.m. on the Saturday morning saw me walking the 12/14 miles from Plumstead to Victoria Station. That saved 1½ pence railway fare and I just made newspaper train at 4.30 a.m. Victoria to Uckfield Sussex which was reached about 7.00 a.m. Bus from Uckfield to Peltdown 1 only in each direction didn't go out until about 3 - 4 o'clock in the afternoon so only had another 7 - 8 miles walking to do, but on way got very tired so sat in the ditch by side of road and off I went sound oh, so when my mother who had to go into Uckfield passed on the 10 o'clock there was her lovely son in the ditch looking like a tramp. Fortunately in the town she met one of the local farmers who brought her back where still asleep I lay and on I was loaded with the other sacks of corn.

At the end of that week to my mother it was obvious that my father wouldn't last long so she wrote to Colliers explaining the position and the reply was to the effect that I should stay at home as long as required and that I was sent back I could resume work.

Surprise that they'd have me back. Well eventually within 3 unpaid weeks back on my barrow was I but before starting I was told that there'd be another boy with me. That I was not to speak to him unless he spoke to me, that I was to ask no questions, and there was my new assistant and off we went here, there and everywhere with not a word out of this well dressed polished shoes, school tie'd 18 year old, it didn't take long before I learnt who it was along side. The youngest Mr. Bertie Collier, after about a month without a single word he just wasn't there on morning and I was inside Inspection Department no barrow no more a-roving instead my time was supposed to be spent between 2 jobs (A) finish machined cylinder heads and barrels had to be washed in warm kerosene tank and all oil ways ensured to completely clear of swarf or muck, wires of various shapes and diameters and blowing through them with your mouth then racked up beneath a draught of warm air (B) all camwheel teeth had to lapped into mesh with belt driven master cam, result you smelt, dripped and tasted kerosene and lapping paste without end. No mustard needed on sandwiches. Before passing from Inspection to Drillers in 1929-1930 I have previously mentioned the Big Press, once in my barrow days whilst collecting boxes of washers an operator had hand cut off at the wrist, his hand was press complete and apparently undamaged into the steel die and the operator hadn't even noticed his hand was gone. No pain, no blood the wrist stump was more or less sealed. He just walked away quite normally to first aid room. I never knew how he made out regards time off and compensation. From this happy note we pass on to adventures new. On to the Drilling Bay and the Bender. Memories of its foreman and assistant Reg Smith and Frank Dent. Reg was a bully and a pig to those under him and poor old Frank Hunt was scared stiff of him as most others were but what a change when the elder Colliers toured and when young Mr. Bertie became a temporary driller. Before words on drilling jobs as quickly as possible a few on the great Bonus Earning Scheme. 1 day after job was first done rate fixed from a distance with stop watch timed operation from start to finish with foreman not operator time allowance was fixed. Say time was 5 minutes 24 per hour was day rate 36 per hour 6 were disregarded for calculation the other

6 ranked for bonus payment. One quarter of hourly wage rate in my case = $3\frac{1}{4}$ per hour = bonus

4

In my case riches beyond avarice. First ever bonus 1/40 farthing. All timing done early in morning when one was fresh. Payment of wages 1 week held in hand so first 10 days no lolly as week ran Wednesday to Tuesday. Bonus payable 3 weeks in arrears. Payment of wages Friday night 5.00 p.m. Clock off. *Clock off first*. Line up at table in clock number according order each table 100 numbers collect clock card showing all details of money then line up in another part of factory at another table again in order hand over clock card, collect wages and bonus envelopes sign for them open and check contents. No errors or mistakes entertained after leaving table then you were free to go maybe 6 or 7 o'clock. If when you got your clock card you thought there was any errors on it, line up at card table and report it to wages clerk before passing on to pay table. All errors corrected were payable 3 weeks in arrears in separate envelope overpayment of halfpenny rounded up to a penny and deducted next Friday under payment of halfpenny not reportable and not accepted. Colliers inventors of one way streets.

1929 - 1933 Drilling. Some Lovely Jobs

Brake Shoes and Linings were in two halves previously spot welded together and were placed in Dummy Brake Drum with two shoes and two linings in position. Cover Plate in front wing nut fastening and then you drill 2 rows of rivet holes 1/8 diameter 16 per shoe, then took each lining out separately and countersank for rivet head were lining and shoe together and rewired each pair of handed shoes and stacked neatly not thrown in steel ammunition boxes for rivetting. dry drilling so drill had to release very frequently to prevent flutes clogging. Linings stank and brass content was like rosy thorns in your fingers clogged drill meant broken drills that meant big big trouble before you got another broken drill allowance 6 months drill sharpening 1 weekly bonus. Nil. Nobody every got 1 penny. Dodge was linings were in cupboards came in sacks which were tipped in various

cupboards uncounted or checked so more linings you could break into pieces and get rid of down toilets, drains, etc. both inside and outside factory quicker cupboard was bare and if you were lucky or unlucky you got off of broken shoes. Maybe on to model A crankpin drill and countersink 3 oil holes



These fitted into top and bottom mating crankpin shape clamped in position and first diagonal hole drilled, drill was only just by 1/8" long to break through as long drill kept constantly relieved and cooled with brushfuls of water oil solvent mix from can, 2nd diagonal and 3rd through race path holes were the killers as at only 3/6? hole to break into in centre of Race Path Drill Handle had to be used twist finger and thumb with lighter than feather touch. Broken Drill Scrap Crankpin. Tricky steel KE805 gave stringy flakes of cut which clogged very easily indeed. Another none money spinner. Luckily only 200 batch runs so you kept your eyes peeled for them and hoped you'd miss them. Possibly you'd passed to the Molten Spindle (12) Nut Tapping Machines. Each Spindle different speed thread, etc. Fed with nuts hand fed down chutes each nut pushed under tap by mechanical finger each nut when tapped ran up tap spindle and spindle raised by chain operated foot pedal tap released from spindle with key and gently lowered into next hole. All taps, pressure oil jets, so with feeding both feet and hands fully occupied all day long about 5-6 pence a week could be earnt. Plum job was countersinking nuts you could take it fairly easy and make up two shillings extra a week, but this was mostly reserved for good boys or Mr. Bertie for the 3 months he was with us. About 31-32 Jigs fixtures started to arrive from Wolverhampton some complete A.J.S. loads of components, stationery,

even toilet paper, all marked A.J. Stevens & Co. Old man Collier had died prior to this and it explained why Plumstead had been on short time for such a long time. Many years later I learnt that the two elder Colliers Bros. had most certainly put their money where their mouth was, both mortgaged their houses, homes and in middle of worldwide slump, record unemployment they raised not only £32,000 AJS purchase price but embarked on building floors 3 and 4 to replace worn out machine tools in a number of cases. Although this bravery did bring rewards I don't feel they were as great as they might have because a number of factors. Plumstead was not the home of innovation, copying, duplicating, as near as patents would allow. Yes. The aloofness of top management from shop floor. Poor communication etc. etc.

Not until the 2nd world war and after did for an all too brief time did all this to an extent change as you will see as years and I advance - maybe at snail's pace.

1933-1935

After the impetus of A.J. diminished and world situation worsened short time descend heavily on Matchless and A.J.S. 3 days a week. Work force drastically reduced on Drillers was just 6 inclusive of 2 foremen until one day there was nowt for me so off to Capstans I was sent there to meet another old genius Arthur Brooker a gentle kindly old boy who could make a capstan lathe sing Home Sweet Home and Bluebells of Scotland at one and same time. Could run his fingers along a turned shaft and say wants another thou off and when you put gauge or micrometer on it he was always right. It did. This was a happy shop under Arthur he brought best out of everyone like upstairs in Filing Shop which was all Welshmen who sang all day long with some grand voices, and who won numerous festival prizes with their choir like them the Capstans sang but never, especially when I joined in did we win any prizes. You couldn't tell me if we were singing and happy or in pain. Some said there was no difference.

Some ops recalled none caused much hassle Part and Valve Stems, Form Grooves Drill Front & Rear Wheel Spindles, trespassing Head Ball Race Grooves you could earn some bonus on most jobs except one breakcase Dowel Pins, 30 ft. lengths of 1/8 mild steel Part & one end, remove parting pip. So cost price = steel - my wages at 17/2, 18, 19 5½ - 7 - 9 pence per hour machine 30 years old belt drive from overhead shaft. Output per day required on time allowed 2500 per 8 hours no further treatment cost over spares counter to customer 12 pence each. My only vivid memory of Capstan time 1 week after I joined also Bertie came to, but with good old Arthur Brooker made no odds to him, Mr. Bertie was another pair of hands, but I always found was a better Capstan operator than I was if I could do 20 per hour, he do 21-22. By end of 1935 again war smell was in the air and unknown to the floor Colliers were in on ground floor. By 1936 lots of Ministry officials started to appear from time to time. Also at start of 1936 on Grinders was installed a brand new Churchill centre-less grinder and Lord knows why I was selected to operate it so on to Centreless Grinder I went and under supervision of Churchill machine demonstrator I started learning grinding. The Centreless was a very interesting tool. Grinding Wheels all on their own balanced mountings varied from 1 inch to 12 inches - 3 ft. 6 inches in dia. revolved at revs = 120 m.p.h. on a 2 ft. dia. Film a Matic bearings control wheel 12 inches wide 18" dia. rubber bonded wheels revolving approx. 100 R. per minute. Centreless Grinding Work passed completely through between wheels resting on steelite tipped angled blade. In feeding was hand operated feed single pieces whole fixture and control wheel machine base moved forward to grinding wheel this form and taper grinding could be accomplished by careful machine setting which machine operator had learn and do coolant was supplied from 500 gallon tank of specially formulated coolant. Grinding by its precision and variation fascinated me, and a new life gave me real job pride and satisfaction and although I says it meself that shouldn't over next 18-19 years I became a fair grinder. Like most morse key operators, grinders can recognize a lot of their own work years after like the operator each has particular accent of touch feel and finish. Again while still a new grinder again appeared Mr. Bertie 1936 holiday week

early August saw me at Sunshine Holiday Camp on Hayling Island where I met my future wife, Rose. More of her 18 years service later. End of 36 through 37, 38 war came increasingly more certain. Work picked up bikes sold, sub contract work started appear, by 38-39 Irving Parachute Hooks Quick release Rolls Royce Merlin engine parts. Browning machine gun aircraft interrupter fire control bodies and gears nearly all grinding work so the centreless and I was busy even to overtime and training another operator while I did 18 months continuous night shift. Before I continue personal details must quickly intrude.

August 6th 1936 met Rose. August 6th 1937 engaged. August 6th 1938 Marriage. August 6th 1939 our son born.

As 1939 and war came great changes started Mr. Bertie moved up to top offices and became more of a power. We start competition trials, scrambles, works, entries. Mr. Bertie competed with fair success even privateers on Matchless and A.J.S. appeared more on minor venues, started to see our names in press, Territorials Reservists were called up. Women appeared as replacements more more. My wages had reached one whole shilling per hour = 5p. Air raid shelters were dug and prepared. War was declared in September 1939 and ensued the phoney war and a number servicemen came back to factory. In this period I volunteered for Royal Navy putting occupation as factory worker. Result I was in trouble for not disclosing I was in reserved occupation as skilled grinder on vital war work. Prior to September 1939 parts and some complete bikes were stockpiled and the first week of war saw lorries of the services emptied the factory of everything. All finishes became matt black - khaki fire service Grey/green or hull battleship grey out went all shine. Girder forks standard. Only two models 350 cc - 500 cc no every trade for a while until Dunkirk we were part of the silly season Dunkirk put at end of hat and it became more and more serious.

Before war actually was declared a few German-Jewish refugees were given jobs, one on grinders Fritz Applier who had married the

daughter of the at the time Mayor of Southend and the week end of the war declaration, Fritz and his wife were with family at Southend and when on wireless Fritz heard "All aliens to report forthwith to nearest police station" Fritz told me later the desk sergeant "Have you ever been for a ride in a Black Maria. No Sir. Well son now's your chance. Get in and poor old Fritz was on his way to interment on Isle of Man. After 18 months he was released and volunteered for Pioneer Corps later for Bomb Disposal and was blown to bits 2 weeks after war in Europe ended of all places Berlin - his birthplace. He was a good bloke and a good grinder. University Professor That's war. Battle of Britain came and went and the blitz on London got going. Matchless had its own Home Guard Battalion. Roads all round factory were sealed off with 30 ft. high barbed wire fences and gates manned round the clock by armed live ammo Home Guards. Entry passes with photo and all details had to be shown in and out. Abandon hope all ye who enter here. Production went on day and night virtually non stop. First used to shut down for air raids but everyone got fed up running in and out of shelters so to hell with work on. On nights left the Manager in charge Charlie Tassell once shift was running - he spent the night riding round and round a 12 mile area finding out where the muck had fallen and if you or yours were involved Charley had you on the back of his bike and if it was humanly possible to get you home - no matter what the obstacles Charley very rarely failed in his mission. Considering this was in total darkness - he was married man himself with 2 youngsters to us another ensuing hero. War tales could go on for ever, but Plumstead factory earned reputation of being luckiest and safest place in London - 2 incendiary bomb through window of 3rd floor into middle of 2500 tyres and tubes. A land mine on its parachute gently and softly came to rest on saddle of G3 on centre stand against outside parachute strands caught on projecting angle iron and held mine in position against wall and saddle so springs weren't even depressed and thinnest tissue paper wouldn't go twist mine and saddle and eventually bomb disposal squad found it was a mine sabotaged in the making in Germany. A dud as were at various times 4 x 500 pounders that dropped in Massey Road Yard steel shavings and swarf bins under which lay petrol, lubricating and cutting oil storage

tanks all duds as was the VI Buzy Bomb whose engine cut out lower down River Thames and Buzy Bomb ended up making a perfect 3 point landing on factory roof. With so many duds we thought perhaps Jerry was trying to tell us someth. 1944. We Rose and I lost our 4 year son David, nothing to do war and as Rose became liable to Direction of Labour. She could have sent to work anywhere in UK or even made to join any Women's Services. I was told by Mr. Bassett that if we liked she could be given a job at factory perhaps under your supervision on grinders. My reaction was no B fear I'd got enough my plate on grinders as Deputy Foreman in charge of 30/40 mixed workers male-female. Running on 2 shifts night and day 12 hours each 7 days a week. Switchover every 2 weeks including me, so Rose was taken on as Brimell Hardeners. Testing machine in View Room. She also switch shifts as I did so we worked and went home together. We made a strict rule once we got to work she was one employee and I was another and she was her own and it was no good any in entire factory saying "Your Mrs.". I just didn't want to know even at the end of her 18 years with A.M.C. very very few people knew we were husband and wife. Rose became an instant success in factory. Very very popular very good worker was afraid of no one and call a spade a spade. On her first day one of chaps didn't notice her near and let rip a right bucketful of bad language and when he turned round instead of crying carrying on complaining to management as many females did when he said "Sorry Rose" she just replied "That's OK Bill. I sooner hear that than be deaf". As you can imagine this soon spread round and did her no harm at all. If I sound proud of her I was very much so and still am - a right good un.

Wars end eventually and like rest of world went mad and the euphoria died a little. Mr. Harry Collier Junior retired and died not long after. Mr. Charlie became a complete golf fanatic pretty well to exclusion of all else so Mr. Bertie carried more more responsibility and the more he took the more we're Works entries, Racing Dept Development etc. etc. came into being from Big Names Professionals came into the game. War had replaced pretty well all old machine tools except odd museum pieces. A completely new

spirit grew throughout the factory - we became a team and a family. Far too much took place under Mr. Bertie's leadership for me to detail here. Between 1945 and 1948 or 9 we reached peaks higher than Everest, Sunbeam, James, Francis Barnett, Norton joined Matchless and A.J.S. under the A.M.C. umbrella which at one time was featured in Sydney Herald, Australia as the biggest factory in the world devoted exclusively to manufacture of motorcycles. Although under him we reached over 3,000 employees still Colliers A.M.C. still weren't much more popular in UK and more particularly not in South East London. Big names Jock West from BMW, Matt Wright from Norton, Les Graham, Rod Coleman from New Zealand, John Surtees Senior and the more famous John Junior all became familiars. Paid holiday, paid sick leave, pension funds, profit sharing, 6 monthly bonus, you name under Bertie it came. No longer the silent Bertie now spoke to all and sundry and when he said it could be and must done. Done it was. Christmas became really festive with works party free to all and their 2 guests, Christmas decorations both inside and outside factory. Depts competed for Bertie's £25 prize for best and most imaginative festoon shop. We grinders were firm favourites with illuminated flashing Star of David 16 feet point to point and mock up television 12 ft. screen which connected to telephone each time phone rang T.V. lit up in colour "The Happy Grinders Wish a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to All". Competition was judged by panel from the "Motorcycle", "Daily Express" and "Times". No AMC personnel at all but the £25 went to our next door department "The Millers" with a huge structure of weather house windmill sails with flashing fairy lights on each vane, complete with male and female dolls in fancy dress popping in and out in time with revolving vanes and the coup du grace a 5 ft dia. water driven mill wheel enamelled in all AMC partners colours and badges again with fairy lights and old mill stream driving mill wheels. In common with all departments decorated Christmas trees under which in giant tubs any gifts could be placed all for each year for either a local hospital or childrens homes always plus Mr. Bertie's personal cheque for £500. A separate employees childrens party in the new year. Each child at end of a 4 hour party got fruit, sweets or toy and a fl note. Under Mr. Bert came Plumstead Porcupine, the 980 CR. the YR Boys'

Racer whic with Rod Colman aboard 2 junior TTs in the Island. If it was good for A.M.C. Bertie was for it. Of course it wasn't all sweetness and light. There are black spots but while Bert was there they were all bearable. The innovations flooded Jam Pot Rear Springing, Front Springing Forks, etc. etc. we were making real motorbikes. Hugh Viney had joined us and was winning Scottish 6 day trial after trial in between being in charge of Erecting Shop. Hugh was really a shy character basically, but once you got close to him as Rose and I eventually he was very nice person but unfortunately his erecting team largely failed to recognise his sterling qualities. To him preparing both himself and his machine for a major trial was to watch a master at work. Out went his pipe gymnasium work outs, diets, weight checks for him. The bike once off were a bolt moved fractions at a time. Engine tuned stripped retuned again and again. One of his favourite tests was with engine just ticking over plonk plonk. Viney standing upright on pedals down five flights of stairs about 40/50 concrete steps in each, on each landing a complete 360° circle and stand perfectly still on machine for full minute down next flight until ground floor under a special arch just high enough for man and machine to duck under another circle then complete reprogress up to roof again all against stop watch, a dab on deck, curses and no joy until dabs were well down into single figures. A Monster Boy now Rose was asked to leave inspection to take on all documentation relevant to engine and erecting shop in Hugh Viney's office. Plumstead Porcupine first pro-type hand and foot room made, special castings and materials. I understood first off cost in excess of 1/2 million. It was for its day most powerful machine in the world even World records were a bit more than just dreams but always marred by handling and power available never achieved perfect and complete harmony even in his turn the great Joe Craig of Nortons couldn't achieve it at Plumstead to the degree he succeeded with Norton Featherbeds at Bracebridge Street, 1949-50. Senior T.T. saw our first heartache. Rose and I joined thousands of others 500/600 from Plumstead on "Motorcycles" £5 each trip to Island for Senior T.T. Leave Euston 7.00 p.m. Thursday evening reach Douglas at 5.00 a.m. Friday morning. Breakfast at Douglas Holiday Camp, walk or run to vantage point, start

Hilberry Governors Bridge where ever, Rose and I at Hilberry saw Les Graham goes past 1 1/2 minutes in lead at lap record race record in the bag on way to Porcupines, Les's and our first post war win for us and Bertie. A mad rush across fields gates stone walls to reach finishing and chequered flag to find on Leader Board Les's light out and to hear over speakers Les Graham stopped at Governors and off and pushing in, believed to be due to running out of fuel. What stopped the lynching of Jimmy Barrett, Ginger Matthews, Bert Junior and rest of pit crew. We'll never ever know. We cried among all the others eventually there was poor Les on trembling legs, ashen pale face, crossed line and dropped unconscious with porcupine on top of him. Filter cap push open and fuel poured out over him. Stripped of best English leather like sopping wet dish clothes, into the rubbish bin and when his boots were up ended out poured nearly a quart of his sweat. The whole crowd went dead silent. It was an utterly wordless 500 made their way back to the 5.00 p.m. boat from Douglas to Lime St, Liverpool and the night long journey back to Euston to a pouring wet foggy cold dawn, it matched our mood, we carried our own dead (drunk) with us. Pubs open all day on the Island, duty free on boat, some 2 even 3 empty whiskey bottles. Oh death where is thy sting. Subsequent post mortem disaster due to broken oil pump worn internal chain of Reynolds is still is a dirty word. I don't think poor Les ever fully recovered and later was killed on another Porcupine at in Italy. Far far worse disaster was in store - the death knell of A.M.C. Mr. Bertie lived at Sevenoaks Kent and one morning riding a BMW up to Plumstead followed by his brother-in-law Jack Killaher astern on an AJS Bertie pushed into a tight left hand bend and no one ever knew what went wrong but when JK got round there was BMW in flames and worse much worse was Bertie dead with shattered skull and broken neck among all the rest of the carnage. Plumstead never recovered from this disaster. Explanations to follow. No words can describe inside factory when news broke. Atom Bomb couldn't have more damage, am convinced and not alone in firm belief but for this today there'd still be an AMC and viable British motorcycle industry.

Back to personal memories, Front Springer Fork Tubes first of all ground on centres on ordiner grinder required 8 carefully adjusted steadies 1/4 thou cut at end of each traverse across 3 inch wide grinding wheel. Molybdenum content in tube acted with friction of grinding which just like a very powerful magnet really nearly insoluble problem so that more than scrap than good. Building of new works canteen at back of grinding bay had started and I discovered one day 6 great big deep 6 ft square holes about 50 feet deep these were for concrete reinforcing columns due to support 3 floor canteen and that concrete pouring was scheduled to start early next morning. Brain wave or storm - ideal for decent burial of 300/400 scrap tubes, saving mine and 1/2 dozen operators neck so late that evening went scrap. But that night it poured so with holes filled with water unknown to us cement pouring suspended till holes emptied. About a week later out I went to see new columns instead awaiting me was a welcoming committee of Works Manager, Bassett, Site Foreman, etc. etc. plus the first building labourers the Cooper Twins, Henry and his elder brother who had gone to if pumps had got rid of all water, they had to reveal rusty mass of scrap fork tubes, not knowing what they were so naturally they'd call Site Foreman who had the lot fished out stacked in one pile, a big un, it was a toss up odds in my favour going to bottom in front of cement most upset bloke was Henry Cooper. "Blimey mate if I had known I'd have kept my cake hole shut". When I see him on box often wonder if he recalls when he was champion of Bellingham Boys Boxing Club and I wasn't President of his fan club. Rose also found troubles, crates shipped to Los Angeles were opened up inside nearly two bikes for price of one. One side. All Matchless badges lining the lot the other side all A.J.S. How heck about 10 people had handled it and no one noticed, at least no one let on if they had. Don't blame them. Would you? Bit of free publicity in national press but funny side only seen by lower orders. Big White Chief of Company now was don't know quite how, a long yard of pump water was now Boss in 1928 when I'd joined was a 15 year old office clerk. His rise was due to 2 marriages both to older wealthy women who both didn't last too long plus poking his long nose into everywhere and making sure any faults went to the top. This

individual I don't believe had a real friend anywhere lots of spies and toadys. Had very condescending sneering manner, to all openly boasted he did know or want to a motorbike from a banana and in my hearing, as long as he got a new Rolls Royce each year with A.M.C. number plate on it he didn't much care what happened. With his accession to power the happy days were over for good. Stopped were all Christmas festivities, profit share bonus, pension scheme, restructured so that contributions went up and ultimate pensions came down qualifying age went up from 63 under Bertie's scheme to after 65th birthday. He stop it so I got back 1/2 of what I'd paid in. I firmly believe if he could have done so he'd have revoked my senior staff status if he could have found a good enough excuse. This had been achieved under Mr. Bertie and try as he could he couldn't break myself and others until we had had enough of him and his cronies in 1960-61-62. but I anticipate events too much. Back to grinders, fork tubes, etc. etc. After the Henry Cooper scare I along with others were at wits end how to grind fork tubes successfully when one sleepless night it struck me if we could centreless through feed grind gudgeon pins which after all were hardened tubes why not fork tubes. After a lot of consultation agreed we should give it a go and after lots of blood, toil, tears, sweat and false starts found with 2 operators one at front loading in and one at back taking weight of tube as it came through and ensuring it didn't drop and damage ends or super finish we'd found success. Fork tubes no sweat. Output trebled scrap virtually nil. Under Mr. Bertie's suggestions for improvements reward scheme I estimate there would have been at least £1,000 to share out among grinders. Under toffee nose no scheme done in firm's time with firms machines and materials so just part of your job. Ah well I'd been spared a cement overcoat. Memory is queer thing to this day grind bore of camwheels I can still remember quite nearly Gauge Plug Gauge Number A5557 and bore size 1 1/4" + 1/4 thou. Time allowed 5 1/2 minutes each. From my Capstan days and dear old brother Brooker I'd learnt one maxim at least. Don't ask any man to do a job on a machine you can't do yourself. Any new job do it and get right first yourself before you ask anyone else to do and apply same criteria to any new equipment or machine. Master it first at least then if those you're in charge of don't like you they'll give

you some respect if only a little. Wise old bird Arthur I can honestly swear these principles I never ever in my working life deviated from. My apologies for bringing in again the Plumstead Porcupine. Every single double pannier tank was beaten out by hand by another old craftsman Bert Colver and to see one single sheet of plate flow under his hammers and dollys like water and then solidify into a great twin fuel tank for the Porcupines so named after the quill like spines on engine fanning was to watch the Michelangelo of panel beaters at work never ever a wrinkle or bruise or dent to be seen or felt just rounded aero dynamic flowing lines. Bootiful really bootiful. Bert. Back to Grinding to many and much to detail first 2 Specials. The first 600 Sports Twin OHV Model 30. The grinding of very first 3 bearing crankshafts and the first solid aluminium rear springing jam pots first jam pots, following Arthur Brookers how first 50 pair were mine all mine on centreless grinder ole machine number 854 same as shipyard no of old Queen Mary liner, an Ali is a bit of a swine to grind because clogging effect on grinding wheel pores with tearing of finish. Mixture of kerosene and cutting oil helps a great deal but chief element is gentleness and great care. Getting dia wasn't too big a problem but when it came to the radii that was kettle of fish as these had to be form on grinding wheel by hand held diamond dressing stick carborundum and yards plus of emergy cloth. All radiuses were such a problem as the blending perfectly in with dia is what gives strengthening to component an aluminium and cast iron are two of worst materials to get radii completely clatter free, nearly as bad as not honing cylinder bore. Eventually the 100 were completed and passed inspection checks and on to Erecting Shop, a few days later it was discovered 20 pairs had gone walk about. No amount of searching or questioning gave any clue to mystery. I was no. 1 suspect because of my previous record with fork tubes. A fortnight all was revealed by an advert. in the old "Green Un". Motorcycles. It read "Have your rear frame converted to luxury springing. Inexpensive. One of the cheerful chappies on erectors had gone into business on his own. He got rid and fitted the 10 pairs before any customers had got their hand on the factory models. B-F, although full marks for enterprise but no £40 per week for him. As

this our Jam Pots were in competition for big police contracts with the Triumph Spring Hub Special Twin who gained the lion's share of these contracts. I think I'm right in saying all we got was 6 machines for Cornish Constabulary and what happen when the nick nicks got them on duty every blasted one developed crankcase oil leaks. On cost ground Jam Pots were then diamond turned and then 1957 - 1958 Rear Springing became a bought out item. Another big problem on early 600 - 300. Were the Cam followers wearing out sometimes after only 100 inches. No one could find out why hardening of faces was up the creek - Charley Danyon had long since returned here for a time was the stellite force Cam Followers but materials and extra operations costs made Cam Followers more expensive than gold. Then it was discovered that a reduction of charcoal in hardening pots was perfect care, also with introduction of Twins and Jam Pots came the 3 Bowring crankshaft for them. Quite a lump of cast steel. Previously installed on Grinding bay had been a new plunge but Churchill Crankshaft Grinder all ready to run but Alfred Herberts or Churchills could not send in machine tool demonstrator for another 3/4 weeks? What to do. Could we do anything about it as show was only 3 days away and the new twins were to be the highlight on AMC stand. Engines would have no innards in em and 8 finished sectionalized crankshafts tarted up with chrome, red and blue enamel, they would be displayed on black velvet revolving mountings under individual spot lights. I can't remember what a crankshaft weighs on its own but with a 16 lb centre bearing clamped in position to counterbalance throw approx 14 inch clearance of two eccentric end bearings but it was quite a lump to heave in and out between machine centres. Luckily tail stock centre was oil power foot operated opening and closing once centre point was in position you had make certain it was fully home and locked in position. Bearing Journals were approx 1" dia. by 1" wide limit on dia was 1/10 thou up or down each must be pourable within itself and all 3 barrelled oversail. This was achieved by grinding test bar and then hoping the bearings came off spot on as well. You'll see reason for above detail later. Grinding wheel was 4 ft 6 inches in dia and being only 1" wide it didn't take much of a knock to break and at 120 plus m.p.h. a chunk off grinding wheel at that speed could and did take a great lump out

of a concrete pillar 500 feet away and if hit you were dead or damned nearly so there was only one place to flat on the floor as small as possible - again later detail one poor devil wasn't on the deck - Harry Coverly. But first again following Brooker's law the machine 8 finished crankshafts in 3 days or less was my baby. 2 days of 22-20 hours cut me to 30 hours eventually flat on floor with a long long hook I pulled the plunge cut lever on in an empty shop on my own. Thank Heavens because Bang Crash Wallop grinding wheel had plunge in at speed before slowing down clear of whole set up. That's when lump of concrete came out pillar. Smashed grinding wheel broken machine centres and score was scrap crankshafts lay 10 gallons of cold sweat. Another 8 hours including going over grinder with fine tooth comb and finding depth of plunge limited and adjusting screw quite by accident and giving experimental turns backwards and forwards all appeared trial number no. 2. I've omitted to include each bearing had two 1/8 radius and in same operation each face of bearing must be ground perfectly flat down to 22 hours before show opening and 8 crankshafts to go plus 6 more grinding operations to follow after 3 rearing grinds. Time was pressing somewhat not helped by arrangements for sectionalizing, chroming, enamelling would done on each one and that each completed shaft would be rushed to show for motorcycles to stand fitters. No one could help as there only one crankshaft grinder nor could any other machine be used - none were big enough first crankshaft took just 6 hours to complete plus 8 hours at least different operations setting time then (God) in his top office that chrome etc. etc. would not be done until all 8 had ground complete. If he had said that in first place at least 5 hours setting could have been saved still 7 to go and 8 hours only to go. To cut saga as short as possible the last crankshaft reached stand and mounted in position just 30 minutes before public poured into show. Comment and reward top dog. "I hope that's not best production we're ever going to see from you Rourke". Talk about make you spit, as I was Senior Staff no overtime payable. I was a monthly servant (sarf), but carnation in buttonhole God was photographed hand resting on crankshaft and floodlight didn't fused and I had to pay at entrance to go up and have a look. No trade passes available on shop floor. When

machine demonstrator did turn up "Oh they left off Graduated Plunge Limiter Deal and Pointer". Gradually crankshaft production increased poor Harry Coverly on a hot summers day lost his temper and failed to ensure test piece was correct in centres with them home and locked in position and Limiter was properly set. Result Harry lost half his skull and forehead and for rest of his life had a silver plated skull and it wasn't only the fact that the Brook Hospital Neuro Surgical Unit was only 20 minutes away from factory saved Harry's life. Result was a mutiny of the rest of grinders. They refused to operate crankshaft grinder. Too B dangerous so for 6 weeks I as Senior Staff was ordered to become Production Crankshaft Grinder Operator churning out 100 plus a week. I think I've already mentioned I'd be elevated to staff by Mr. Bertie, and not long after this event we acquired our first bike a pre war 350 rigid which as result of an accident had laid in back in open for 2½ years, what a mess but £25 and we could be mobile we hoped. When I'd got Harry to bring it home and hoped for a free rebuild and refurbish in the factory. But the shutters came down with a great big bang on that idea. One of the new boys on nightshift had done just that with his heap and the B.F. came back on days and one dinner time with almost a brand new bike outside factory when an elderly couple of gentlemen were standing looking it over and said to him. "Is this your motorcycle son? Isn't it in good condition". Chummy launched into song, chapter and verse on what and how he'd got it all done. The two gentlemen - Charley Collier and Donald Heather so we were back to square one with elbow grease, gunk and brushing enamel. Of course it was very strange what I found in my pockets from time to time. Eventually the old rigid was running after a fashion and I learnt to ride and with test passed first crack for our first holiday only touring Devon and Cornwall would suffice so with about £25 between us 4.00 a.m. on Saturday morning we were away with our sights on Dartmouth first stop but best laid plans of mice and men go awry and how. Just short of Salisbury "Bang" and back tyre and tube in shreds. A broken beer bottle base doesn't do a lot of good. Getting back half to pieces and wheel out on old rigid was not an easy job for like me a novice about 2-3 hours struggle followed by a 4 mile hike to purchase new tyre and tube, leaving Rose sunbathing and 4

miles back. To arrive to discover her head in ditch being as sick as a dog - sunstroke. "Oh I wish I was dead". With a bike in bits and a sick wife so did I. With Rose deciding to live at least for a while set to on reassembly with fear of inner tube trapping but that part was a piece of cake, thanks to a Michelin X went on like a bit of silk but when it came to chain link? Where oh where's my little link gone. With wire hair pin as substitute we were ready for onward trek - only to kick kick until I was sick too some considerable time later discovered a stuck open exhaust valve so after a roadside de-coke engine turning over into Salisbury and a new link maybe bike touring wasn't too bad. Eventually into bed and breakfast cafe at Yeovil, riding into car park bang again. 2" French nail in new rear tyre and tube. Late evening and with help from other bikers, the Matchless roadway again and so to bed Sunday morning loaded up and Rose mounted was advised by others to blow in rear valve. Off we go. Hadn't got out of car park. Another Bang. Another nail 3" this time. Getting bigger and better every time. Joys of motorcycling. Where. We weren't finished yet. Dartmouth and 2/3 days on road, etc. etc. etc. and then spate of oiled up plugs, clutch slip, no umph at all. Guts ache stuff. Money smaller and smaller. What to do. Suddenly brainwave. One of the bods from repair shop had got job in dealers at Newton Abbott so over the river to Newton. 4 dealers, last choice right one and a warm welcome from Ray Learton but check of old Matchless - verdict poor old lady KAPUT. Ray asks "Why don't you have a new or nearly so 1953 A.J.S. 500 c.c. Springer? After I came down from ceiling and calmed down was taken to see the beauty in showroom, 200 miles on clock - repossession H.P. not 6 months old. Pristine. Ray saw Governor after doing some faking of G3 and dealer offered £45 exchange allowance balance at 5 shillings per week including free set of panniers, tank top box, rear carrier and full tank of juice. If insurance switched overnight. The dream dual seat and all would be ours at 8.00 a.m. next morning. Waiting on doorstep and couldn't wait to get into office and sign up, pen in hand and governor with his guide in hand said Just a sec. If I cut exchange allowance down. Oh Oh and if you can afford another 2/6 per week I can let you have £30 cash now. We could hardly put pen to paper. On to new mount with 6

brand new fivers in our pocket. What man and woman could ask for more. However, had come to earth. Falmouth, Exmoor 300/400 miles. Piece of cake. Then Lands End here we come. When Rose asked about petrol - Don't worry this one's got a gallon in reserve - only got to switch tap on, all true, except, dopey had got taps mixed up and was already into reserve. 12/14 miles from Lands End and first and last petrol filling station in England and in boiling hot day we're off and pushing empty. All of a sudden a car stopped and back came Eric Ritson Sales Rep at Plumstead. We recognised him but he didn't us and when he learnt trouble, no juice, poor Eric launched into his bull act. He was Sales Director of A.M.C. Couldn't pass an A.J.S. in trouble. Would 2 gallons be OK old boy. Payment wouldn't hear of it old boy. All part of A.M.C. service old boy. Our engine purring like well fed cat. Cheerio old boy and off he went. Some considerable time later when at Plumstead Eric and we had become good friends, when I asked him if he had a couple of free spare gallons of petrol to spare Eric and the magic password - Road to Lands End - Eric called us all the names he could think of for listening to his rabbiting without letting that we known who he really was at the time although by now he was truly Sales Director. He enjoyed the joke as much as we and he recounted the story many a time from then on. Back to Grinding and the Works Managers retirement. Goodbye Bert Bassett. The big man appointed 3 joint works managers - 3 shop foremen, the 3 M's, Moore, Mason and Martin. Good foreman all but they'd be the first to agree not Works Managers especially under the new order, before my finish Moore committed suicide, Mason a nervous breakdown and then a fatal heart attack at work. Martin did last until AMC's end but finished a white haired old man with worry. First rumour factory was moving to Sheerness but when Rose and I went down to see proposed ground found it under 8 feet of flood water and locals informed us that every light tide ground was always under water to greater or lesser degree and never really ever dried out to more than mud flats, yet great big signed banner proclaimed "Site of new AMC factory". Incredible isn't it. Next rumour we were going in turn to Northern Ireland and then Kidderminster as you know in reality we didn't in our time go anywhere only down the drain. Our big kick in the teeth and lovely 500 stolen

out of factory car park - misery abounded. I applied under another of Mr. Bertie's innovations Senior Staff Bike scheme whereby you got a brand new machine of your choice at cost price. You paid nothing at all on collection but must be paid for after 12 months and before 18 was up, not before the 12 months up. I was lucky my first staff 350 was bought by a young chap just round the corner from us, no shortage of cash in this family. Father high rank in Arsenal. My buyer was architect and his younger brother wanted a bike as well so another staff crate made him happy. All staff bikes before sale went back in factory for refurbishing.

All over tyre to tyre so buyers were happy. A virtually new bike now in, new speedo no gremlins and at least £60-£70 cheaper than they could get anywhere else. Me and my mate were happy 12 months riding more or less free. We used to take boys in factory they chose what George and I rode for 12 months and what they'd have then. To say I was astounded that my application for this privilege being granted is the understatement of all time. Perhaps the Supreme Being and his book keeper gang had some good in em after although I never found .. again. With ascendancy to Staff Bike I was asked if I'd leave grinders and join Progress Staff Office as Senior Progress Chaser so off came my boiler suit and on with tie, pencil and paper. As you'll well know no one loves a progress man factory always you want too much. Management you've never asked enough. I hadn't been progressing very long when summoned to Holy of Hollies. "Rourke it has been reported to me that you are still eating in works canteen and not in Senior Staff Restaurant. You will cease this practice forthwith". Me - will I hell, I'll see you damned first. Those blokes are my friends and if I know anything they taught me. I may be Mr. Rourke not have to clock in and out but to myself I am Clock No. 227 and always will be and to me those shop floor lads are better men than you can every be now Sir if you want to dismiss me do so, but after the shops know why I'm going "Get out Get out" Who was I to disobey an order. I went still into works eaterie - grub was cheaper and more plentiful than upstairs but from then on I was a marked man. Next episode I was asked to go up James Factory at Great Birmingham where

previously supreme had moved from Plumstead complete some 50 automatic machines. I was to act as Manager for Production Progress and Inspection. I was to go up on Monday morning - come back Thursday evening and spend Friday in parent factory reporting and consulting. When I got to James I found Automatics with only 2 ex Plumstead operators as foreman and his assistant. No patrol inspections. View Room staff 3 sun burnt gentleman, Azil Mahmoud and Chalkie. The first two only very very broken English spoken, not read at all, Chalkie promoted from broom pushing Inspection Dept no micrometers no clock gauges, gap gauges. No one knew how to set and if they had, no slips to set them to. The list is endless and too long for here. No wonder automatic work reaching Plumstead from Birmingham was 75% at least scrap. First move was to ask for interview with Mr. Charles Summerton, Managing Director of James. This he granted immediately. When we met it was as if Mr. Bertie had come back to life. We took to each other straight away although Managing Director of James he had absolutely no power or say and was denied access to Automatics in any way whatsoever. He ran James and Autos was Plumsteads and that was it. Charlie's way at James was every Friday a full meeting of all Departmental Heads one assistant to each and with them anyone whom a complaint was levelled against. Charlie presided and in turn everyone said their piece, decisions were reached and that was that and Charles wouldn't discuss only the direct emergency until the following Friday. You had your say and will have another one chance next Friday. Until then, you've got a job to do and so have I. Good Day. That was Charlie Summerton. No Rolls for him at least I never saw one but always I saw him on James and one was on call for me from day one. Although at Plumstead I could only make very slow headway. With Mr. Summerton's help and suggestion over a period we jointly prepared a report for submission to the whole AMC Board. That he'd see, that our report, jointly signed, my name first, was circulated to all Board members and if needed to shareholders at Annual General Meeting. Who came first in my estimation I'll never know Mr. Bertie Collier or Mr. Charley Summerton. First reaction to Report to me was from D. Heather who informed me he was calling an emergency Board Meeting, that I should present Report in person and that Mr. Summerton as his

(Heather's) personal guest would be co-opted as extra special Board member and my supporter. Now we were getting somewhere, but again it's an understatement to say I was scared witless and without Mr. Summerton's and Mr. Heather's encouragement and support I think I'd have cut and run, but as usual the event wasn't so bad as I feared except with some very black looks from my mate the Aytollah of the day, but in spite of him money and equipment was authorized subject only to Mr. Summerton's approval. As he'd already given me that we were off and running so gradually scrap after some 18 months of my toing and froing to Birmingham became the exception instead of the normal. By this time 1959/60 I'd had more than enough of living out of a bag and so had Rose only having a 3 day husband so eventually I was empowered to advertise in Birmingham Post for replacement Chief Inspector and Departmental Manager. All applications to Mr. Summerton initially - some 250 and when he'd made a short list of 6 the lot he passed over to me for me to select my own 6 runners independent of his. When at the end of our selection we compared there was only 1 difference. After he invited me to jointly interview not six but seven applicants the staff appointment was made of a Fred Milia, brother of Birmingham City Football Club back. At the end of his month's trial I handed over a fully equipped Inspection Department staffed with 3 patrol viewers and 8 inspectors in View Room. The weekend before I left Birmingham at Mr. Summerton's expense and invitation my wife Rose was invited up to Birmingham on the Saturday evening Mr. Charles gave us a dinner party at his own home, had us picked up at our hotel by hire car and returned thence. All auto staff new and old all also invited. No black tie affair. He tried to hard to persuade us to move up to Birmingham permanently but neither of us fancied leaving Plumstead so rightly or wrongly we bade him and Birmingham farewell. Sequel within 18 months the whole Automatic Dept was back in Plumstead. The complete exercise in utter futility. On my return and resumption of Progressing the Great Being began to what now I can only describe as a mental illness or maybe it was the male menopause. (1) I found installed in Progress office one of his well known spies, 3 years previously a Senior Staff from Start bookmakers clerk well known to one and all by his trade mark a flowing coloured

silk handkerchief always flowing from both jacket sleeves. Many suspected like his master they as a pair escaped from Burton's window. Golden Rule. If anything it should be kept under wraps don't chief spy see or hear. (2) The all highest had upset Jock West who departed back to whence he'd come B.M.W. (3) Hugh Viney who in pre-AMC days had been motorcycle riding instructor and who in Hugh's army days had under him and had recognised genius in bloom, young Geoff Duke whom when Geoff Duke came out the service Viney brought him down to Plumstead as a potential works racer only for Duke to be told "Go away son and get some experience and perhaps then we may consider you for a test ride." Mr. Viney was told "Don't bring any more of your army kids down here again so not only was Geoff Duke lost to AMC Racing Department, but Mike Hailwood as well. Their feats are legendary and need no poor words. (3) Bill Doran, Rod Coleman, both had their contracts terminated - too expensive. (4) When one of first Honda's came to Plumstead via Comerfords of Acton for assessment although some £35 cheaper than our cheapest bare model and Honda had as standard electric starting, traffic indicators, wind visor streamline, front and rear carrier all round spring suspension, white wall tyres foot and heel rocker gear change head locking slightly better top speed and petrol consumption what was 2 stooges verdict. Too flashy, never will sell too cheap to be any good, built on a bowl rice a day. Will never take on and be a serious competitor. Words fail me and then the real genius moves. We would make scooters, Lambrettas and Vestas had flooded the post war world before we even thought of designing. In this Department Design had come and gone in despair, Joe Craig to Vincent HRD, Matt Wright and some half dozen others in conjunction with scooters we'd make James, Francis Barnet, two strokes and 175 and 250 cc machines plus our own gear boxes for the whole range Sunbeam, James Francis Barnet would all be sold or closed down. Norton would also be made at Plumstead, Bracebridge Street would also go, Racing Dept would shut down only a limited number of Boys racer the 7R would be made each year and when quota had been built that was it for another 12 months, no matter what or who wanted to buy one. Retooling and re-equipment would be handed over in its entirety to Alfred Herbert Ltd of Coventry Machine tool agents, no one in Plumstead shop

floor was consulted in any way whatsoever, several million pounds expenditure was involved and wasted completely. Prime example a 2nd John Lund reciprocating table, weight nearly 1000 tons building time and installation 12/13 months. The old John Lund Surface Grinder would take 36 Con Rods per load for grinding both faces for location, the new one biggest loading of same Con Rods, 15 per load. Table twice the size as was whole surface grinder, every component tried was same result new machine 1/2 capacity of old - consequence new £36,000 machine never ever used for production all it was ever used for was bright surfacing billets of steel before marking out before tool making in tool room. If it was used 3 hours per month that was its absolute maximum use until eventually along with many many more very expensive machines and fixtures at AMC demise at Plumstead were sold for scrap. Herberts were given idea from AMC top we'd be like Fords of Dagenham, machine was designed and set up for one operation and one only for whole of its working life, at Fords on line production i.e. lathe-miller-grinder to finished component if any break in line replacement machine already set up came in one way on overhead gantry while faulty machine went out in opposite direction by same method, stoppage time 2/3 nights. We at Plumstead were trying to be swans on a lake instead of clucks on a small pond. Another grave error two presses was relocated next door to grinders while at other end came a much enlarged hardener so with heavy vibration one end and extreme heat the other end accurate grinding became virtually impossible so much so that in a short time machines in grinding started to move on their bases every which way some to such a degree of inches several I saw myself were just rocking on points as shown and grinders, scrap level became better or worse than Autos ever knew how in their workday and then miracles of miracles it was realized all sub soil under the factory was just white silver sand and had once been bed of flames. Henry Cooper, Canteen and Fork tubes could have told them why 50 ft piles had been driven but no one wanted to listen, or if they heard paid no heed. Flotation of 5/- shilling shares had brought in not only money but Rolls Royces AMC1 to AMC12. All this down in the main down to 2 men who had never ever cocked a leg over a saddle or soiled their lily white hands or silk hankies on a machine. I can

only think that the poor Colliers must still spinning like tops in their graves to this day. I could go on and on and on but what's the use I'm only making you sick as it all made me and still does Rose and I as I pen this. At end of 1960 Hugh Viney had had enough as many others, 1961 the list included Mr. D. Heather and my time was nigh. February saw ex-booky Lanky Don installed in Board Room. His only superior, the Supremo. March 1961 my own boss Basil Austin ended 30 years service, sick of it all, and one day I found on my desk a jointly signed memo A.E.S. and D.G.G. which read this "You are forthwith ordered and directed to assume duties and responsibilities of Progress and Production Manager. Up to holy temples, empty, both gentlemen were abroad for 3 months. Visits to other Directors all I got was its their decision. Salary? Only they could decide but rest assured matter will be reviewed on their return. It was, April, May, June, July and August nearly over and not a word then on September, 1961, I found both in the Senior Headmaster's Office. Oh yes Rourke the matter has unfortunately been overlooked but you will be informed of figure in next few days. When I asked has my efforts over the past 6 months been quite satisfactory. Oh yes quite - very much so. Your confirmation of appointment permanently" and your increase in salary will be made public by Friday next. Fool that I was away I went back to work. That Thursday another memo appeared on my desk, no envelope just open sheet of paper. Certainly confirmation of permanency. Your salary will from end of current month be increased by £104.0.0. per annum, not even a signature this time. As I knew this £2 per week was exactly £28 less than my predecessor had been getting and about £100 per week less than the booky was getting this was the final insult confirmed by them. "That's it Rourke. There's no more and matter is closed". Thus ended 32 years 9 months continuous service. There was no more I could take, so on Friday evening at 4.30 p.m. I walked out Plumstead Factory for very last time and never entered it again. One final dig on the Friday afternoon in midst of my farewell party in came to the Progress Office the unholy twosome - not to say Goodbye and Good Luck but to sneer, "See you are still associating with Factory Hands Rourke". Unfortunately for them did I hear this insult but in dirty overalls Charley Hood from Polishers and Harry Moore my

senior setter from my grinding days. Out of the office went the two luckily through the double doors not through glass panelling both with some what more than their dignity and feathers ruffled and some disarray. Although out of AMC through Rose's next year when even she could take no more and ended 18 years 1944 to 1962, not only from her but numerous mates I heard of the decline and disappearance of A.M.C. from Plumstead. Shares - dealing on Stock Exchange suspended. You couldn't give them away, work force going down and down as anyone who knew anything about his or her job, this applied not only in factory but in offices and staff as well as they departed - up and up went scrap rate with more disastrous consequences. Charles Summerton was made Managing Director and Chairman by a desperate Board and his valiant efforts staved off bankruptcy and enabled A.M.C. what was left to move to Andover with some slight dignity and credibility left - not a lot but even he couldn't raise the Titanic in spite of his getting contracts for making Moby toy horses, etc. etc. The two left the scene and a Homeric battle to Mr. Summerton and eventual failure and AMC was no more.

The tragedies were death of Mr. Bertie Collier, the A.M.C. attempt of far too much far too late, the substitution of Engineers Craftsman, Motorcyclists and Businessmen by snobs, bookkeepers, whizz kids and paper for work. The forgetting of the reason of our very existence to make damn good motorbikes - get em to the customer give him what he wanted when he wanted it and a price he could afford. Of not heading Geoff Duke's report and warning to the motorcycle manufacturers and Traders Federation after his 2 years in Japan as Consultant to Honda and Suzuki. He recently repeated on "Top Gear" on BBC2 in September 1987 the contempt and ignorance his warning and report was treated with by the Industry. Before finally leaving Plumstead in 1978 Rose and I among others shed not a few tears to see the factory at Plumstead become first completely derelict, then knocked down and become a huge hole in the ground and today just another housing estate with not one feature recognisable or remembered of a great and in spite of everything a wonderfully happy place wherein lay buried a total of over 50 years of our two lives.

But really finally that happiness has been revived for at least by a chance meeting with Rob Harknett and the other members of Matchless and A.J.S. Owners Club, for his and their great kindness and interest from two old codgers our sincerest thanks and deep gratitude to you Rob in particular and to all you other gentlemen wherever your front wheels may go.

God bless you all.

John and Rose Rourke
November 17th, 1987



TELEPHONE - WOOLWICH 1010 (4 LINES)



TELEGRAMS & CABLES - MATCHLESS WOOLWICH

H. Collier & Sons Ltd.
Manufacturers of
Matchless Motorcycles

FACTORY -
BURRAGE GROVE, PLUMSTEAD,
MAST POND WHARF, WOOLWICH



**Plumstead Road
Plumstead
London**

Our Ref. WB/DR...
Your Ref.



*All Communications
to be Addressed to
the Firm, & not to
Individuals.*

Nearest Station -
WOOLWICH ARSENAL
(SOUTHERN RAILWAY)

May 25th 1928.

Mrs. H.J. Rourke,
Star Inn,
Feltdown Common,
Nr. Uckfield.

Dear Madam,

With reference to the visit of your son yesterday, I am pleased to inform you that we are prepared to give him employment, and that his rate of wages will be 3d per hour, plus bonus when on production work. We would like you to clearly understand however, that we cannot accept him as an apprentice as we do not accept apprentices, but every opportunity will be given him to make headway and progress will be entirely in his own hands, advancement being given on merit. He can start work on Wednesday morning the 30th inst at 8 a.m.

With regard to lodgings we have arranged through our Welfare Department to introduce him to a married employee who is prepared to give him lodgings. This will at any rate give him immediate accommodation and if it is not to his liking it will allow him time to make other arrangements. We would also mention that our Welfare Supervisor will keep an eye on him and will also help and advise him in any difficulties that may arise.

Yours faithfully,
H. COLLIER & SONS LTD.,

H. J. Rourke

Works Superintendent.

THE ORIGINAL BOOK, HANDWRITTEN, WAS DIFFICULT TO READ. I MADE MISTAKES OR COULD NOT MAKE OUT WORDS, USE CORRECTIONS TO FILL THE GAPS ETC. IN THE TEXT. Rob

PAGE 2 LINE 2
 1. THAT SPARE TIME
 2. RECOGNIZED ABOUT CUT THE
 3. FEW OCCASIONS THE MAN
 4. AND HAD NO OTHER AND CHANGED WORKING
 5. DELETE FOLLOWED ONE KINGS/WORKING HIGHWAY
 6. WHEN BEING RECOMMEND AND
 7. 1. BELIEVE WHEN SUCCESS COME
 8. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

PAGE 3 LINE 1
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 2. LATER, COME TO KNOW AND IN SOME CASES BECAME
 3. FRIENDLY WITH SOME OF THE WHO WERE
 4. MR. BERT COOPER, MR. A. HENRY, AND A FEW OTHERS
 5. CAUSED AND HAD BY WAS TALKING AS HE WAS, DIRT ETC
 6. NAME
 7. DELETE WORD FOLLOWING ALSO AT THE TIME WHEN I
 8. 16. ALTHOUGH ALL WERE MARKED
 9. 17. IN SOME CASES WITH A
 10. 18. WERE CONSIDERED
 11. 19. BETWEEN 300 TO 400
 12. 20. FROM GREAT COVER, IT WOULD
 13. 21. HATING
 14. 22. IN THE CHURCH WITH THE T. J. HENRY, T. J. HENRY, T. J. HENRY
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PAGE 10 LINE 1 FIRST PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF BUREAU. DELETE ALSO AND
 10 I KNEW YOU WERE SAYING BY MY GRAND MERE KNEW
 14 INSTALLED AS COUNTRY ADJUTANTS AT PILTOWN
 16 FIRST CONTACTS AND WE HAD APPROX WITH MERE R-100
 17 MTE OUR PUB FOR 1/2 PINT OF BITTER BEER AND A
 19 RAB BLUE 10/11/54 FOR CURIOUS P.O.
 20 PETROL TANK. ENGINE LOCKED TIGHT
 21 RAB BLUE AND A YOUNG SPID. HAD A RIDE ON BUCKEN
 22
 PAGE 11 LINE 1 LATER FROM MY OCCUPATION I LEARNED YOURS MAN IN RAB BLUE WAS
 4 AIRCRAFTSMAN SHAW -
 4 CONSIDERED LAURENCE OF ARABIA WHO JOINED RAIFERS
 5 THAT SPEDD WE WENT THE IDEA I KNEW I COULD NOT CHANGE
 9 CONSIDERED LAURENCE OF ARABIA SHAWEN HIS BROTHER
 9 THESE A 1916 YEAR OLD FARMER'S BOY
 13 OUR PUB WAS IN BARNES AND PILTOWN
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PAGE 14 LINE 1 WELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE OF TO NEW THIRTY
 6 6.25 AM YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE AT YOUR MACHINING
 8 PREPARING BEFORE THE SOUND OF 7.00 AM SINGING AND DRUMS
 12 REPORT WITH CHECK CARD IN HAND. DON'T LOOK ON THAT UNTIL WORK
 23 FOR HIM TO TAKE ME TO HIS HOME, MY NEW ROOMS.
 31 FUTURE VISE JAWS
 32 YOKES END
 33 FUTURE VISE JAWS
 34 FUTURE VISE JAWS
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PAGE 22 LINE 3 FIRST EVER BONUS, I START A FARTHING - AND DID NOT BANK FOR PAYMENT ONE PENNY NEAREST COIN IN THE PACKET ROUNDLY ONLY APPLIED AND COUNTERSINK FOR NINETEEN WINE LINDY MANAGER

PAGE 22 LINE 24

PAGE 23 LINE 16 POSSIBLY YOU'D PREFERRED TO THE MULTI SPINDLE ABOUT 1901-1902 THIS FINANCIAL ETC ETC

PAGE 23 LINE 26

PAGE 24

PAGE 25 LINE 1 MUCH NOBLE PART AND CHAMFER VALVE STEPS FROM FOAM VALVE COLLET PROTECTS

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PAGE 34 LINE 14 FIRST THE P.O. RECEIVED FROM ARTHUR BAKER'S TESTIMONY - ON WENTENESS GARDEN, END PRODUCE NUMBER

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