



## **A Family Affair**

### **By Colin Asprey**

My father came down from London in 1910 and he brought his wife down, who he met in London but she died while he was down here and he was subsequently a widower. Now he had a son by his first wife and he was about approximately 30 years older than me. Dad married again and that was when I came along. Mum had been married before and she was living in Southampton. My father was a turner by trade and in 1922 he was made Assistant Foreman, which, was a post he held till 1950. During World War Two he spoke about the large number of Irish girls in the Machine Shop and he said they were very hard working. My father retired in 1950, he would have retired in 1940 when he was 60 but the war came along and they asked him to stay on and he worked till he was 70 and then he retired and he died at 74.

I started on the railway works in 1952, as a cleaner in what they call the running shed, it's called a motive power depot these days. That was April '52 and I started as an engine cleaner. We were expected to clean all the parts of the locomotive. A gang of us, you know. About half a dozen. It was April 21<sup>st</sup> it was sort of showery and they fitted me up with a pair of overalls because I was only small. I had to turn them up in the leg and when I went in the canteen they all took the mickey out of me. We had to clean the engines as best we could. For the wheels, we had a special machine it was called a weaver cleaner and it was a steam cleaner it used, they used to get so bad you used to blow the dirt off, its motor driven, petrol, weaver a firm called Weaver used to make them.

What I did the first time was 8-4, eight in the morning till four in the afternoon, there was 2 cleaners, it was a bit of a doddle really because they were employed from 4-12 they would clean up locos in the evening but about half way through the shift they would pack up and help turn the locomotives. Turning it was called, we were learning then, you take them off the coaling because when they finished their duty they went around to the coaling station in Campbell Road.

I went out learning to shovell coal, I didn't do the driving not on the mainline and it was decided that I was so small, that I wasn't sturdy enough to be a fireman, so it was suggested that I went into the Works and that is what I did. I started an apprenticeship on March 9<sup>th</sup> 1953 when I was 16, my father was a Foreman in there so he could pull some clout if I'm honest. I worked in the Boiler Shop where I acquired a certain amount of industrial deafness which I had money for through my union, they were very good.



As an apprentice I worked as a fitter and turner. What they call turning was lathe work, turning pieces of metal. We didn't touch the wheels because that was a specialist in its own right, that was the Wheel Shop. I didn't do any drilling, I didn't have a drill to operate, a bit limited because we didn't do electrics either in those days like they do nowadays. You could have done an electricians trade but you wouldn't have touched steam locomotives, it would have been electrical maintenance, not over on our side but they certainly did in the Carriage Works because they repaired the electric stock that run out of London. I was doing that job for about 4 years.

When I was 19 I went into a heaving shop called the Erecting Shop. Now in the assembly shop they assembled all the components as it were. They had a forge with a 35 ton drop hammer, when that was working at night you used to hear thump...thump all over town. When a locomotive came in it was stripped and there was a special stripping gang and they pull bits off and they dispatch them throughout the Works and then when it's ready for assembly, not necessarily the same part, as long as it fitted, it was the same class, because these were divided into classes

I did one and a half years in the Machine Shop. Eastleigh was a well-paid job. Drivers got paid even better, they were very rich, they would say get £8 a week, were as the national average wage would have been about £2.

I managed to get a National Ordinary certificate and I went in the Drawing Office, I went in as a draftsman, just drawing. Sometimes I drew locomotives, it was a real mix, sometimes it was to do with locomotives. Mainly it was plant machinery, jigs and tools, I specialised in cranes and lifting tackle.

