

a Wee Yarn about  
**a Big Yard**

**by David Livingstone**

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*To my grandchildren:*

*Jessica, Joshua, Katie, Connor, Michaela,  
Jaime, Sophie, Colm and Christopher.*

*This is part of your history too.*

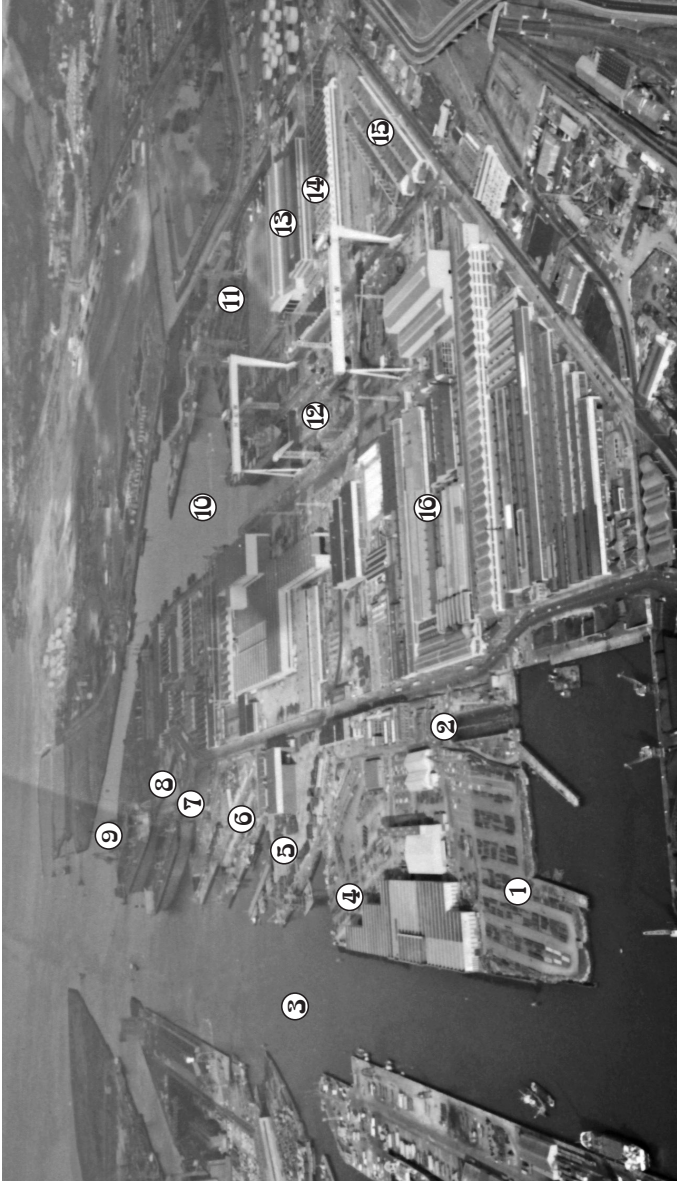


## **Introduction**

My name is David Livingstone and I immigrated with my wife, Anne and three children, Neill, Sharon and Gary, to New Zealand thirty years ago. As I get older, I find myself reflecting on my working life, much of which was spent at Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast.

My memories are not unique, as most men who worked in The Yard will have had the same experiences, but as time goes by, there will be fewer men left to tell the stories of that era. I think that it's important that I pass on these very special memories to my nine grandchildren and extended family.

Although I have known hundreds of men from my time at The Yard, the names I've mentioned are people who were involved in the events or who have influenced my life in some way, both in work and socially.



1 The Abercorn Yard; 2 Abercorn Basin (Dry Dock); 3 Victoria Channel; 4 Slipways of Titanic and Olympic; 5 The Victoria (Wee) Yard; 6 The Alexander Dry Dock and Wharf; 7 The Thompson Dry Dock and Wharf; 8 The Deep Water Wharf; 9 The Belfast Dry Dock; 10 The Musgrave Channel; 11 The Musgrave Yard Slipways (East Yard); 12 The Building Dock; 13 New Welding Shop; 14 Old Welding Shop; 15 Steel Construction Department (Cumming Road); 16 The Engine Works

## **The Yard**

“The Yard”, as it was known to everyone, was Harland & Wolff Shipyard. It was situated on the east side of the Belfast Lough, on land called “Queens Island”.

When I started work in 1955, The Yard consisted of:

- The Abercorn Yard
- The Main Yard
- The Victoria (Wee) Yard
- The Musgrave (East) Yard
- The Musgrave Channel
- The Alexander, Thompson, Victoria and the Deep Water Wharfs, which were full of ships being fitted out and ships that had come in for repair.
- The Engine Works, where the massive engines and boilers for the ships were built.
- Harland & Wolff Steel Construction Department on the Cumming Road, which carried out the steel construction work on many large building projects all over Northern Ireland.

Although the workforce numbers varied over the years, the maximum number of employees that worked at any one time was 30,801 in 1944.

***The Yard workers called the Victoria Yard, “The Wee Yard” and the Musgrave Yard, “The East Yard”.***

### **Family connections at The Yard**

The earliest connection my family has to The Yard, was when my grandfather, Sandy McNab, moved with his family from Glasgow to work there, in the early 1900s. He worked in the Main Yard and during his time, he worked on both the Titanic and her sister ship the Olympic, which were built side by side.

Granda McNab was a Plater by trade. A Plater’s job was to measure and mark the steel plates which were to be cut to the correct shapes according to the ships plans, and to punch out the holes which would hold the steel rivets. This was very hard, manual work.

Around the same time, my other grandfather, Billy Livingstone, was working there as a Stager. A Stager erected the staging (scaffolding), making safe working platforms for the men building the ship. Much of this staging was erected at great heights without safety harnesses or any other safety equipment. It was a very dangerous job and many men fell to their death or were left crippled.

***Original staging planks were made of Oregon pine, which was really good for lighting coal fires at home. You can imagine how many staging planks went missing over the years! The men would cut the planks up into blocks and shove them inside their coats so that they could get them past the Bulkie (Harbour Police).***

## **The Livingstones**

I was born in Belfast, in 1941 to a Scottish mother and an Irish father. I lived with them and my two older brothers, Angus and Tom, in Ballarat Street on the Ravenhill Road.

My father, Tommy Livingstone, was a Riveter's Heater Boy up until the second World War. He then went to Short & Harland Aircraft Factory as an Aircraft Riveter and worked for many years on Sunderland Flying Boats.

My mother, Jessie Livingstone, worked in the private dining room at Harland & Wolff, which served people like Sir Fredrick Rebbek and the other company hierarchy.

My brothers went to work in the shipyard when they left school. Angus, the eldest, served his time as a Welder on the Aircraft Carrier H.M.S. Eagle. It took nine years to complete from the time the keel was laid in 1942. It was launched by Princess Elizabeth in 1946 and finally commissioned in 1951. Possibly there was no urgency for it to be finished once the war was over, hence the reason it took so long. This was certainly enough time for Angus to serve his five year apprenticeship on the one ship.

***When Angus was working on the Aircraft Carrier Eagle, he played football in the usual lunch time match on the Eagle's flight deck. One day, when Angus went after the ball, he was running so fast that he couldn't stop and ran right off the end of the flight deck into the water. What a panic! As well as not being able to swim -***



***he was wearing welding leathers. Thank goodness he managed to take the leathers off and scramble to the bank.***

***Angus told me, that looking back on it, he didn't think it was funny, but it certainly gave his mates a laugh. For quite a few years after; once I started to serve my apprenticeship, welders would ask me, "Are you Angus' brother?"***

***I would say, "Aye."***

***They would then say, "Where's Angus swimming today?"***

Angus was twelve years older than me. When I was about ten years old, he took me with him to The Yard on a Friday afternoon, as he had taken the day off and he had to collect his wages.

Just as we entered the East Yard gates, he took me across to the side of the Musgrave Channel and showed me a ship that was called the Juan Peron. It was a whaling ship on which a gangway had collapsed when it was crowded with men at knocking off time. Eighteen men had died and fifty nine had been injured. The story didn't mean much to me at the time because I was so young, but when I started to work at The Yard four years later and heard the story again, it was only then I realised how terrible it must have been for the families of those who were killed and injured. After that, any time I passed the jetty where it had happened, I would stop, look into the water and give a thought to the men who perished there.

Tom, my other brother, served his time as a French Polisher working on mainly passenger ships (two of the most well known being the Southern Cross and the Canberra).

***As a French Polisher, Tom was always in demand with family and friends when they had scratches or burn marks on their good wooden furniture.***

***The one tip that I remember was how to remove white marks, which polish would not remove, caused by something hot being put onto an unprotected wooden surface. The remedy that Tom used really impressed me. He would pour Methylated Spirits on to cover the burn mark, then set it alight and almost immediately blow it out and rub it with a cloth. If the mark was still visible, he would repeat the procedure until the mark was gone - usually no more than three times.***

*I learnt how to do this by watching him and over the years I have removed lots of marks from family and friends' furniture. Sometimes it took a little convincing for them to let me set their furniture on fire - but they were always pleasantly surprised at the outcome.*



*Me, aged fourteen, in 1955*

## **Starting Work**

When I left Park Parade School in 1955 at the age of fourteen, I was already registered to become an Apprentice Welder at The Yard. One had to be sixteen before they could start serving their time, so I had to get a job for two years. Through working for management, my mother was able to secure me a job as an Office Boy for Jack Watson, (Mr Watson to me). He was Head Foreman and his office was situated in the Welding Shop in the East Yard. And so began my working life at The Yard.

*In those days, Head Foremen wore black bowler hats. This distinguished them from the Foremen (Gaffers) who just wore caps. The other Gaffers that worked in the same office were Bertie Liddle, Alfie White and Johnny Kerr.*

*I was always called "David" by my mother, my wife and the rest of close family; in The Yard it was always "Davy".*

## **The Walk to The Yard**

I like to reminisce about the route I walked to work and how it used to be. On my trips back to Belfast, I notice that the landscape as I remember it has changed so much that some of the streets and landmarks are no longer there.

I would leave home between 7.15am and 7.30am to walk to work, as did most men who lived in East Belfast. As I walked from Ballarat

Street, across the Ravenhill Road and into Glentoran Street, I met up with Stevie who lived there, and Jackie Smith who lived in the Lagan Village. They were both Plater's Helpers.

We then walked along Mount Street, crossed the Albertbridge Road into Mountpottinger Road and straight across to the entry that ran down the side of the Picturedrome Picture House. This led us to Harper Street, into Bryson Street, then straight across the Newtownards Road to Fraser Street. By the time we reached Fraser Street bridge it was black with men going to various Yards, Slipways and the Engine Works.

Many men walked the same route, rain, hail, snow or shine. We never thought about the walk, as we would talk about football, girls and all the other things men talk about. Yes, at fourteen years of age, I thought I was a man too! Walking to work every day with two men, my education of adult life began.

***Sometimes, if I was late or I was walking on my own, I would take a shortcut through Seaforde Street. This street was in the Short Strand area, which was a Catholic area: I came from a Protestant area. We always thought that it was dangerous for a Protestant to go into this area, just as the Catholics thought it was dangerous to come up the Ravenhill Road. The first few times I walked this route I was nervous. But, as I came into contact with women who were bringing in their milk from the front door, I was always greeted with things like,***

***"Hello son. It's cold this morn isn't it?"***

***or, if it was raining, "Terrible morn, son!"***

***They certainly knew that I didn't come from their area, but they were always very friendly. In all the times I walked in the Short Strand area, I never had a wrong word said to me.***

At the end of the working day, the roads were again black with thousands of men making their way home. In 1955 I guess about 25,000 worked at The Yard. It is documented that in 1960 there were 23,201 workers. By any standards, this is a lot of people to move in and out of one area in a day. Men travelled from all districts of Belfast and the surrounding towns. Men living in East Belfast were the lucky ones, as most of them would have walked or cycled.

Although there were cars around, most working class men didn't own one. The workers who came from further afield travelled by bus or train. The public transport system in those days had to have been second to none, as it moved nearly 25,000 people in and out of the same area in a short time frame - and that was only the shipyard workers: there were all the rest of the factories and mills, in and around Belfast, that usually started and finished work at the same time as The Yard.

## **Picking Up Your Board**

When I reached the welding shop, I had to go to the time office to pick up my board. This was the time keeping system used by all manual workers at The Yard. We picked up our boards every morning from the time office by 8.00 and then threw them in through a pigeon hole, into a box in the time office, at the end of the working day.

A board was a small rectangular piece of wood with our individual numbers etched into the top. When it sat in the Timekeeper's box, with a couple of hundred other boards, the Timekeeper could easily find your board when you called out your number.

***Some of the Timekeeper's memories were so good that they picked out your board even before you called your number: they just recognized you and put a number to the face.***

There were time offices all over the The Yard and your board would be at the office closest to where you worked. The shipyard horn could be heard all over Belfast and beyond. It blew at 8.00 every morning for the start of the working day and then again at 5.30 to end a normal day's work. In those days, if someone had not picked up their board by 2 minutes past 8.00am, they were locked out, regardless of what excuse they may have had. As the years went by, this rule became more relaxed. The power of shutting people out was taken from the Timekeeper and given to the Gaffer. As long as you were not habitually late, he would let you work.

***Some Timekeepers were so mean, that if you said, "I slept in." They would reply with something like, "Well, just go home again and get a good night's sleep, so that you will be nice and early tomorrow."***

***This was rubbing salt into the wound of having lost a day's wages.***

To work this system, there were two sets of boards. After the boards were given out each morning, the ones that had been thrown in the night before were sorted and put into order for the following morning.

## **Office Boy**

I really enjoyed my time as an Office Boy, as it was a really cruisey job. It was very varied and took me to many different parts of The Yard. Sometimes I walked and other times I took The Yard Bus. I think it was an old Bedford, which was painted dark brown and was rough and ready with wooden seats. It certainly beat walking - especially if it was cold or wet. It drove continuously all day, transporting workers to various parts of The Yard or Works. It went from outside the main store in the East Yard, to the Deep Water at the end of the Queens Road making stops along the way. Although there were no official bus stop signs, everyone knew where the bus stops were.

My first job every morning, was to leave the office and go back across Fraser Street Bridge to the News Agents. There, I picked up various newspapers and cigarettes for the foremen and the men who worked in the Welding Shop. This led me to start smoking, as some of the men would pay me by giving me a cigarette. At first, I would give them away, but then I decided to try one and that's how I started smoking. (Thank goodness I kicked the habit eighteen years ago).

Every Thursday, I helped Bertie Liddel, one of the Foreman Platers. Bertie would calculate how much each Plater had earned through the Piecework system. I helped him get the time sheets ready to go to the Timekeeper, so that he knew how much money to request from the Head Timekeeper's office in order to pay the men their wages.

***My uncle, Angus McNab, was a Plater working in the Plater's Shed. As Office Boy I would go through there to get to the offices near the East Yard slipways.***

***The first few times I would especially walk through the bay he worked in and I would shout, "All right, Uncle Angus!" (I had to shout as the shed was quite noisy.) After this happening a few times, he saw me coming down the shed, intercepted me before***



***Welding Shop Group - just before the July Holiday Break, 1956.  
I'm in the back row, second from the right.***

***I reached his bay and said, “David, son. No more “uncle”. Just call me Angus, because every other bugger in the shed is starting to call me “Uncle Angus.”***

***That's how easy it was to get a nickname in the shipyard! After that, I went through the shed another way to avoid him, because in my mind it just wasn't right to call my Uncle Angus, just Angus.***

On Thursday afternoons, I helped the Timekeeper wrap a carbon copy of the time sheet around the individual boards so when the men picked up their board on Friday morning they could check their earnings for the previous week.

The Timekeeper's office was locked on a Friday after the money for the wages had been delivered. He had sole responsibility of making up the men's wage packets which, of course, in those days was cash.

There were errands that took me to different parts of The Yard, for instance, taking plans to be altered to the main Drawing Offices on the Queens Road.

Once I got there, The Draughtsman would sometimes tell me to come back in an hour. Rather than go the whole way back, I would take a walk and sometimes catch up with other office boys who worked at the main Harland & Wolff Gatehouse, which was in the same building. One boy that I got very friendly with was John Davidson, who came from Garnerville Road. He worked at the Victoria Yard offices, which were just up the road from the Gatehouse, and I would call in and see him when I was in that area.

***In the 1950s, Rock ‘n’ Roll had become the rage with teenagers. The record, Rock Around The Clock by Bill Haley and the Comets, was number one in the charts. It was the theme song to the movie “Blackboard Jungle”, which all us young ones went to see.***

***Up till then, aged fifteen, I was taking Ballroom Dancing lessons. After seeing the movie and listening to the music, it was no more ballroom dancing for me: from then on it was The Jive.***

***I used to meet John at his house on a Saturday night and with him and his friends we would go to the Queens Hall in Holywood. We would meet some nice girls and jive the night away. Those were the days!***

At other times, I would make my way to where some of the newly-launched passenger ships were being fitted out. I remember the Southern Cross in particular when she was being fitted out at the Victoria Wharf. I would go on board and watch Joiners and French Polishers working. It was exciting to be on such a big ship and I visited it many times, watching it being turned into a thing of beauty and luxury by many talented tradesmen.

*The older men always took a hand out of (teased) new boys by asking them, "Where does the last rivet in the ship go?"*

*The boys usually answered, "Don't know."*

*The men would reply, "In the last hole!"*

*The other joke they played on new, young Marker Boys, was to send them to the store for a left handed hammer. The Storeman would say, "Whoever sent you for that, just tell them we only have right handed hammers!"*

## Changing My Mind

When it came near the time for me to start my apprenticeship, I thought that I would like to serve my time to be an Upholsterer rather than a Welder. I had watched upholsterers at work and thought that it looked like a job I would enjoy; it was also a clean job. When the Head Foreman, Mr Watson, heard what I was contemplating he took me to the side and asked me, would I rather come home clean with a penny in my pocket or dirty with a pound in my pocket. Welders were much better paid than Upholsterers. I decided that I wouldn't mind getting dirty for more money and that I would become a Welder. I have never regretted taking Mr Watson's advice.

*Mr Watson was normally a very reserved man and in his position as Head Foreman he didn't have much small talk for anyone. He must have had a good sense of humour though, as I can remember two stories that he told me:*

*He had to lay men off because of the lack of work. He brought in the men individually to his office to tell them. One of the men, when told he was being laid off asked, "Why am I being laid off - sure, I've done nothing!"*

*Mr Watson said, "That's one of the reasons you're being laid off!"*



*The other story went like this.*

*A Manager stopped a young fella on his way out of The Yard and said to him, "Hey boy, where do you think you're going?"*

*The young fella said, "I'm going home. We're all on strike at the Deep Water."*

*The Manager asked, "Why are you on strike?"*

*The young fella replied, "I don't know. But we're not going back till we get it!"*

With this renewed interest in becoming a Welder, I took the opportunity to watch Welders at work and sometimes even tried to weld with their supervision. As the office where I worked was in the Welding Shop, I was lucky enough to watch the first aluminium welding being done on a grand scale for the SS Canberra, whose whole superstructure was aluminium. I also visited the Welding School and watched the new intake of apprentices learn the basics of Welding.

## **Apprenticeship**

In order to start an apprenticeship at Harland & Wolff, you had to be indentured. This guaranteed five years continuous employment, unless you were guilty of misconduct. This indenture cost the apprentice five pounds which they got back at the completion of their apprenticeship.

*Five pounds was quite a lot of money in 1957 and my family did not have any spare cash. My mother borrowed the money from our local grocer, Harry Hazlett, whose shop was at the corner of Glentoran Street and Ravenhill Road. She paid him back over a period of time.*

I started my apprenticeship on 4th March 1957, when I was sixteen. I went to the Welding School where I had previously watched other new apprentices begin their training. There were about twenty five apprentices training at any one time. It was a four week course and was run by Billy Briggs, (who later became Harland & Wolff's Welding Engineer).

We were taught how to set the power, burn electrodes and learn all position welding before practicing constantly to enable us to tack

weld. After four weeks, the apprentices were split up and sent to various yards. Our job was to tack weld for Platers and Shipwrights. Tack welding was a small amount of welding approximately every nine inches to hold the job in the exact position until a Welder followed up with a continuous weld.

My apprenticeship had begun and I remember feeling so grown up.

## **Learning The Trade**

After Welding School, I was one of the apprentices who was sent to the Victoria Yard, "The Wee Yard". We were told to report to Mr Hedgecock, the Head Foreman, (called Hedgie by the workers but not to his face!). He came out of his office, introduced himself and proceeded to give us a pep talk on how we should conduct ourselves as apprentices. There was no such thing as a safety speech in those days!

By that time, a few of the Welding Gaffers had come out of the adjoining office and joined us. Each Gaffer was then allocated two apprentices. From memory, I can remember two of their names: one was Wee John Hannah and the other, who became my Gaffer for the first few months, was Big Norman Crieghton. My Gaffer took me to one of the three ships that were under construction in the Wee Yard at that time. He introduced me to a couple of Shipwrights and for the next three months, I was their Tack Welder.

## **The Dugout**

Working on a ship as an apprentice was a lot different than being an Office Boy or being in the Welding School. There were no tea breaks in those days, just half an hour for lunch and there were very few facilities on the ship for boiling a can for tea.

To boil our can, we would find a Riveter's fire near to where about half a dozen of us took our lunch. It could have been under the deck head, in one of the holds or under the ship. (Ships sat on keel blocks which kept them approximately four to five feet above the ground.) This was generally known as a Dugout. Although it was strictly against the rules, we tried to boil our can about fifteen minutes before the horn blew. If our Gaffer found us at the fire

before time, he would have told us to get back to the job and report us to the Head Foreman.

Sometimes a Manager or Head Foreman would come on to the ship about fifteen minutes before the break and purposely walk around the Riveter's fires. If we saw them coming, we lifted our can off the fire and scattered. If there were any half-boiled cans sitting beside the fires, they would stand around until the horn blew; some of the more aggressive ones would kick the cans over which meant we got no tea.

There was also a time when five or six apprentices got together and had one big can which we passed around. We each took a bite of our piece (sandwich) and a slug of tea and passed it onto the person sitting next to us. I believe that this was the source of a gum infection that I suffered with for years. People today would cringe at the very thought of so many people drinking out of the same can every day!

***The cans were brought from home - the best ones were fruit cans as they seemed to have a better lining on the inside. We pierced a hole on each side and made a handle from a welding rod. Tea and sugar were mixed together and wrapped in a piece of newspaper while milk was carried in a used medicine bottle with a cork on top. Our pieces (sandwiches) were wrapped in greaseproof bread paper - all of this was carried in our coat pockets. It was a common sight to see men's pockets bulging with their lunch. If someone had a lunch box, they would be called a sissy and a common remark would have been, "Would ya look at the big girl with her fancy piece box!"***

The Welders and apprentices met the Gaffers every morning at the store. There, they would allocate Welder's jobs and write orders for enough rods (electrodes) for the day's work. So, other than lunch time, the only time we came off the ship was to go to the toilet. Now that's a story in itself!

## **Seven Minutes**

The toilets were situated close to the slipways and they were called "The Seven Minutes". When the men went off to the toilet they would tell their workmate, "I'm away to the Minutes."

On entry to the Minutes, there was a turnstile and a man who sat in a glass cubicle with a clock on the wall. As someone went through the turnstile they would shout out their board number. He took a note of the number and the time they entered, then repeated the exercise on the way out.

We were allowed seven minutes for our ablutions, hence the name “The Seven Minutes”. There was even a notice on the wall to that effect! If someone was much longer, their number would be reported to their Gaffer. I was never reported, but I saw the “Shite House Clerk” (as he was called by all) banging on toilet doors, and getting a reply, in real shipyard language, to “#\*%# OFF!”

The Yard sense of humour always had a saying for every situation. Some of the men would shout out, as they passed the Shite House Clerk, “Yer looking grumpy! Have ya not got yer tonnage up for the day?”

## **No Formal Training**

Other than four weeks in the Welding School, apprentice welders didn't get any formal training; everything was learnt on the job.

If the Shipwright or Plater I was working with had to prepare a job for fairing up, I would be at a loose end so would go and watch a Welder at work. By watching, I started to learn how to burn the rod and how to achieve the deposit of welding required for that particular job.

The deposit that had to be achieved on a weld was set in the plans of the ship and these figures were given to you by the Gaffer.

For example, a typical weld was 2/8/7/5. This meant:

2 = 2 runs of welding

8 = a number 8 electrode

7 = the first run at 7 inches of welding to an electrode

5 = the second run at 5 inches to an electrode

This deposit of welding, paid seven pence farthing a foot when on Piecework. It was used for jobs such as welding watertight bulkheads and engine seats that the ships engine sat on. When a weld was finished, it was measured with a gauge to make sure the correct deposits had been achieved. There were other number combinations of deposits to suit the welding job in question.

I clicked on pretty quickly to the Welders who didn't mind me asking questions and who let me weld for them under their supervision. These Welders were on Piecework - which meant they had to produce a certain amount of welding footage for the week to earn their wages - and I was taking up some of their valuable time.

The names that spring to mind, of the ones that I learnt from, are Jos Holyoake, who came from around the Shankill Road area, Wee John Savage from Island Street and Sammy Murphy from, I think, Montrose Street. They were just a few of the many great Welders that Harland & Wolff produced.

***One day, I was working beside Wee John Savage. To reach the ladder where I was going, I had to drop down onto the staging where he was working, which was about a four foot drop. So, without thinking, I jumped on to it and shook the staging plank while he was welding. He stopped and shouted, "Hey! Hey! Hey! Where do you think I learnt to weld? On a #@&# ing Rocking Horse?"***

***I wasn't his favourite person for a couple of hours!***

***Throughout my time as a Welder; I worked in other countries and I can truly say that a lot of The Yard Welders were among the best that I have seen.***

## **Friday Afternoons**

Apprentices were not allowed to work Piecework until they were eighteen, so the younger ones always had spare time - especially on a Friday afternoon.

I have no idea how the custom started, and I am sure it was not official, but on Friday afternoons the younger ones would ask the Welders and Shipwrights that they had been working with, for their "odds", meaning any spare odd money. It would have been a couple of pennies or maybe a thrupenny bit, but we always got enough to take us to the "Washers" at the public baths, or to the afternoon pictures.

***I would go to the public baths in Templemore Avenue. We only had a tin bath at home which we had to fill with a hose from the water***

***tap in the scullery. When I got into it, my knees hit my chin, so it was luxury to stretch out in a big white bath with continuous hot water and lie there for a full hour:***

We had to go back to The Yard to lift our week's pay and we made sure we didn't get there until about ten minutes before the horn blew. This was so we would avoid running into any of the Gaffers, as they had gone to their offices by this time. When the men lined up to get their pay, the young apprentices stuck out like sore thumbs because a lot of them had nice, clean, shiny faces. The men that were lined up beside them would say, "We know where you've been."

Once I started to serve my time, I got to know a lot of the other apprentices from different trades. One, in particular, was another apprentice Welder called Jacky Sanlon. Jacky had joined the Territorial Army and he would tell me stories about going on weekend schemes and driving three tonne trucks. This all seemed pretty exciting, so I decided to join too. We were in the Royal Army Service Corp. So, I learned how to drive at the Army's expense and I got paid based on my attendance every week. The money was handy, as we weren't able to work overtime in The Yard at that age. An added bonus was that we also went to camp each year to Ballykilner or Magilligan.

## **Idle hands**

One time, when the Platers were on strike for thirteen weeks, all other trades' work eventually dried up and workers were laid off. The laid off men got "The Dole" (unemployment benefit), but the Platers got nothing, because they were on strike. Stories were told of them selling their furniture to feed their families.

For us apprentices, it was all fun and games, as our Indenture guaranteed us full employment for five years. It was like going to the playground every day as, obviously, there was no work for us to do. We played football or cards and even would take a walk up town to have a look around.

Idle hands and teenage energy were a good mix for making mischief. Some boys even managed to get up into the tower cranes and start

them up. They had a play at moving the cranes along their rails, until management cut the power.

Another time, half a dozen of us decided to make a raft and sail it from one side of the Victoria Channel to the other. We lashed together large, empty metal drums and staging planks with ropes, then we pushed off and paddled with pieces of sticks. When we were about a hundred yards out, our raft started to fall apart and we had to scramble to find something to hold onto. Some boys swam for it but I managed to get astride a plank and paddle back to the bank. I don't think our knot tying or our raft building skills were very good. One of the Gaffers found out about our adventure and told us, "If that's the way you are going to build boats in the future, then I think you should look for another line of work!" We didn't try that again!

(The Victoria Channel is the stretch of water that the Titanic and the Olympic slipped into when they were launched from under the Main Yard gantries.)

After the strike was settled, it took some time for the work to build up again. It was a gradual return to work for all of the laid-off workers and the end of play-time for the apprentices.

***Between the fifties and sixties, a Crew Cut hair style was all the rage with the apprentices. Singeing gave a great finish to your Crew Cut but it cost more to have it done at the barbers. So, we would just pay for the haircut, then the next day at work, apprentice Welders would singe each other's - and other trade apprentices' - hair with a hot welding rod.***

***We would fuse a welding rod to the bulk head without striking an arc, and just before it became red hot, break it away from the bulk head. We could then singe hair by passing the hot rod over the crew cut. Once it cooled down, we repeated the process with the same rod.***

***I saw some apprentice's hair catching fire by accident, but I have also seen it done on purpose! Everybody thought it was a great laugh - except the one whose hair was on fire.***

***We all thought we looked smooth - especially for meeting girls at the Pictures (cinema) and the Saturday night dance.***

## Piecework

From the age of sixteen to eighteen, I was learning on the job and trying to become as good as the Welders that I had been working for. At eighteen, I was allowed to work overtime and to go onto Piecework. This made a great difference to my take home pay - for the better of course. Piecework was worked by the majority of Welders, Shipwrights, Riveters, Platers, Caulkers and Burners - which were generally known as the "Black Trades".

Piecework was measured by how much you had to produce in order to make your pay. In the Welder's case, our work was measured by the finished welding footage - which had to have the correct welding deposit, be free of slag and be wire brushed.

Our work was counted by a Counter, who came around on a Wednesday and again on a Friday. If the welding was not up to standard, he would mark the defect and we would have to repair it before he would pass it for payment. This certainly taught us to make sure we did it right the first time!

***When the ship was in the water, fitting out, there would be still work for Welders - but not enough to make up their Piecework wages. The unions established, because the lack of work was not the Welders' fault, the wages would be made up, to what they would have earned on Piecework, by the Counter. The Counter who did this, was Wee Johnny, (I can't remember his surname). The Welders gave him the nickname, Max Factor, because he was the Make-Up Man.***

## Overtime

Overtime could be worked on a weeknight or a Saturday or Sunday. If we were asked to work we were pleased, as overtime was paid at time and a third. After 12 noon Saturday and all day Sunday, it was paid at double time. If someone didn't work Saturday, they couldn't work Sunday. If, after working Saturday and Sunday, they took Monday off, they would not been asked to work the following weekend. This was to stop men taking advantage of the higher rate of pay for the weekends



Some of the apprentices and I, from the Victoria Yard, were asked to go and work overtime one Saturday in the Main Yard. I was working that day with an old Shipwright who, in the course of the day's work, said to me, "Do you know something Welder?"

I asked, "What?"

He answered, "Do you realize that the ship you're working on is sitting on the same slipway that the Titanic was built on?"

And, without thinking, I asked him, "Did you work on the Titanic?"

He came back at me with a chuckle and said, "Welder, I know I'm old, but I'm not *that* old!"

I was like a lot of other people of my age who didn't know the significance of what happened to the Titanic until the movie "A Night To Remember" was made. All of a sudden, it was the most famous ship ever built.

***I remember asking my Granda McNab about the Titanic, but he was reluctant to talk about it. I have thought about his reluctance as I have got older. I can guess that it must have been very difficult for the men who built the Titanic with hard work and pride, to then have her sink on her maiden voyage with devastating loss of life. It would have been a great shadow of grief that hung over The Yard and its workers.***

## Some Of The Hazards

Welders were supplied with gauntlets and welding screen. The rest of our working clothes we supplied ourselves. For a Welder, getting burns was a big issue. I used to buy the heaviest denim available, which at that time was Wrangler. Our jeans and coats would end up full of burn holes from the hot slag dropping off the weld. It would go right through and burn our body; to this day, I still have scars on my body caused by hot slag. After about four months of being on Piecework, I could afford to buy a welding jacket and this certainly helped cut down on the amount of burns.

Shoes were not as important to me then, and my shoes often had holes in the soles. Like many other people, I stuck cardboard from the welding rod cartons inside as an insole, to keep my feet dry. The consolation was, the cardboard insoles were free and I could

replace them at any time when they got wet. You can imagine what happened when, on a wet day, we would be walking across the deck of the ship, over live cables that were criss-crossed everywhere. We tried to tiptoe in between the cables, but sometimes we ended up dancing from an electric shock when we stepped on a cable that had bare patches or thin insulation.

On Piecework, there was no such thing as waiting till the rain stopped to pull our cables onto another job. Time was money and when our gauntlets got wet, we would get shocks through our hands. We would then have to try and dry them at a Riveter's fire before we could continue welding. Drying them at the fire made them so hard we could hardly get them on. It was very difficult to get a new pair of gauntlets - they nearly had to be full of holes before the Gaffer would give someone an order for new ones. As the years went on and safety became more of an issue, new gauntlets were readily available.

Another hazard that came from welding was known as a flash (Arc Eye). It was an unpleasant experience that happened quite often if someone's eyes made contact with the arc of a welder. This could happen to Welders working too close to each other, or to anyone else working in the vicinity of one. It burnt the film that protects the eyes. You were not aware of it happening at the time, but the symptoms resembled the feeling of a lot of grit in your eyes and you were unable to be in daylight. This occurred about four hours after the flash. Near the end of the working day there was always a queue at the first aid station for eye drops. These helped reduce the symptoms, but the only solution was to go home to bed. We would use the old remedy of a cloth soaked in cold tea across our eyes. Though I don't think this did anything other than soothe them, even that was better than nothing. After a night's sleep, they would be much better. If it was a severe flash, we would have to take the next day off work, and of course we didn't get paid for that.

***One of my memories was of a first aid man in the East Yard called Stewarty. He was a very friendly and knowledgeable first aider, but my goodness, he was rough! We would look into the first aid room and if Stewarty was on duty we braced ourselves because it felt as if he was administering the eye drops from a great height.***

***Another unpleasant thing that happened, was blisters on the rims of the eyelids. It felt as if you had something in your eye. The blisters were scraped by a special little tool and we cringed at the thought of Stewarty being on duty.***

If someone had something in their eye, before going to the first aid, they looked for a Caulker - who were noted for being very good at removing foreign bodies from an eye. They would take a matchstick and chew the end to soften it. They would hold the eye open with their forefinger and thumb and if they could see the speck of dirt, they then would try and remove it with the matchstick.

Some of the Caulkers carried a little tool that was magnetized at the end so that when they held it close to the eye, if the speck was metal, it would be extracted without them having to touch the eye. If the foreign body was on the inside of the upper lid, they would expertly roll the eyelid back on a matchstick which made the removal easy. Nine out of ten times the Caulker could do the job, but if the foreign body had been there for more than a couple of hours, it was off to the first aid. They would keep working at it until they removed it - which was very unpleasant. In any case, it was advisable to have any thing removed from the eye as soon as possible, otherwise you would end up going to the hospital.

***One day, it was very warm and I had been welding engine seats. It was about 3.30 in the afternoon and I was hot and tired, so I rested my head against the engine seat and closed my eyes for a moment. Next thing, my Gaffer, Wee John Hannah, shouted in my ear; "Would you like me to get you a pillow, Davy? If you would go to bed at night instead of running after the girls, you wouldn't fall asleep on the job."***

***That sure woke me up!***

***For the next week, I was always waiting for some sort of repercussion, but thankfully, I never heard another word about it.***

## **Another Experience**

In the course of my apprenticeship, I was asked if I would like to work for Harland & Wolff Steel Construction Dept. This was at Coolkeeragh Power Station at Maydown Londonderry. This

department, which had a large yard within Queens Island, was responsible for the steel construction on many Northern Ireland landmarks. I took the opportunity, as it would give me wider welding experience, though it would be the first time living away from home all week. I was seventeen and so it made me feel quite grown up.

Every Monday at 8.00am, a Harland & Wolff bus picked up about six or seven Steel Erectors and me, the only Welder, at the Big Clock (Albert Clock) and took us up to Derry. We worked till lunch time on a Friday, had our lunch on site and then boarded the bus and returned to Belfast for the weekend.

In those days the journey took three hours. These days, with the motorway, better roads and faster cars the same journey takes about an hour and a half. The bus and driver stayed on site during the day and ferried us back and forth to our digs (lodgings).

I lodged in a big, three storey house in which four of us stayed. I shared a room with an older man in his forties, called Sid Templeton, who came from around Shadolly Street on the Newtownards Road.

***We got our wages on Thursdays and so paid our landlady on Thursday after work. She was a big, stout woman, and I remember when I give her the money, she would kiss it, and say, "First today." I knew, of course, that she said the same to all her lodgers.***

The work was interesting and made me feel important, as a lot of the welding was done out of what was known as The Bucket. The Bucket was made of steel and was approximately five foot square and four feet high.

I put all my welding gear into the bucket, making sure I had enough cable from my welding machine to reach the job - which could be over a hundred and fifty feet off the ground. Then a Steel Erector and I got into the bucket, the crane hooked on and hoisted us up to the job. We would be up there for anything up to three hours. The bucket would sway in the breeze so the Steel Erector would tie the bucket off to one of the girders and shield me from the wind with a bit of tarpaulin. When we stopped for a cigarette, we had a great view of Lough Foyle and beyond, across the border to the Republic of Ireland. I worked in Derry for just over a year. I enjoyed my time there and made many new friends.

*Sometimes I stayed in Derry for the weekend and went to the dances with some of the local guys that I worked with. One of our favourites was Borderland Dance Hall. This was in the little town of Muff which was just outside of Derry in the Republic of Ireland.*

*We danced to some of the great Irish show bands of the day that toured Ireland and America. Two that come to mind are the Capital, and also the Royale, with lead singer, Brendan Boyer.*

## **End Of An Era**

While I was serving my time, welding started to take over from riveting. There were four men in a Riveting Squad: a Riveter, a Howler Up, (Holder Up), a Heater Boy and a Catch Boy. It was a treat to watch a riveting squad at work.

Rivets came in large bags and the Heater Boy would stand at a portable fire that was about waist high and fuelled by coke. He would always have about twenty rivets at the back of the fire heating with about six more in the fire. When they were white hot, he would lift them with tongs, one at a time, and throw the rivet across the deck. The Catch Boy would catch it with tongs and drop it into a bucket beside the Howler Up, who would pick it up with another pair of tongs. He would put it into the hole in the plate then hold it in place with a hydraulic machine. The Riveter, who would be on the other side of the plate, then hammered the rivet home with a hydraulic gun. Then he would be ready for the next rivet.

The co-ordination between the four men had to be very good so that each rivet reached the Riveter at the right time and at the right heat. After riveting, a Caulker came along and caulked the join in the plates with a hydraulic gun and a caulking tool to insure they were watertight. It was a very labour-intensive procedure, so when welding was proven to be as good as riveting, and, as one Welder was doing the job of a four man riveting squad, riveting became a thing of the past. As time went on, Riveting Squads were absorbed into other Steelworker Trades.

*While working under the Piecework system, Riveters were paid for the amount of rivets they put in. Preparation involved quite a*

***lot of work, so it was a well known fact that Riveters climbed over the wall at the weekend and prepared their jobs (screwed up their jobs). This meant that they could begin riveting as soon as the horn blew on Monday morning.***

***When the Titanic and other ships of that era were built there was no such thing as hydraulic machines, so the rivets were hammered into place manually by the Riveters.***

## **Spreading My Wings**

After completing my apprenticeship, there was an opportunity for me and a number of other tradesmen to work at a Shipyard in Gothenburg, Sweden.

It was December and I remember thinking to myself as I got off the plane. "This is like walking into a refrigerator."

The work was similar to what we had been doing in Harland & Wolff, but working conditions were rough and quality control practically non-existent. Most of us only lasted six weeks at the job, as we were cold, miserable and living on a Houseboat with approximately sixty other men. We were sleeping four to a cabin and the food was totally alien to us.

There wasn't a lot of new shipbuilding work at Harland & Wolff when I returned from Sweden, so I went to work for Stewarts & Lloyds in England. I became qualified as a Pipe Welder, which at that time was quite a significant qualification. I worked as a Pipe Welder while working on various power stations in England and at the Sydenham oil refinery in Belfast when it was being built. During that period, the Abercorn, Main and Victoria Yards had all been closed down.

***After my father died in 1962, I came home from England and lived with my mother. With the money I had saved by working on big projects in England, I bought myself a car. At twenty three, I was now the proud owner of a very nice Ford Zephyr 6. I really felt special, as very few working class people had cars and, in fact, I was the only person in our street that owned one.***

## **Super Ships**

The Suez Canal blockade from 1956 to 1975, created the demand for larger oil tankers and bulk carriers. Because of the longer route around the Cape of Good Hope ships needed to carry more tonnage to be profitable. With this turn in events, work returned to The Yard, but never to its former size or workforce.

By the time I returned to The Yard, much larger build-up shops had been erected. This was to cater for the huge weldments needed for the larger ships that were now being built.

I worked in one of the new build-up shops and it was enormous. It came complete with overhead cranes which had twice the lifting capacity of the cranes in the old shops. They also had giant extractor fans built into the roof which made the working environment practically like working in fresh air. I worked a lot on welding massive lifting lugs onto the large weldments. One lug would take most of the day to weld and had to be 100% in quality, as they were used to lift enormous weights to great heights. I enjoyed the work, as it was not only clean, but because I was still on Piecework, it was good paying work.

## **No More Saturday Night Dances**

By the time I was twenty-four, all my mates were married with children but I was not even going steady! Although I had no one special to socialize with, I would go out on a Friday and Saturday night to one of the pubs that I frequented, where I would usually meet someone from The Yard to have a yarn with.

One Friday night, I called into Lynch's Pub in Holywood to have a Guinness and I met Big Terry Brannigan, a Fitter's Helper that I knew. He asked me if I would like to join him, his wife and daughter at the Sing-Song in the Upstairs Lounge on the following night. I decided to go, just for an hour before heading to the Saturday Night Dance. I quite enjoyed singing and Sing-Songs were always good entertainment as there were some great singers around. When I arrived, Terry introduced me to his wife and his daughter, Anne. I sang a couple of songs that night but I never got to the Saturday Night Dance: I was totally taken by Anne - so much so, that I married her within the year.

*About a week after I was married, Uncle Angus came looking for me. He said, "Now, just because you're married, you don't need to give the wife all your wages. Just give her so much and keep the rest for yourself."*

*I took his advice and when I gave Anne her money she looked at it, but didn't say anything. The next Wednesday evening when I come home from work, she told me she had no money left to buy food until the next pay day.*

*I learnt a valuable lesson: never listen to Uncle Angus as far as money was concerned! After that, I left the finances to her and now, nearly fifty years later, she is still doing a great job!*

## Night Shift

My Gaffer, John McCauly, (Balls McCauly), came to me one day and told me it was my turn to go onto the night-shift. I refused. A few weeks later, the Senior Foreman, Sammy McVeigh, came to me and said, "Davy, it's your turn for the night-shift."

I said, "Sammy, I don't do night-shift."

He asked, "Why not?"

I told him that I didn't think working night-shift was natural and thought night time was for sleeping.

In the meantime, I spoke to the Shop Steward, Robin Adair, and told him I was being pressured into going onto the night-shift, which I didn't want to do. He told me that I didn't have to work night-shift as it was not compulsory. I was happy, but I soon learnt if they don't get you one way, they get you another. Sammy McVeigh came along again with the same story about it being my turn for the night-shift. My answer was the same as before, but I added that I had spoken to the Shop Steward who had told me that night-shift wasn't compulsory. Sammy said, "Oh, did he now?" and went away.

I thought that was the end of the night-shift saga, but the very next morning he came along and said, "Davy, get your gear together. You are shifting up the yard to the slipways."

My immediate thought was that as I was probably being shifted to the Oil Rig, my nice clean job was gone - but at least I didn't have to do night-shift.



## Sea Quest Oil Rig

*The Sea Quest was a semi-submersible, drilling rig built at Harland & Wolff and launched in January 1966. She was 320ft high and weighed 150,000 tonnes. The legs were 35ft in diameter and 160ft long. It discovered UK's first North Sea oil in the Arbroath Field in September 1969 and the first giant oil field, in the Forties Field, in October 1970.*

I had guessed right: I did go onto the oil rig, the Sea Quest, to work. Oil rig construction was a new venture for Harland & Wolff and the construction was very different than that of shipbuilding. For a start, it stood on three enormous legs which spanned three slipways and then the Superstructure was constructed on top. The main structure, with the exception of the accommodation, was welded with low hydrogen electrodes. Low hydrogen rods helped prevent cracking in welds. This was imperative for an oil rig that was to be anchored to the sea floor where it would be buffeted by gale force winds and high seas.

The welds from the legs to the feet had at least thirty runs of low hydrogen welding. The welding on the legs and diagonal bracing was x-rayed to ensure maximum quality. Welding with low hydrogen rods was a first for a lot of Welders, including me.

***By sending me to work on the Sea Quest, Sammy Mc Veigh did me a favour, as the amount of overtime was fantastic. I worked twelve hour days, seven days a week. Within six months, I had the deposit to buy our first house.***

To this day, I marvel at the job the Stagers did on the rig. The staging under the deck was approximately 180ft off the ground. To give the men working there a safe platform to work from, they put staging planks practically edge to edge one way, with sarking laid on top the other way. It was almost like a solid floor and it would have been difficult to drop even a welding rod through it. We felt extremely safe, even though we were so far off the ground. What I admired, was the fact that the Stagers had to work at that height to erect it in the first place - and they had no safety platform.

The Sea Quest was the only oil rig that was built on slipways and

not in a building dock as other oil rigs were, so there was a lot of speculation that it could not be successfully launched. The most sceptical were the Japanese, who were hot competitors to European shipyards in shipbuilding at that time. Coming near the completion of the construction, a steel pontoon was built and welded to the feet of the oil rig to stabilise it.

At the launch, the Musgrave Channel Road was black with both the public and shipyard workers all watching the spectacle.

As the launch took place and, just as the last leg hit the water, the pontoon buckled in the middle and the men standing on it were all forced into the middle where it had buckled. I think everybody's heart skipped a beat - I know mine did. As she came to rest in the middle of the channel, a roar of applause went up from the crowd. She was then towed from the Musgrave Channel to the Victoria Wharf and, almost immediately, burners started work on removing the pontoon. In my opinion, it was the pontoon that saved the launch from disaster that day.

***Launches of ships were open to the public and there were always lots of people who came to watch particularly of well known ships like the H.M.S. Eagle, the Southern Cross and the Canberra. One day, a member of the public stopped a young fellow and asked, "Could you tell me where the urinal is?"***

***He replied, "The Urinal? I don't know. How many funnels has she got?"***

I still worked on the Sea Quest after she was launched and was sitting in water at the Victoria Wharf. Most of the work was finishing work, rather than structural. Welders worked with Electricians, Joiners and Blacksmiths. For Electricians, it was welding lugs for cable trays, for Joiners, it was lugs to hold Formica walls for cabins, and for Blacksmiths, it was welding handrails.

***One day, I was working for a Joiner when at about 3 o'clock he told me he had to go to the Joiners shop to get more lugs, would not be back that afternoon so he would see me the next morning. In those circumstances, I should have gone to my Gaffer and told him that the Joiner would not be back until the next morning. He would then have found me a wee job to do for the last hour and half of the***

*day. I decided, however; it would be nice to go home early, so I got someone to pitch my board and off I went.*

*“Pitching your board” was a term used when you got someone else to throw in your board at the end of the day. It was a practice that was used by the men now and again when they had time on their hands, but it was regarded by management as gross misconduct.*

*The next morning, my Gaffer, John Napier, said to me, “Davy. You weren't on your job from 3 o'clock”.*

*I said, “The Joiner had to go for lugs so I went and did a wee message.”*

*He replied. “Well, you didn't come back. What I want you to do now, is get your gear together and go back into the yard and report to Mr. Brown.”*

*Mr Brown, (Wee Brown), was the Head Foreman Welder, so I knew I was in trouble. When I arrived at his office I knocked on the door but there was no answer. I knocked again and I heard a gruff voice saying, “Come.”*

*I walked into the office, literally with cap in hand. Mr. Brown was sitting at his desk with Billy Thompson (The Skinny Man), his second in command standing with his back to me, seemingly reading plans.*

*Mr Brown said to me, “I have been told you were off your job from three o'clock yesterday.”*

*I just stood there, lost for words.*

*The next thing he said was, “Billy. What will I do with him?”*

*Billy Thompson replied, without lifting his head or turning around, “Sack him.”*

*A lump came into my throat.*

*Mr Brown replied, “Sack him?”*

*Billy repeated, “Sack him!”*

*I could feel the blood drain from my face, my heart was racing and I'm thinking “What am I going to tell my wife?”*

*We were not long married and had just bought a house.*

*Mr Brown turned to me and said, “You count yourself lucky this time that I'm not going to sack you. Take your gear and report to Bobby Lamb in No 1 Bay and he will keep an eye on you.”*

***When I reported to Bobby Lamb (Wee Lamb), in No. 1 Bay, he looked at me very sternly. He obviously knew what I was on the carpet for and I thought to myself, "Well, this is going to be a barrel of laughs!"***

No 1 Bay specialized in the fabrication of ship's masts, which were 40 to 50ft long and 3 to 4ft in diameter. They were large enough for me to go up the inside of and weld. The working environment in No 1 Bay was different to working on a ship, as it was a much more restricted area. All the work was located in one place and a lot of it was repetitious, where working on a ship was more varied, even down to the type of welding. The welding on the masts with the crow's nests, ladders, yard arms, etc. was all good, clean work.

***I worked with two Shipwrights who worked permanently in No 1 Bay: Gordon McMaster and his mate, Big John. They were always good to work with - as well as getting the job done, we always had a great laugh together. Some of the other workers who sat with us round the fire at lunchtime in the Dugout were; Jimmy Grant, Albert Gregg, Geordie Braithwaite and Big Norman Green. Though I didn't know whether to believe some of the stories they told - I always had a good laugh.***

One of the jobs that I worked on was a slipway extension for the oil tanker Myrina. An extension had to be built, as the Myrina was the largest oil tanker being built in Europe at that time and the slipways in the East Yard were all too short to accommodate her.

***The Myrina, at 190,000 tonnes, was launched 1967, by Lady Erskine, wife of the Governor of Northern Ireland.***

## **End of Piecework**

I can't remember the exact time Piecework ended, but I think it was around the time I worked in No 1 Bay. This brought in a lot of changes for Shipwrights, Structural Workers and Boilermakers. (Boilermakers encompassed the Black Trades, which included Welders).

Demarcation was a thorn in the side for the company. Demarcation

meant that one tradesman could not do a different tradesman's job or use their tools. The company believed, that in order to increase productivity, they needed to have flexibility among the Black Trades. By allowing certain jobs to be carried out by different tradespeople, rather than waiting for a specific tradesman to perform sometimes quite a trivial job, this would increase productivity. As a trade off for removing demarcation, our wages increased, we got tea breaks and other benefits plus the Piecework system was abolished. This meant work wasn't counted and we got the same amount of wages no matter how hard we worked. I think that the benefits were good and long overdue, but without the Piecework system, productivity suffered.

## **Working Holiday**

There was not an abundance of work at The Yard after the Myrina was launched. In order to keep men employed, Harland & Wolff contracted a number of Shipwrights, Welders, Burners and Platers to the N.D.S.M. Repair Yard in Amsterdam. They were to work on an oil tanker that had been damaged in a storm.

Obviously, there was a lot of men who volunteered as it was a bit of an adventure to go to another country; people didn't travel much in those days.

My Gaffer, Bobby Lamb, used his influence to get me on the list to go. I had explained to him that Anne had extended family living in Holland, so if I went she would follow with the children. It would be a great opportunity to see her relations and for me to meet them for the first time.

When we arrived in Holland we were treated very well. We stayed in a hotel in the centre of Amsterdam with all meals supplied, including a packed lunch to take to work. I stayed there for a week until Anne and the children arrived, then I stayed with them at the Hook of Holland.

I had met a couple of men in the Repair Yard who travelled every day, with four others, from Rotterdam to Amsterdam in a mini van. I arranged to go with them every morning and evening. So, after the first week, I went by train from the Hook of Holland to Rotterdam,

where my new friends met me. Then, we would drive like the clappers up the Motorway to Amsterdam. They were all from the Dutch East Indies and I was the only pale face among them. Their English was surprisingly very good and it was interesting when we swapped stories about our homeland.



***The Shipyard Workers contracted to work at the  
NDSM Repair Yard, Amsterdam.  
I'm at the right of the photo wearing the dark shirt***

I really enjoyed my four weeks in Holland, both with the people I worked with and meeting my new family. It was just like a working holiday.

***That year Europe, including the UK, was experiencing a very hot, dry summer. (If my memory serves me correctly, Northern Ireland was without rain for about thirteen to fourteen weeks.) It was so warm working in the Repair Yard, that the medical staff supplied us with salt tablets after many complained of headaches.***

After Holland, it was back to No 1 Bay and business as usual.

The next big change at The Yard, was the decision to turn part of the Musgrave Channel into a building dock. This had been talked about for several years and at last, it was happening.

No 1 Bay ran parallel to the Musgrave Channel and was a prime location to watch the progress of the construction. For weeks on end, there was a continuous convoy of trucks dumping rubble into the Musgrave Channel. This was to create a coffer-dam to enable the water to be pumped out of where the dock was to be built. The dock was built by George Wimpey & Company, between 1968 and 1970.

And, of course, there were the two famous cranes built by the German company Krupp. They dominated the Belfast skyline. Goliath, built in 1969 at 96mt high, and Samson, built in 1974, at 106mt high. They completed the Building Dock which enabled Harland & Wolff to build the Super Tankers of the future.

## **Chasing the Money**

Around 1969, there was no overtime at The Yard, as orders had slowed down considerably. Although Welder's wages were good in comparison to the other workers, I had been used to working overtime and the extra money had been good.

With my pipeline experience, I got the chance to go and work on a pipeline extension at the Sydenham Oil Refinery. The wages were very good and there was plenty of overtime. The pipeline job lasted for about seven months. After it finished, I returned to The Yard to the Repair Yard as that was the only department that was employing men.

I started work on a ship that was in the Thompson Dry Dock. It was in such bad condition and so badly rusted, a screwdriver could have been stuck through some of the bulkheads. It took nearly fifteen weeks to repair and I worked on it the whole time, twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

***It was around Christmas when I was working so much overtime. I was earning such a lot of money that it made it a real bumper Christmas, with extra special presents for the family. I felt like Santa Claus!***

I continued working in the Repair Yard for about a year. I enjoyed the diversity of the work as I could be working on different ships

every other week. Other repair work included repairs on The Yard equipment, for example, the handrails on the 100 tonne Floating Crane.

The troubles in Northern Ireland started to greatly reduce the amount of ships coming in for repair. The ships crews started to demand more money to come to Belfast as they deemed it dangerous.

When work in one area of The Yard slowed down, the workers would be deployed to where they were needed. This is when I was shifted from Repair to one of the slipways in the East Yard, where there was a bulk carrier under construction. After that, I worked on various vessels between the East Yard and the Building Dock that was now in operation.

## **The Building Dock**

The Building Dock was another new experience in shipbuilding. To get workers from the dock floor to the deck of the ship there were open cage lifts. These stopped at the various levels and could take up to nine men at a time. There was also a stairway from the dock floor, but you had to be fairly fit to use it.

The ships being built in the building dock, were all oil tankers of the 300,000tonne class, with large bulk carriers being built in the East Yard. The concentration of workers at that time, worked in these two places plus in the newly built fabrication shops. The prefabricated weldments that were built there could only be built to a certain size. This was to enable them to be lifted by the shops overhead cranes and also to be able to fit through the doors. The weldments were loaded by crane on to a transporter, which had a driving cab on both ends for manoeuvrability. These had huge wheels and though I never counted how many, believe me - there were a lot of them.

When the weldments were placed on the transporter, you could see the whole vehicle compressing with the weight. The prefabricated weldments from the shop were taken to a site near The Building Dock. This was where there was an open space large enough and within the operating range of Samson and Goliath. There they could be built up into larger weldments.



For example, some of the large weldments would have the full plating from port to starboard including the centre tank and wing tanks. It would be the full beam (width) and height, from shell bottom to main deck, with a lot of piping already in place. It was a massive undertaking when these weldments were placed, as everything had to join up precisely for welding the longitudinals - which ran the full length of the ship. The only downside of the large structures being built on site was when it rained, a lot of the work had to stop. While management minded, the workers didn't - they got a rest.

One of the impressive sights, was watching Samson and Goliath lifting a full superstructure, from behind the building dock where it had been built and placing it on the deck of an oil tanker - exactly where it should be. These super structures were sometimes six decks high. There was usually the start of another tanker being built behind the other, so when the ship in front was floated out of the Building Dock, the ship behind was floated in and set onto the keel blocks of the one that had left.

On a good day, I would be walking along the side of the Building Dock and would stop for a minute and have a look around me. Everywhere was a hive of activity of men and machinery. It's a pity I didn't have a handy, little camera like I do nowadays; I could have taken some fantastic photos.

In the Building Dock, Norman Green, another Welder, and I worked a lot together. It always seemed that Hughie Thompson, our Foreman, had us always welding the inside shell seam that ran the full length of the ship. All the joints of the shell of the ship were x-rayed and the welding had to be free of defects. We enjoyed working as a team and from memory, this continued for three consecutive ships. Norman then left to join the Prison Service and I was moved to the Slipways in the East Yard.

As the orders for ships increased, especially the super tankers of the 300.000 tonne class, it became apparent that there were not enough welders to complete the work. A training programme was introduced to re-train other tradesmen who had suffered from the downturn in work. The trades that were affected were mostly all finishing trades, like Joiners, Upholsterers and French Polishers. The work for these

trades had dried up because not as many passenger liners were being built. The training programme gave these men an opportunity to become Dilutey Welders. After training, they carried out simple welding jobs which freed up the tradesmen Welders to do the more specialized and quality tested welding.

## **The Shipyard Worker**

There were many shipyard workers that had a very quick wit and who would have made great stand-up comedians. It was a rare day that we would not have had a good laugh. We enjoyed taking the mickey out each other and out of the many situations that life itself threw at us. Think of Billy Conolly, an ex-shipyard welder, and his humour: that's the type of humour I heard every day at The Yard.

There was a great comradeship and in all the years I worked there, though I heard lots of arguments and heated discussions, nothing ever came to blows.

On Friday, all the pubs and clubs near The Yard were packed. The Railway Bar at the County Down Railway, The Vulcan, at the corner of Dee Street and the Great Eastern, at the corner of Hornby Street. The Guinness flowed and quite a few stayed till closing time. The Bookies at the bottom of Dee Street Hill made a killing with Friday night punters betting on the dogs (greyhound racing) at Dunmore and Celtic Park.

***Some wives would meet their husbands on a Friday, as they come out of The Yard so they could get their housekeeping money before it all got spent at the Pub or Bookies.***

***Men who had got themselves into financial difficulty through gambling, would go to one of the known moneylenders that worked in The Yard. This was a vicious circle, as the lenders charged high interest rates. By the following pay day when they had to pay back the loan, they were even worse off.***

Not all men went drinking - a lot just made their way home. For lots of families it would have been treat night with fish, or pastie 'n' chips for tea from the local fish and chip shop. The children would get their pocket money for sweets or maybe half-a-crown to put into their Belfast Savings Bank account.

## Football Supporters

Lots of men would only work till noon on a Saturday, especially in the football season. There were five city teams: Glentoran, Linfield, Crusaders, Cliftonville and Distillery - plus lots of other teams in Northern Ireland which made up the Irish League. There were many supporters for all teams but the two most prominent, as far as the shipyard workers were concerned, were the Glens (Glentoran), whose home ground was at the Oval in East Belfast and the Blues, (Linfield) whose home ground was at Windsor Park, Donegall Avenue. When these two teams played each other, it was the event of the day as there was a lot of rivalry between them. Football was a great Saturday afternoon's entertainment.

On a Monday morning, anyone could recognise all the football supporters among the workers going to The Yard, as they would be sporting their team colours with scarves around their neck. I know that Monday morning, of all mornings, I wore my Glentoran scarf whether Glentoran won or lost on the Saturday.

***My father, my brothers and I were all Glentoran supporters. As a child, my father and Angus took Tom and me to all the matches. When Tom and I had sons of our own, we would take them with us to the games. It was an accepted practice that adults lifted the children over the turnstile without paying for them, so lots of children watched first division football from an early age.***

## Homers

Homers were little jobs for home, like making pokers or small fireside shovels for the open fire. There would hardly have been a shipyard worker's home that didn't possess these two items. The shovels were so popular, that a particular Plater in the Plater's Shed would press out the shape of the shovel on a machine that was also used for shipyard work. It would then be taken to a Welder, who would weld on a piece of tubing for a shaft. These jobs for home would have been worked on when the Gaffer wasn't about.

There were lots of other items taken out of the yard; it was such a big place with so many workers coming and going all the time, it was difficult to keep track. One item management did stop being

carried out, was electric light bulbs. There were so many of them going missing every day from the temporary lighting on the ships, that they changed the current on the temporary lighting system. That meant the light bulbs that worked with the new current would no longer work in residential properties. If workmates saw someone working on a homer, they would joke and ask, "When is the launch of your house?"

The shipyard was a good place to get advice if someone was doing a job at home. They would go to an Electrician for electrical advice or a Joiner or Shipwright if working with wood. I learned a lot as a home handyman this way. I remember a Shipwright called Geordie Braithwaite, who came to my home and showed me the proper way to hang a door.

For bigger jobs that couldn't be done by yourself, there was always a tradesman that would do the job for you. He would be paid, of course, but it was always much cheaper than employing a tradesman who didn't work in the Yard.

When I bought a Home Welding Machine, I would do the odd job for other people, but mostly, I used it for making fancy wrought iron fencing and lamps for my own home.

***There were always good bargains to be had through the workers at the Yard. Someone would put the word around that they were looking for a particular item and there would always be a fella, who knew a fella whose wife's cousin had a contact who could get them what they wanted at a reduced price. In other words, they didn't know who they were buying it from, but they didn't care because it was a bargain. The other bargain, was the booze that fell off the back of a lorry every now and then - especially around Christmas time!***

## **Pitching Boards**

"Sloping" or "Diving" was when someone left The Yard without permission. It was a sackable offence. When Piecework finished, lots of men who worked on the slipways and Building Dock took the risk of sloping. The practice escalated because the men didn't have to produce a certain amount of work to make up their wages.

It also made it easier for someone not to be missed, because with larger ships it was difficult to have close supervision. It was virtually impossible to slop if you worked in a workshop.

If a Gaffer came to see someone between 3.00-3.30pm, they more or less knew they wouldn't see him again before the horn blew for knocking off time. The Gaffer usually left the ship about 3.30pm to go to his office to do bookwork. That was the chance to leave early - if they had someone to pitch their board.

***There were men who made a tidy sum of money by pitching other men's boards - some of them would pitch between ten to fifteen boards! From memory, the going rate was two bob (shillings), a night.***

About three minutes before the horn blew at 4.30pm, all the workers lined up in a narrow alleyway at their respective time offices. When the horn eventually blew, it was bedlam and virtually impossible for the Timekeeper to see how many boards were being pitched at one time. Some of the professional pitchers would join the queue two or three times over, pitching four or five boards at a time. Another trick, if the Timekeeper was watching, was to drop a few boards on the ground outside the window. After all the men were gone, the Timekeeper would lift them, thinking that in the scramble of men trying to get their boards through the pigeon hole, they had fallen on the ground.

## Unions

Before the end of demarcation, there were always small, lightning strikes. They would usually be a demarcation issue or the ongoing dispute with management over pay parity. Although the majority of the so called Black Trades belonged to one union, each trade had a separate Shop Steward to deal with their disputes. Theirs was a thankless job, as they couldn't please everyone, but at least as a worker, we always had the protection and support of the union. The Shop Stewards always tried to find the middle ground between the workers and management.

After demarcation was abolished between Steelworkers, there was a committee of Shop Stewards formed to represent all

Black Trades including Shipwrights. (By this time there was an amalgamation of Boilermakers and Shipwrights and they were now all known as Steelworkers.) They handled all conditions and concerns of worker/management by meeting weekly with management. That way, any problems could be discussed and solved before they could become a dispute. For a worker/Foreman dispute, someone would still go to their Trade Shop Steward, who was more knowledgeable about that specific trade and problems that could occur.

There were some very skilled negotiators among the Shop Stewards. Two that spring to mind are Sandy Scott and Jim McFall. After achieving great results for the Boilermakers at Harland & Wolff they ended up on the Boilermakers Executive in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Apprentices within the Black Trades were, from then on, known as Apprentice Steelworkers and were trained in all the Steelworker trades. This made them very versatile. At the completion of their apprenticeship, it was an advantage for the Company to be able to use them at the trade where they were most needed, at any given time.

***The Era in which I worked in The Yard, was a good time for manual workers. Through the unions and the solidarity of the workers, we achieved better working conditions - including health and safety, shorter working hours and more holidays. I know my grandfathers would have been astonished at my working conditions, in comparison to theirs.***

## **The Troubles**

From when The Troubles started, to when I immigrated to New Zealand, the only time they disrupted work at the Yard, was when there was a Loyalist strike. This not only affected The Yard, but the whole province.

## **Nicknames**

There were a lot of men who had nicknames. Some of them knew and answered to them, but there were other men whom we would never dare say their nickname to their face!

Some that I remember:

Geordie Sore Toes - always complaining about how sore his toes were

Rocky - He looked the part

Seldom - Seldom did anything

The Screaming Scull - Always shouting about something

Elvis - Looked like Elvis and was a great fan

The Skinny Man - Very thin. Every Welder in the East yard knew who he was

Hurdler - Always jumping over the wall and gone

My Way - A Foreman Shipwright who always said, "Do it my way."

Dennis the Menace - Worked in the Wee Yard and always did the opposite to what he was asked to do

Pierre - He always wore a beret to one side and had a thin black moustache. He looked French and rode a bike. (This was Big Terry - my father-in-law)

Dollar a Half - Pitch and Toss Gambler

Flint - A mean and hard, Head Foreman Welder

Rodeo - A real Cowboy. Can't say much more without insulting an otherwise nice man

Soldier - Welders' Shop Steward. If someone had a problem, he would tell them to, "Just soldier on."

Max Factor - Wee Johnny, the Counter who made up our Piecework wages

## **Industrial Deafness**

The shipyard was a noisy place at the best of times, but when working above, below or beside Riveters and Caulkers, the noise was deafening. When coming away from the area, it took about five minutes before our hearing adjusted and we could hear properly again.

Around the 1970s, industrial deafness was recognized and a lot of shipyard workers claimed compensation for hearing loss. I thought I should have a hearing test because I had always worked around a lot of noise. I received a small amount in compensation as my

hearing loss at that time was not severe. As the years have gone by, my hearing has deteriorated and I firmly believe it was from working in a very noisy environment without any protection.

***When I went for the hearing test, the Doctor asked me, "What makes you think you have hearing loss?"***

***I replied, "Whenever the wife speaks to me, I sometimes don't hear her."***

***He said, "Do you not think that might be from a lack of interest?"***

## **Gaffer**

The management were well aware that the Dilutey Welders would need on-the-job training after coming out of Welding School. These men would not only need supervision as workers but, more importantly, their welding would need scrutinizing until they became proficient. This created a demand for more supervisors to be employed.

A Foreman Welder position was advertised and I applied, though thinking I didn't stand much chance since hundreds of other welders may also apply. I was among six men that were selected for an interview. At the interview, I was told that there was only one position available, but there was a possibility of more positions in the near future. If I was not successful this time, then it should not deter me from reapplying.

Much to my surprise and delight, a fortnight later I was handed a letter confirming my appointment as a Foreman Welder, starting the following Monday. Even though I knew I would have no problem doing the job, I was a little bit nervous; at thirty one, I would be the youngest Welding Foreman in the Building Dock and on the Slipways. I would be supervising up to forty Welders - some who were much older and experienced than me. I would also have the responsibility of bringing Dilutey Welders up to standard.

***I remember getting the letter confirming my new job and Anne being very happy. But what gave me the most pleasure was seeing my mother's look of pride when I showed the letter to her.***

On Monday morning, it was strange putting on a collar and tie to go to work, but this was the dress code for foremen. We were supplied



green overalls with a H&W monogram on the breast pocket and we wore blue hard hats which distinguished us as Foremen. This was a lot different from my welding jacket, head screen and jeans with burn holes in them.



***My security pass when I was Foreman***

I had to report to the Main Office, in the East Yard to Tommy McCrory. He was one of the Senior Foremen in charge of the Building Dock, and was to be my immediate boss. He assigned me to the wing tanks on the port side of an oil tanker that was being built. An oil tanker had port and starboard wing tanks plus centre tanks. Two other Foremen were responsible for the starboard and centre Tanks.

After the formalities of meeting the men, all of whom I knew, and seeing the job, Tommy McCrory left me to carry on. After a few days I had settled in and was getting into the routine of my duties. I didn't have time to think as I was very busy, but I was certainly enjoying my new position.

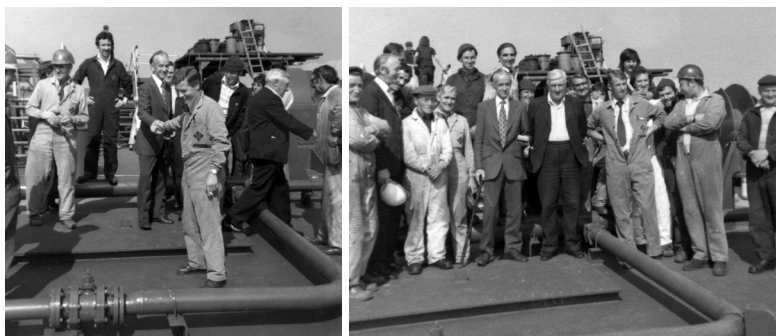
It became apparent to me that the same amount of work was not being produced since Piecework was abolished. As a Welder, I knew what a good day's work consisted of, so each morning I would give each man a job that I considered a fair day's work. As long as he got that work done, I was more than happy.

As a Gaffer, my first job each morning was to meet the men on the dock side to allocate work and write out orders for electrodes, gloves etc. Then, I would do a general walk through the tanks to see how the job was progressing and addressing any problems. At various times, I would inspect the next tank along, always moving forward towards the bow of the ship. I would liaise with Foremen Shipwrights and Platers, whose men would be preparing work for

welding ahead of us. When the preparation was to my satisfaction, I would move a couple of Welders into that tank to start it off, thus making constant progress. Throughout the day, I would constantly be taking notes of work that I deemed necessary to be done by the night shift. A job sheet had to be written out daily for the night shift. The work may not have been done if there was rain on open parts of the ship or a Senior Foreman decided he wanted another part of the ship given priority.

As well as time-served Welders, I also supervised a number of Dilutey Welders who were only just out of the Training School. Their work had to be scrutinized and training time spent with them. The Boilermakers' Union dictated that I was only allowed to burn three electrodes a day to show them how it was done. I certainly didn't think that three electrodes a day was enough - especially when I had four or five Dilutey Welders working for me, so it was not unusual for me to burn more than the allocated three. As I always enjoyed welding, it was no great hardship tutoring these men. I would always rather have them trained correctly than have work that didn't pass inspection and then need to be cut out. Some of the Dilutey Welders became very proficient.

***The Welders' Shop Steward, John Davidson, once said to me, "Davy, do you not think you are burning too many rods? Just remember - you are only supposed to be burning three rods" I replied, "Okay John - you've told me."***



***Farewelling two retiring workers.  
In the photo on the left, I am in the foreground.***

One man who worked for me, was a guy called Francie Parkinson. He was a Welder by trade but was known as a Searcher. A Searcher's job was to search for welding work that had been missed in tanks that the welders had already moved on from. He would mark up the work and then report it to me so that I could allocate one or two welders to go back and complete the job. Francie was a very thorough searcher and was an invaluable asset to all the Gaffers he worked with.

My time as a Gaffer in the Building Dock was spent on oil tankers, supervising work on the port wing tanks and sometimes, the centre tanks or the bow section. When I supervised the work on the port wing tanks, Frank Connolly, another Gaffer, supervised the work on the starboard wing tanks. We became good friends and we always had a good laugh together. He very rarely called me Davy - he usually called me "Kid".

A friendly rivalry developed between us when it came to which side of the ship was progressing the fastest. This rivalry was cleverly encouraged by the Senior Foreman who would say little things to either one of us, like, "Your side doesn't seem to be progressing the same as the other side!" This rivalry never affected our relationship.

I got a whisper of a supposed nickname, for me: "Wonder Boy". I think it was because I was quite young, energetic and full of enthusiasm. It is quite possible that it was Frank that initiated the name, because if I walked into the office he would say, "Here comes Wonder Boy." Luckily the name didn't catch on.

Another time, someone wrote on the bulkhead on my side of the ship, "You are now entering the side of Livingstone's Guerrillas." If the men had another nickname for me, I certainly didn't know it. I enjoyed my time as a Gaffer and the years seemed to go by very quickly.

Two of the last super oil tankers that I worked on were built for the Onassis Group and were called "Olympic Banner" and "Olympic Princess". I have tried to find the history of these ships through the internet, but to no avail. I know that after they were finished. They were anchored in a Scottish Lough as there was no work for them at that time. Perhaps they were sold to another shipping company and

their names changed. This was probably one of the first signs of the decline in world shipping.

The demise of British shipyards was obvious when the Japanese and Korean shipyards were able to build ships quicker and cheaper. European shipyards suffered the same fate. Shipyards closing down led to massive unemployment in cities that had relied on shipbuilding as their main employer.

## **The Golden Years**

With plenty of work and loads of overtime, the Sixties and Seventies were the golden years for most tradesmen in The Yard. The quality of life was so much better than for the previous generation. We were buying our own homes, changing our car every couple of years and going on holidays to the Continent (Europe). We could afford new-fangled luxuries like colour televisions, fridge/freezers, automatic washing machines, telephones and even central heating.

***These household goods are now a normal part of any home but when I was an apprentice I never thought that I would be in the position to afford them. How things had changed dramatically!***

## **Time to move on**

I was thirty nine years old when I left The Yard. Prior to leaving, the work had started to get scarce and my job changed to the point where I felt more like a policeman than a supervisor: I was trying to keep men on the job when I didn't have work for them. Management kept the men employed in the hope that they would soon secure more orders. It was around this time we, a family of five, immigrated to New Zealand.

## **New Zealand**

When I came to New Zealand, I started work as a Welder for a company that was doing all the pipework for the Marsden Point Oil Refinery. We lived in a small seaside town called New Plymouth, which was the hub of the Oil and Gas industry.

Within nine months I became a Welding Tutor for the American

company, Bectal Pacific. My job was to train Welders for Motunui - the first Gas to Gasoline Plant in the world, being built just outside of New Plymouth. In about a year, after most of the welders were qualified, I moved to the plant as a Supervisor/Inspector. I worked alongside lots of English, Scottish and American men who had come to New Zealand for the project, which lasted about three years. Most of the immigrants then moved on to the next big project and big wages in both New Zealand and Australia. We had settled well in New Plymouth, had made many friends and were enjoying the lifestyle. So, rather chase the money, I had various jobs - always connected to welding, until I retired. These were all good jobs but my preference has always been for Shipbuilding.

## **A Walk Down Memory Lane**

In comparison to the engineering projects being carried out in today's age, the ships that were built at The Yard probably seem insignificant today. In that era, though, they were among the best in the world with many first-in-the-world achievements.

What makes those working years proudly memorable for me is the comradeship, the good and the sad memories and the fact that it was an important part of my young life which helped mould me into the person I am today.

Each time I return to Belfast for a visit, I always make a trip to the Queens Island and reminisce about where the slipways, workshops and sheds used to be. I try to picture the ships that lay in the Musgrave Channel and the Thompson and Alexander dry docks. I also walk up the Newtownards Road to see if I can recognise any faces from the past.

***I hope to visit it at least one more time and see the changes that have been made to the Titanic Quarter. When we are walking in East Belfast, I might say something like, "I think I recognise that guy!"***

***Anne usually has to remind me, "David, that guy would only have been at primary school when you left for New Zealand - over thirty years ago!"***

***In my memory all the guys I used to know still look the same as when I last saw them all those years ago.***

## Family Members

Over the years, from around the time when the Titanic was built, I have had quite a number of family members who have worked at the The Yard:

Grandfather: Sandy McNab, Plater

Grandfather: Billy Livingstone, Stager

Father: Tommy Livingstone, Heater Boy

Mother: Jessie Livingstone, Assistant Cook in Harland & Wolff private dining room

Brother: Angus Livingstone, Welder

Brother: Tom Livingstone, French Polisher

Anne's Grandfather: Hugh Black, Delegate for Shipwrights Union

Anne's Father: Terry Brannigan, Fitter's Helper

Uncle: Colin McNab, Plater

Uncle: Angus McNab, Plater

Uncle: Andrew McNab, Plater's Helper

Cousin: Andrew McNab, Foreman Plater

Cousin: John McNab, Welder

Cousin: Angus McNab, Steelworker and Drawing Office

Cousin: Stephen McNab, Electrician

Nephew: Angus Livingstone, Welder

Nephew: David Livingstone – Fitter and Fitter's shop steward

## Memory Lane

Throughout this wee yarn, I have mentioned names of people I have worked with, a lot of whom are now dead. After reading stories written by others or hearing of those who are looking for information about relatives who worked there, I get a sense that all of them, including me, want to share their stories with anyone who will listen.

I have enjoyed wandering down memory lane and hopefully, by putting pen to paper, someone reading may recognise a name and get a glimpse into their relative's working life.

I know that at the very least, my grandchildren will learn a little bit about my working life at The Yard and have an insight into the early life of the man they call “Granda”.

My home in New Zealand is full of memorabilia of The Yard and the Titanic. My daughter-in-law, who lives in Northern Ireland once said to me, “You can take the man out of Belfast - but you can't take Belfast out of the man.”

David Livingstone  
August 2012