

# Letters

## TO THE EDITOR

### **Pelapone Engines**

Dear Editor,

With reference to the recent letters on Pelapone engines, I left Derby Central School in September 1951 and wanted to work at Rolls Royce, but unfortunately RR only took on Apprentice Intakes once a year and I had missed it for that year!

My friend, Reg Hickenbottom, who worked at Pelapone Engines, Slack Lane, Derby, told me they had a vacancy for an apprentice, so I applied for the job and got it, starting at 15 shillings and six-pence a week. My interview was with the foreman, Ted Butterfield, and I had been warned by Reg, that he was a 'Nasty B\*\*\*\*\*d' who did not like apprentices, and went out of his way to say so!

My first job was helping on the paraffin washing machine, a large machine on which engine bases and cylinder castings were loaded and fed through to wash out all of the machining dust and swarf; they were then blown off with an airline. That first day I went home soaked in, and reeking of paraffin. When I think of Health & Safety today I shudder; there was paraffin spray everywhere, slippy and soaked wooden boards, earth floor and just a sodden leather apron and no goggles for protection; engineering 1951!

I was on that job for a week, and then it was on to 'Fettling' the castings before they went to the machine shop. This entailed hammer and chisel work, and to me meant taking large chunks out of my hands and bruised knuckles as we had no gloves: to this day I can hit a chisel with a hammer in the dark.

Various other jobs I had, included copper pipe brazing and bending, which I really liked. The chap I worked under, always before finishing time, warmed a bucket of water so we had hot water to wash our hands. There were no nice washrooms in those days.

I steadily progressed onto building up small assemblies, and remember one job, engine Tappet Rods: This entailed pressing the cast iron cups onto the end of the rod; me being a bit heavy handed, split a cup, and being fearful of Ted Butterfield's tongue, I put it in my lunch bag and took it home. My mother used it as a poker, I still have it today!

One of the jobs I did was helping with scraping white metal bearings, after making a scraper from an old half-round file, which I still have in my toolbox. We used Prussian Blue and Raddle (oil and red lead). I never ever saw a hammer being used on the bearings, they were so near bored that little scraping was needed, so please let the story with the hammer fade away. Ted Butterfield, 'Sod that he was' was a very skilled old-time engineer; he would be spitting bullets to read that a hammer was used on bearings.

One day, Reg had a huge fire outside, he was burning wooden boxes, which was more interesting to me than the job I was doing, so I went out and joined him. Not for long however, for Ted came storming out. The outcome was that we both were sent home and told not to come in tomorrow. This was terrible; we dare not tell our parents, so we set out for work as usual and spent the day train spotting from the bridge of Siddles Road, near Bob Storer's scrap yard. Working at Pelapones gave Reg and myself every opportunity to indulge in our hobby of train spotting as the Engine Shed for the LNER was in Stack Lane; we always had a look in the shed when passing.

In June 1952 I had the Rolls Royce interview and was accepted for the Tool-room. I had to approach the 'dreaded' Ted Butterfield who said "Rolls Royce? Do you know something Slater, I would never employ anyone who worked at that place" That was old Ted, sour to the end.

I never did escape the Pelapone Influence, on doing my National Service in the RAF in Malta, I serviced quite a few Pelapone engines and fuel pumps, and even today as my job involves reconditioning diesel fuel pumps, I am still getting units in for overhaul and requests for spares. Looking back it was all good experience.

***Peter Slater, Fuel Injector Engineer, Scunthorpe.***