

## **11. Work, Industry, Shipping, Archie King's, Fire, Pubs & Shops, Bombs**

I worked at Colmans as a fork lift truck driver and that was marvellous. I enjoyed every minute of my working life there. I also learnt how to shunt - they had their own coal fire station and they used to shunt coal trucks up from the railway sidings. You weren't allowed to smoke in Colmans but you could smoke on the railway site, so you found a brass plaque that said RAILWAY PROPERTY - COLMANS PROPERTY and you stood on the Colmans property and you could smoke to your heart's delight. That was when everyone smoked of course. You used to shunt the coal trucks in and then the empty trucks out - that was how you got your overtime - and then they used to have seed come in to pump into silos, that used to come in enormous trucks, they were like a block of flats. You worked long hours, but you enjoyed it; ten hours was the usual and four hours on Saturdays. Yes, they were long hours and you went home dog-tired, but you enjoyed yourself at work. You see people with long faces now, IT and what d'you call it - people are not happy at work now, not like I was - well, some people might be!

**Tony Grey**

I almost lived in the middle of a scrapyard on Ber Street because Archie King's scrapyard went right round behind the block of shops where I lived and that was some consternation to my mother, because I used to go out in the scrapyard and play. Mother was feared of everything, she would see fear in everything, so you never really knew to distinguish between the serious risks and the non-serious risks and I used to go clambering around on scrap metal and various things which I really shouldn't have done, because I thought, "Oh, she's just muttering again!". There were old cars but a lot of the stuff that did come was stuff that was scrapped after the war and one of the things that used to be there was small tanks and we used to climb in and pretend we were driving them and when the guys used to dismantle them, the turrets turn on large ball bearings, about a one-inch diameter, and we used to scrounge the ball bearings from the guys who worked on the scrapyard and use them as marbles. You'd be the envy of your friends because you had these bright shiny steel things and the others only had these little glass ones.

So you had quite a bit of general scrap and odd crashed aircraft - I used to sit in the cockpit of this Hawker Hunter and think I was flying that and there was a bit of a Hurricane and I used to play in that one, pull a lever and cover myself in hydraulic oil and other such games. But the Hunter that was there - I knew it was a Hunter because I was very much interested in aviation - they'd

taken all the instruments out except for one, which was the G-force measurer, which had broken, so I took that out and went home and mended it and I've still got it to this day. They also used to bring a lot of military stuff that was scrapped, guns with their barrels slit with oxyacetylene things to be scrapped, but I have a feeling a lot of them went somewhere else. Now, I don't know what happened but I think some of them went to places like Egypt, where this stuff that was supposed to have been disabled seemed to have a market elsewhere. I'm not really sure about that - that's one of the things that's still in the mystery times. But that was the dominant thing in the street at the time, because when I used to come back to my dad's shop and even later, when I used to drive and try to park, there would be all lorries queued up to get on the weighbridge. That was one of the things - recycling - there and further down, Warminger's had a big place for recycling waste paper. They were pretty much all on the eastern side, nearest King Street. King's offices were on that side but the actual scrapyards were between us and Notre Dame School.

There was an amusing but rather dangerous incident in the latter years at the scrapyards. Because of limited accommodation downstairs, I used to do my homework and college work in my bedroom, which faced over towards Notre Dame and the back of the scrapyards. There was this big pile of tyres out there. I suddenly realised there was smoke and flames rising from these tyres and it was well alight. I

told my Dad, he called the fire brigade but by the time they got there, this had burnt through very very well, to such a degree that it was affecting what was underneath it. Now, one of the things they used to deliver as part of the scrap after the war was ammunition boxes. Unfortunately, some of the ammunition boxes hadn't been emptied, but King's people, instead of saying to the Admiralty or whatever, "There's some ammunition left here", they just went, "Oh, we'll bury that." Unfortunately, they had buried it underneath this area where these tyres caught fire. So what was happening then, was this stuff was going off. And there was this tracer going up into the sky, and my Dad said, "Right, that's it, get to the road side of the shop, get the brick walls between us and it," but this stuff was exploding into the sky and of course the firemen didn't want to go too close to it either, so by and large this thing burnt itself out, but my god, within the next few days we had all the top brass, there was gold braid everywhere as the top people from the Admiralty and the Army and the RAF were all down to this place investigating what had gone on. But they still carried on trading, so how they got out of that one I really don't know! But you can imagine, it was quite an entertainment to see all these people come up - but it could have been really serious. Fortunately it was against a wall and what went off mostly went upwards rather than sideways.

I used to be very keen on photography when I was a teenager and I used to come down to take pictures by the river, mainly from the Riverside Road

side because the other side was where Reads Flour Mills were, there were the breweries and various other places where they would load straight from the river into the buildings; there was no quayside in parts of it, but the quayside was the other side of the river and the coasters used to come up and bring grain and coal, well all sorts of things used to come up. A lot of them came to Colmans bringing timber, because Colmans used to make all their own packing cases. Colmans was a major employer in the area; Laurence Scott employed 2,000-odd people in Norwich; Boulton & Paul, the breweries were here. My mother, grandfather and uncle all worked for Colmans at various times. Many of those industries, in particular Colmans and Rowntrees, were very labour-intensive in those days, the chocolate factories and food industries were very labour-intensive, and they did a lot more than sell. Colmans virtually did everything; my grandfather told me about the deal yard, which was on the opposite side of the river at Trowse, where they used to have all the deals - the wood - delivered for them to make their packing cases that they then used to use for exporting mustard and all the other products overseas.

My mother worked at one point in Colmans in the place that made the tins for the mustard. Modern companies just don't do this - they outsource everything nowadays. Colmans were almost self-sufficient; they even had their own generating station. In fact, when electricity came in

and they needed it for lighting, William Harding Scott did some installations for Colmans to provide them with generators and things and he later formed Laurence Scott, later Laurence Scott & Electromotors. That was just around the corner and all those industries developed in the Carrow Road/King Street area. In fact it hadn't been for Colmans, Laurence Scott wouldn't have ever happened. They did employ a large number of people in those industries at that time and when you used to come down to work, the bit of King Street that comes down from Bracondale and sweeps over Carrow Bridge - which used to open frequently in those days, because the port was still in use - what used to come down Bracondale and queue all over that bridge would be bicycles. Very few people came to work in cars in those days. Bicycles were the major traffic that came through that area. Go down there now, you might see a bike, but in those days most people did that and they used to come whizzing down from Bracondale and King Street because of course that was a bit downhill, but you had to turn right over the bridge.

And then there was Carrow Hill. When I was young I did a sandwich course at Laurence Scott's, where you spend six months in a factory and six months at college for four years, working in all different departments, and in my first year I did my bit at college and went back and worked in some of the departments and one of the old guys in the winding shop, he said, "I saw you, riding your bike up Carrow Hill - you'll

stretch your chain, boy!" He used to push his up, you see. And of course he was right, absolutely right. The stupidity of youth and thinking, "Oh, I can pedal up here!" and of course it did stretch the chain on the bike and I had to put a new one on. So I used to walk up in the end. It's a very steep hill but you know, when you're young, you like to think you're fit and able!

I used to take photographs and just watch the port in operation, because the coasters used to deliver to Colmans, Reads and so on. There was the occasional sailing barge, even in my day. The size of the vessels that could come up to the city was dictated by the width of the turning bay, which is just at the back of Dragon Hall. That bit was made wider for the ships to turn round because otherwise they'd have had to go all the way back to Yarmouth in reverse, which wouldn't have been very popular! They were biggish powered vessels and the captains were skilled at manoeuvring them round, but some crew would push them off and there were fenders at the sides of the river there so if they didn't get it quite right it bounced off. It seemed to be a case of putting the bow at this end against something and use the engines to push the back 'round. We used to stand and watch them. Beyond Foundry Bridge you can't go any further than that with a large vessel because the bridge doesn't lift, so that was the limit of navigation of any vessels that were any height at all. But of course, previous to that, when the wherries worked the river, they could lower the mast and they

used to go up to the end up near the bottom of Gas Hill and right into the city almost, up to Quayside and the Duke Street and Fishergate area. My wife's heritage is very much there; her grandfather and great grandfather were both wherrymen.

#### **Ray Hannent**

In the war years of course King Street was very badly bombed. In 1941 I was at City of Norwich school, playing cricket, when a Dornier 217 flew over at low level and we didn't recognise it as a German aeroplane until it dropped bombs. Carrow Works was bombed and the girls leaving off from Carrow were trying to walk as they normally would up towards Ber Street when they were machine-gunned and a number were killed. Some of the bullet holes are still visible on the wall of a small road up towards Ber Street. During the April 1942 blitz - the Baedeker raids - it was totally indiscriminate bombing. Follow the river from Yarmouth to Norwich and then just drop your bombs and get the hell out of it. That is why the environs of King Street did get quite a packet.

#### **Denis Kirkham**

In the 1960s, starting off at the Prince of Wales Road end of King Street, you had the Mann Egerton showroom on the corner, then the road that goes round the back of the Nags Head pub - the landlord was Cecil Smee in the 1960s, then a garage which was Mann Egerton's Ford department, then a coffee bar called the Mohamba [?] coffee bar, then opposite that a pub called the Crown, with a passageway

that went through to Studio 4. Cross Rose Lane and there was a cafe on the left run by an Indian gentleman. Further down you had the Lads' Club, St. John's Ambulance, then a fish merchants just before the corner of Mountergate. Then a little sweet shop. The opposite side was Watsons Builders who used to do all the maintenance in Morgan's Brewery. Then you came to Howard House which is where the brewery offices were. Then some big iron gates where you went through to the yard where the coopers were, who made the beer barrels. Howard House needed a few jobs doing to it even then. Opposite Morgan's yard was the big tower with the brewery vats in, the boilerhouse next to that, and Watney's had their own well where they drew their own water from there.

On the corner of St. Anne's Lane was the Cellar House pub, which was the rest room of the brewery. You went down St. Anne's Lane to the malthouse for the brewery and round the back to a lot of terraced houses, mainly occupied by people who worked at the brewery. Synagogue Street ran round the back of the brewery, opposite the Co-op Shoe Factory on Mountergate. On the left hand side of St. Anne's Lane were the big gates for the loading area for Coca-Cola. From the Dragon Hall building, I can remember the old pub, the Barge. There was a butcher's, a couple of houses then Watts the furniture people, then a chap named B.B. Adams, an ex-market trader, later Bennetts Electrical. Opposite that was Plumstead Engineering. Truman's Brewery also

had a yard in King Street, just before Wensum Lodge. Then Youngs & Crawshay Brewery, you can still see the old walls there. Across the road was Yallop's shop, Mick Yallop, a little general-cum-grocery shop. There were several shops down there, not big flashy shops, front room of someone's house, sort of thing. They came down when Rouen Road came through.

I remember the old Ferry Boat pub, the lady's name there was Warminger, that was another pub we used to deliver to. There were no drink-driving rules then. When we came back, we were allowed to have a couple of pints in the Cellar House pub before we went home. Now the breweries are all "dry" and you can't do that, but I have seen some rare sights in my time with draymen coming back and trying to unload and they'd been drinking all day. They could always get a drink at a pub; the landlord would say "Well boys do you want a drink or a cup of coffee?" and of course they'd always say beer. Don't get me wrong - they were big boys and they could drink a lot, they had their fair share.

**Robert Kent**