MEN'S LIVES

In the West End of Newcastle



St James' Heritage and Environment Group

in partnership with

West Newcastle Picture History Collection



Local People: Local Heroes





MEN'S LIVES

In the West End of Newcastle

This book is the outcome of the *Men's Lives* project which worked with local residents in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne to explore and celebrate the significance of the area's industrial history and the skills of its residents, and to involve older men in recording their memories of work and life.

The project was run by a volunteer-run community organisation, St James' Heritage & Environment Group, and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund through its *All Our Stories programme*.

Acknowledgements

Men's Lives would not have been possible without the participation of the men who were willing to share their experiences and memories. Particular thanks are due to those whose stories appear in this book, and also countless other people who contributed their stories or supported the project in other ways but do not feature here.

West Newcastle Picture History Collection supported the project throughout with characteristic generosity, preparing slide shows and offering access to their collection as well as providing many of the images which illustrate this book.

The Heritage Lottery Fund supported the project financially including funding the printing of this book. Thanks are also due to Newcastle City Council's *Make Your Mark* programme which supported earlier work from which this project developed.

Stories and Images

The individual stories in this book are based on interviews recorded as part of the Men's Lives project, and include edited verbatim extracts from those interviews.

Unless otherwise indicated, the photographs in the first part of the book came from West Newcastle Picture History Collection and the images illustrating the men's stories came from those individuals' own private collections.

St James' Heritage and Environment Group

St James' Heritage and Environment Group is an independent voluntary organisation originally set up in 2010 to support the restoration and improvement of St James' Church graveyard and building and to develop these as resources for people of all ages to explore and celebrate the history of the west end of Newcastle. The Group now runs a varied programme of exhibitions, publications, events and activities. *Men's Lives* is one of a series of local history publications under the theme of "Local People: Local Heroes".

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Design by Jack Upton

ISBN 978-0-9929183-0-9

Published by St James' Heritage and Environment Group, 2014

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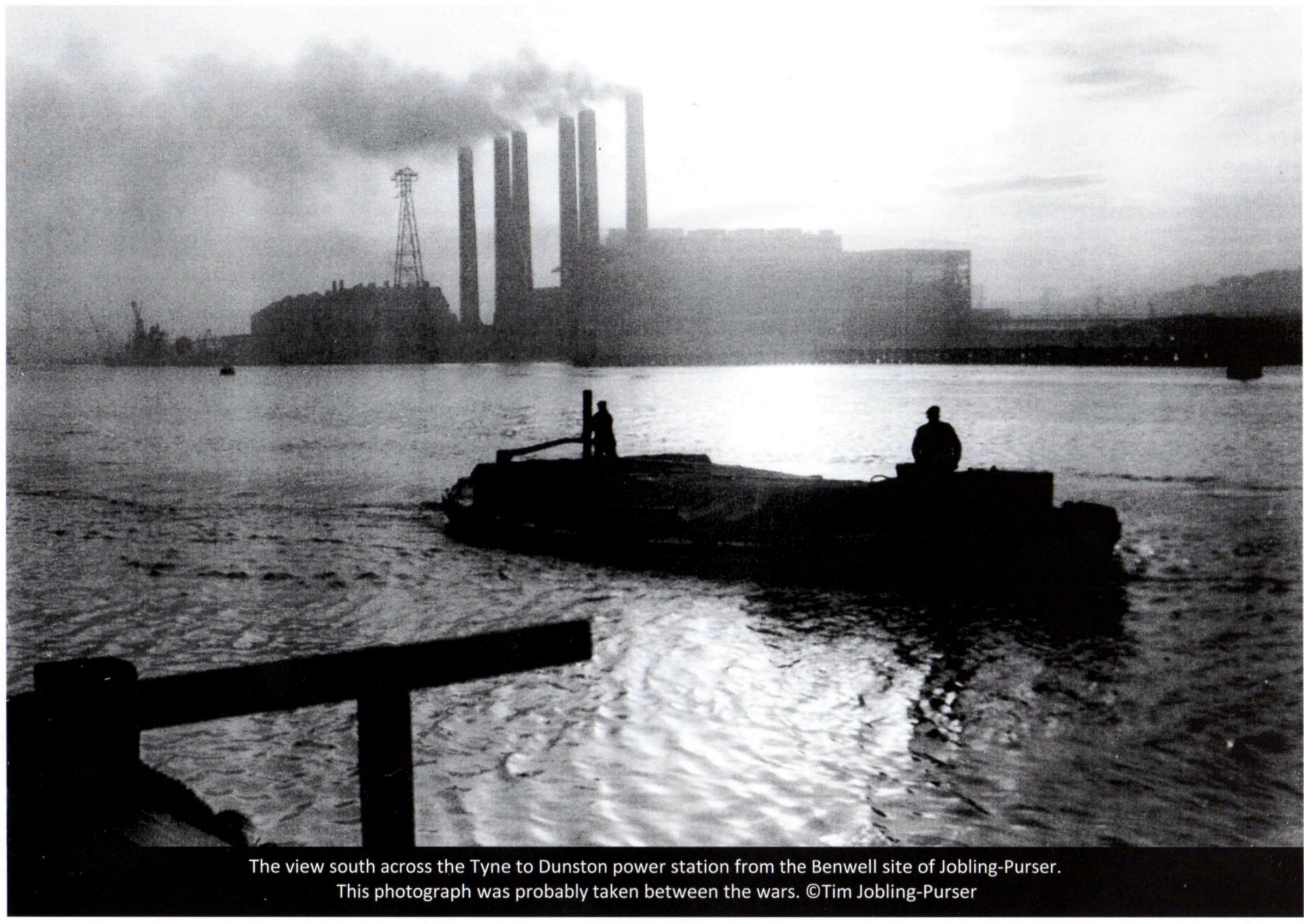
Introduction: West Newcastle in growth and decline

By the middle of the 19th century when Armstrong opened his engineering works at Elswick, the west end of Newcastle already had a long industrial history. Coal had been mined for at least 500 years, and by the beginning of the 19th century there were pits throughout the area employing hundreds of workers. Although much of the riverside area was still undeveloped, a range of manufacturing activities such as glass, iron, lead and paper manufacture had already grown up there, attracted by the ready availability of coal and access to the river.

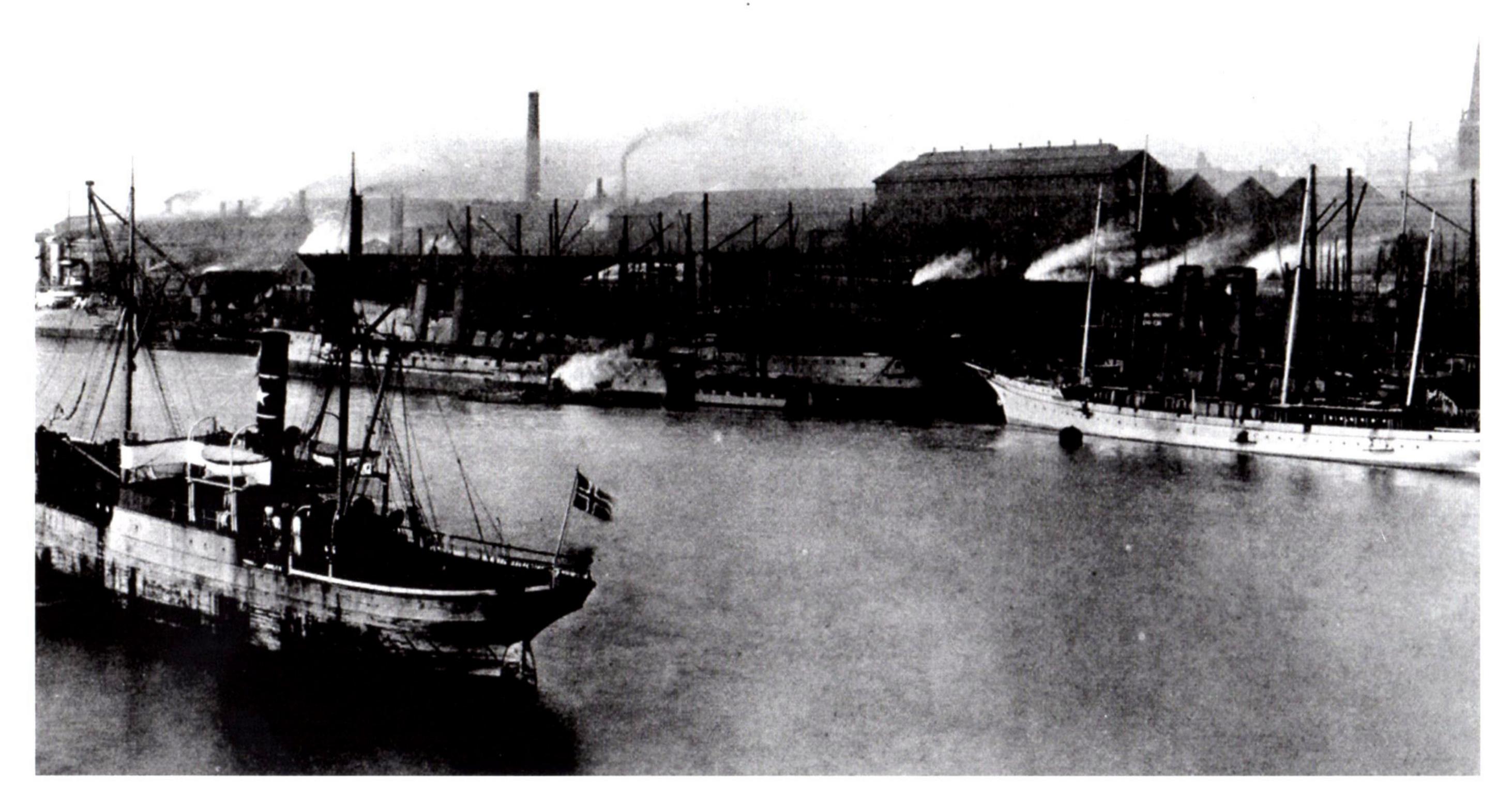
The second half of the 19th century was a period of major industrial development in Britain, led by the dramatic growth of the iron, steel and heavy engineering industries. Tyneside was at the forefront of these developments, and West Newcastle, home to companies such as Armstrong's, became an area of strategic importance in the national and even the global economy. The growing industries needed workers. Armstrong's alone employed some 13,000 people by the beginning of the 20th century. Within a hundred years, Elswick and Benwell had lost their rural character and become densely populated urban areas housing around 80,000 people.

By the time Armstrong's second works was built at Scotswood in 1899, the riverside was almost completely filled with different industries. A century later, almost all of these had disappeared. During the 20th century the industries of the west end experienced a series of booms and slumps set against a long-term trend of decline. The 1970s marked the start of a particularly disastrous period for the local economy, with a number of major closures such as Richardson's leatherworks in 1971, Adamsez in 1975, and Vickers (formerly Armstrong's) Scotswood works in 1979.

Of course the boom in jobs during the later 19th and early 20th centuries was not confined to the west end of Newcastle. Major industrial development also took place in the east end, notably based on the growth of shipbuilding and heavy engineering, whilst a huge growth of commercial activity in the city centre led to a rapid expansion of white-collar and service jobs.



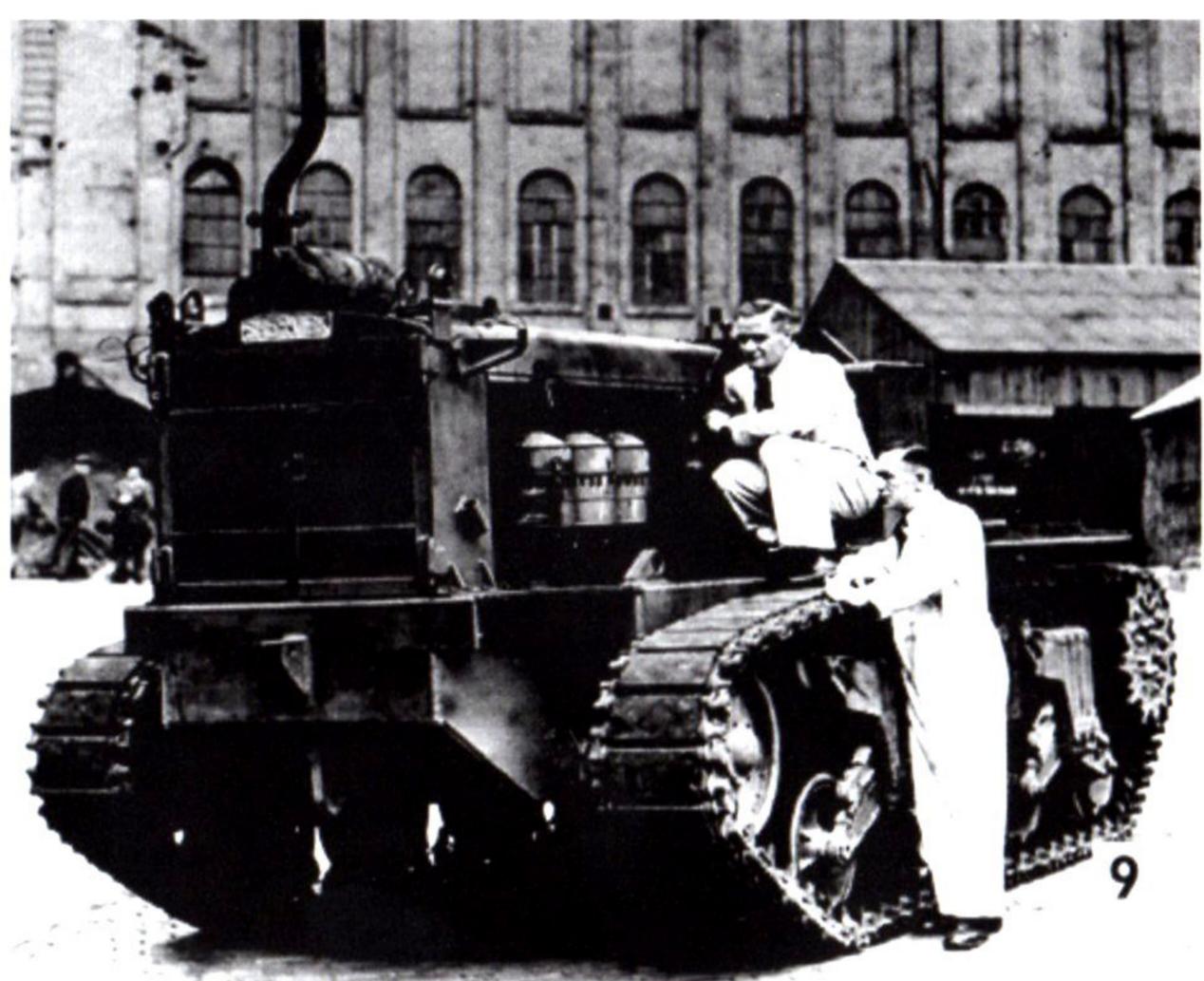
West End Workplaces



When Armstrong first set up his factory in 1847 to manufacture hydraulic cranes, it occupied five and a half acres. It grew to cover more than 70 acres of the West Newcastle riverside. One of the most significant developments was the extension of the works in the 1880s, following amalgamation with the shipbuilding firm of Mitchell's, which gave it the capacity to build and equip an entire warship from raw material to finished product. Armstrong's became the most successful exporter of warships in the world.

Armstrong's Elswick works was at one time the biggest employer in Newcastle, employing as many as 13,000 people. The all-time peak was during the First World War when more than 20,000 people worked for Armstrong's in the west end.











"It was a lot of big buildings. They were called shops. Most of them were single decker but they had to be tall because they had big cranes in them. There was one in particular which was called 33 shop on the bottom and 39 shop on the top. And in the bottom end that was where they made the cartridge cases for the little guns, then upstairs was what they called the fuse department where they used to make the fuses.

The ones along the riverside were specifically designed for making the gun mountings. Those shops were specially made with sliding roofs, and when they made the gun they used to put the big crane in - you know the big hydraulic crane - they used to pick them up and put them on the barges and often they used to take them down to Vickers naval yard to be put on the ships. And then at the very far end, at the Park Road end, there was a steel foundry where they did a lot of the steel castings. At the west end there was the brass department where they made brass castings and also the strip to make the cartridge cases.

The other specialist shop was 13 shop. When you make these big guns, the barrels aren't in one piece, they are made in three bits, and what they do is they make an outer skin and they make another one to fit inside, but it is a neat fit so what they do is they have to heat the outer rim up to expand it, drop the middle one in and let it cool down. To do that they had to heat them vertically otherwise they'd have been all bent, and this 13 shop had a great deep pit -65 feet deep, I believe - and they had to have a great tall shop because they had to get the barrel lifted up and drop it down, so it was very distinctive, a very big high shop. This was roughly opposite where St Stephen's Church is.

And of course there was a complete road system around. And they certainly would use the river for things that were too big to move conveniently by road. They would put them on a barge and take them along the river. Certainly the gun mountings they would have to go by river - couldn't move them any other way, they were too big. But they had a railway line came into the works. The railway line went along just below Scotswood Road, and there was a link into the works both here and at Scotswood end as well, and a lot of stuff would go by rail.

Obviously it was noisy. It was just clanging metal and things like that, the noise of the electric motors and the machines. The shop next door to us at the lab was called the forge. That made quite a bit of noise. In the forge you heat the thing up and whop it into shape, you could hear the bang."

Fred Millican: Description of Vickers-Armstrong's Elswick works in the 1950s.

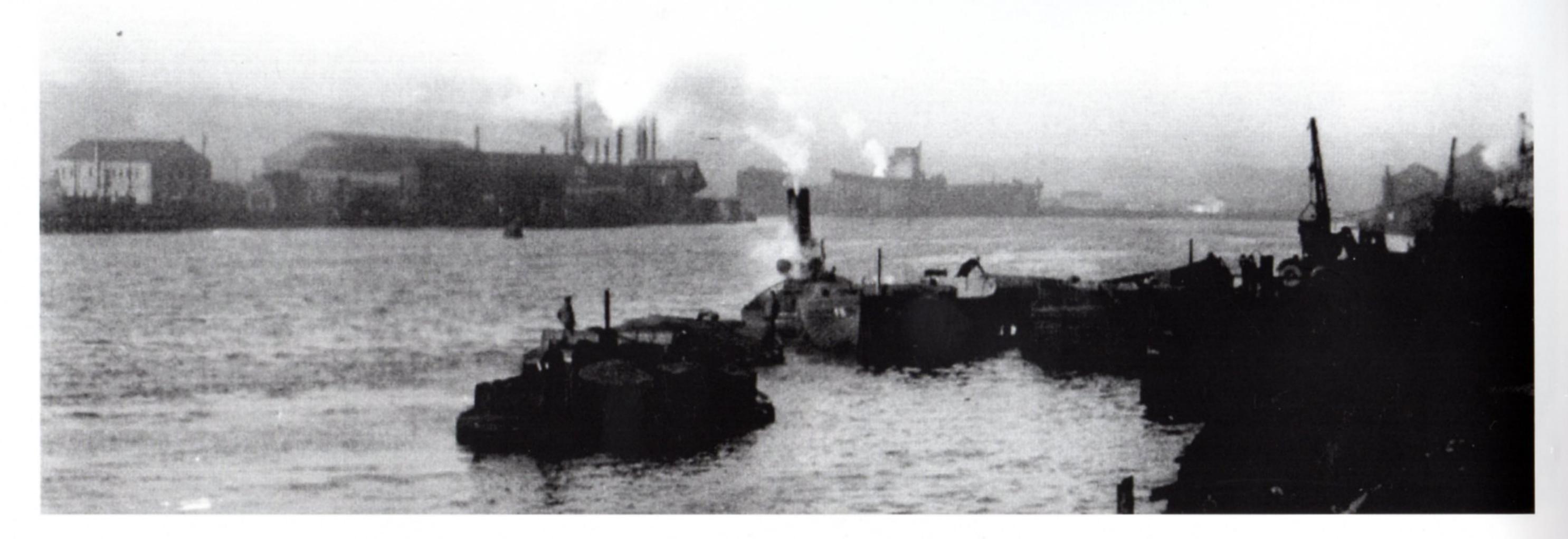
Pictures as follows (from top to bottom, left to right):

- -The shipyard at Armstrong's Elswick works, c1910
- -Built in 1847, "The Chapel" was the original machine shop of Armstrong's works
- -Shervik tractor, c1948
- -Blast furnaces at Elswick works, c1900
- -The hydraulic crane at the Elswick works, c1930
- -Pouring steel casting, c1955

The company of Jobling-Purser moved from the east end to a site which had previously been part of the Vickers-Armstrong Elswick works. Originally in the business of importing organic phosphate to be sold as fertiliser, the company later diversified into bitumen manufacture and road-building. Still a family business today, Jobling-Purser is one of the few traditional industries remaining on the West Newcastle riverside. These photographs probably date from the interwar years, and show workers loading barges at the works. ©Tim Jobling-Purser



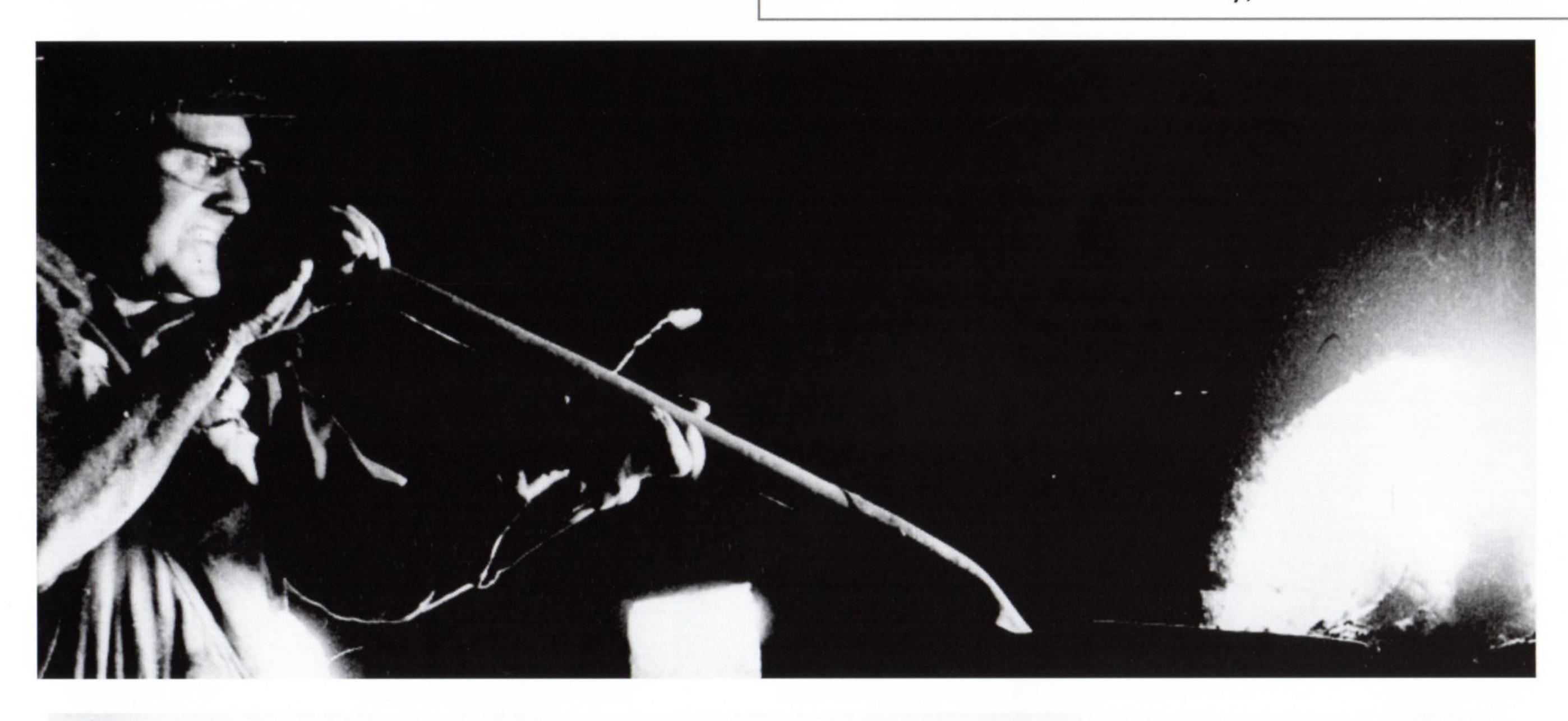


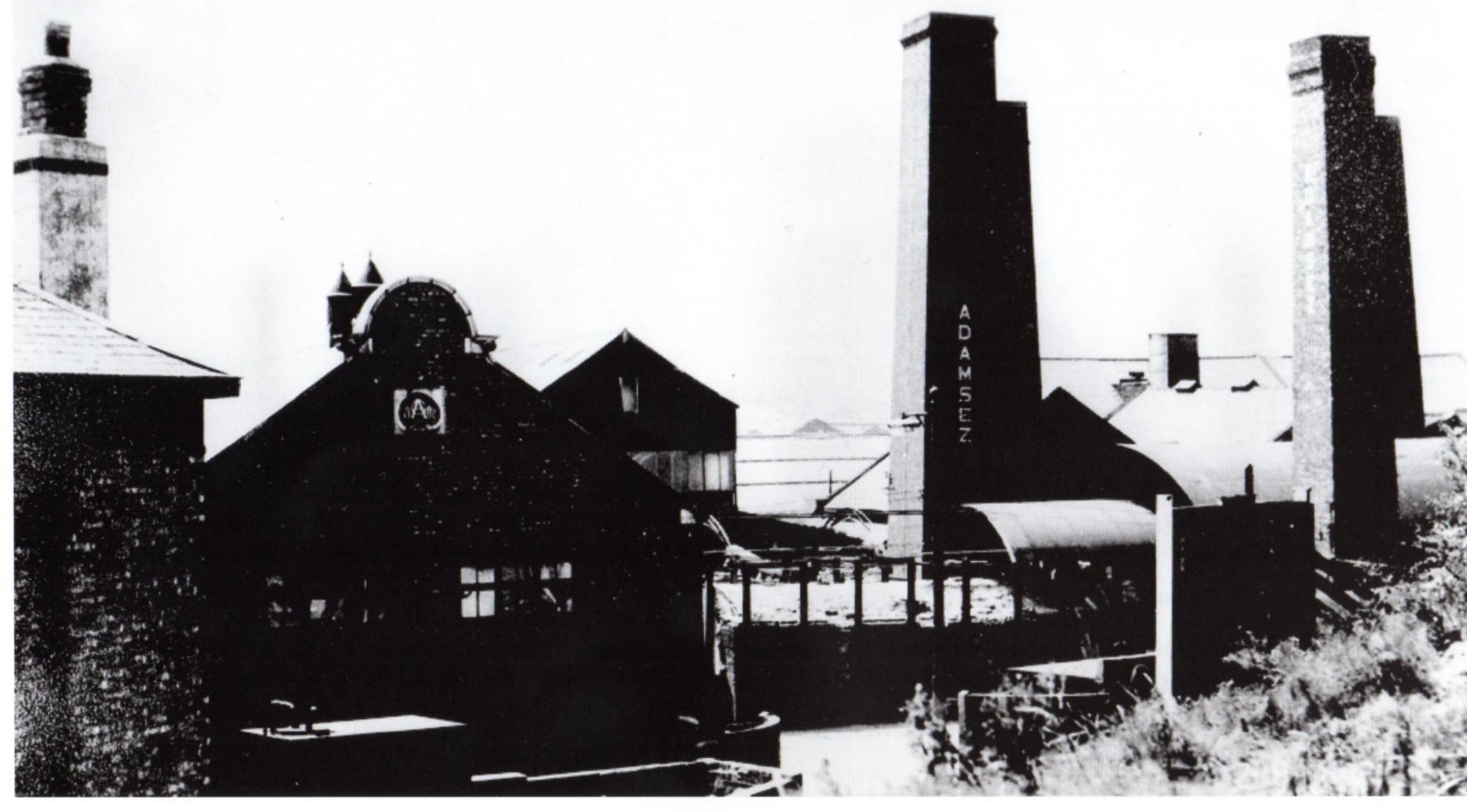




Adamsez was set up in the 1880s in Yorkshire by the two Adams brothers to make sanitary ware and sewage equipment. In 1903 the firm took over a fireclay works in Scotswood and moved its sanitary ware production to a nearby site. It continued to manufacture here for the next 70 years despite becoming increasingly uncompetitive. Job numbers fell drastically over time, however, until by 1975, when the factory finally closed, only 170 workers were employed there.

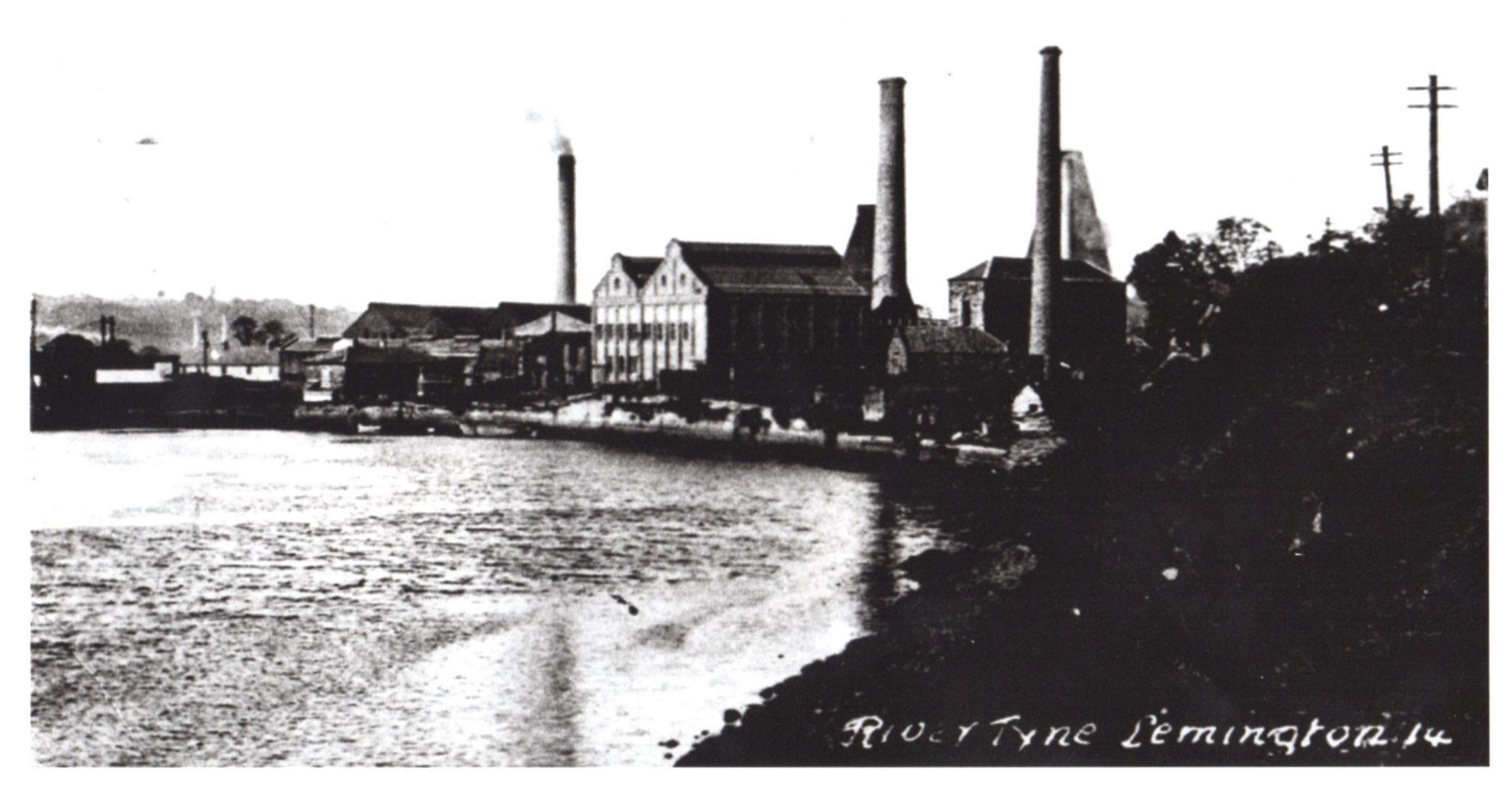
The photograph at the bottom of the page shows Adamsez factory in Scotswood, c1960. The company used the traditional fireclay material to make sanitary ware, and the top image depicts a miner at Adamsez Scotswood fireclay mine, c1960. The centre image is of a furnaceman at the factory, c1950.



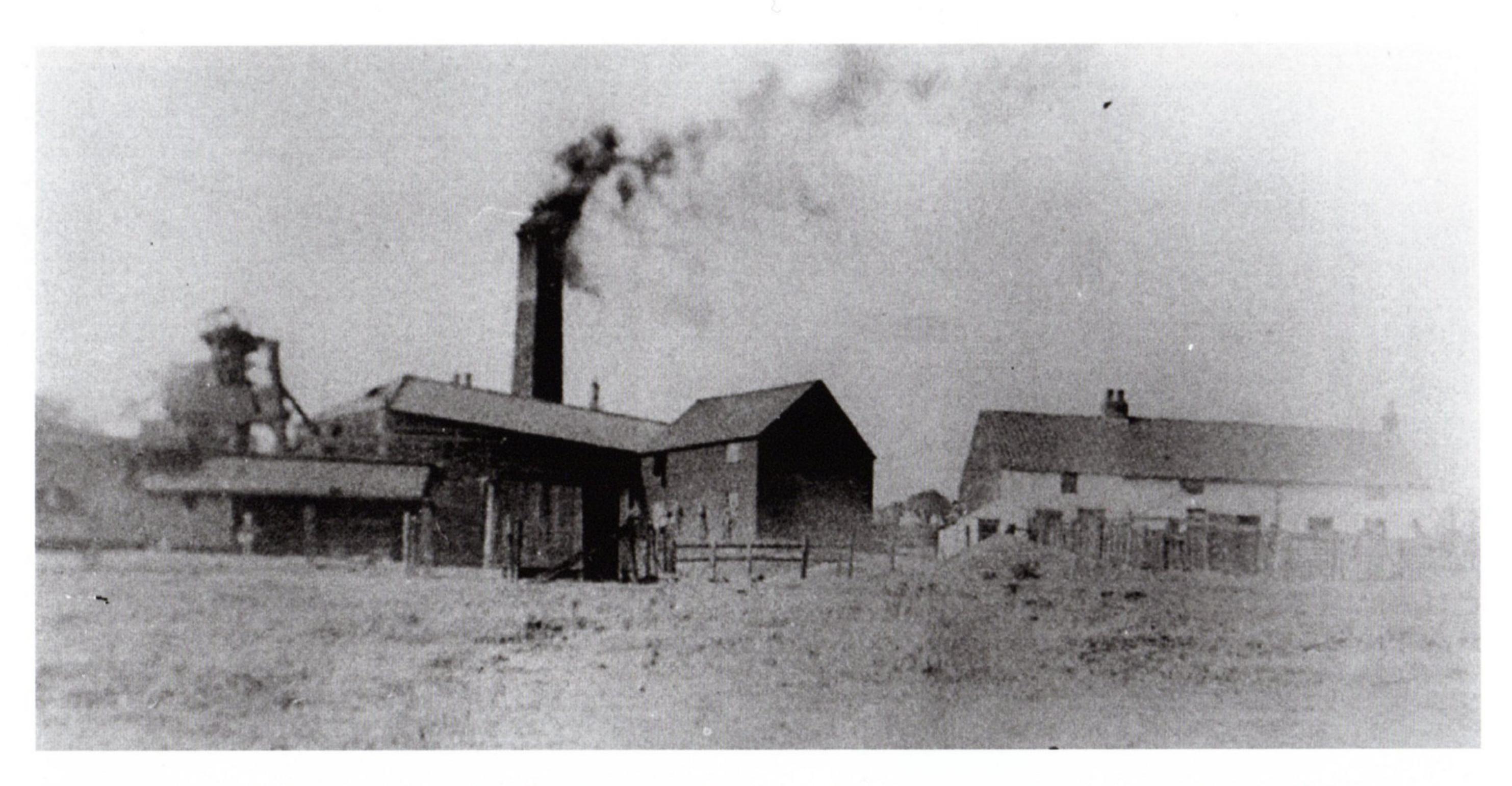


Below: Lemington Glassworks, established in 1784, pictured at the end of the 19th century. It had a succession of different owners over the years, including Sowerby & Sons who developed mass production of glassware on Tyneside during the 19th century. Lemington glassworks closed in 1997 but the iconic cone, which is one of only four such glass cones to survive in the UK, still stands on the site





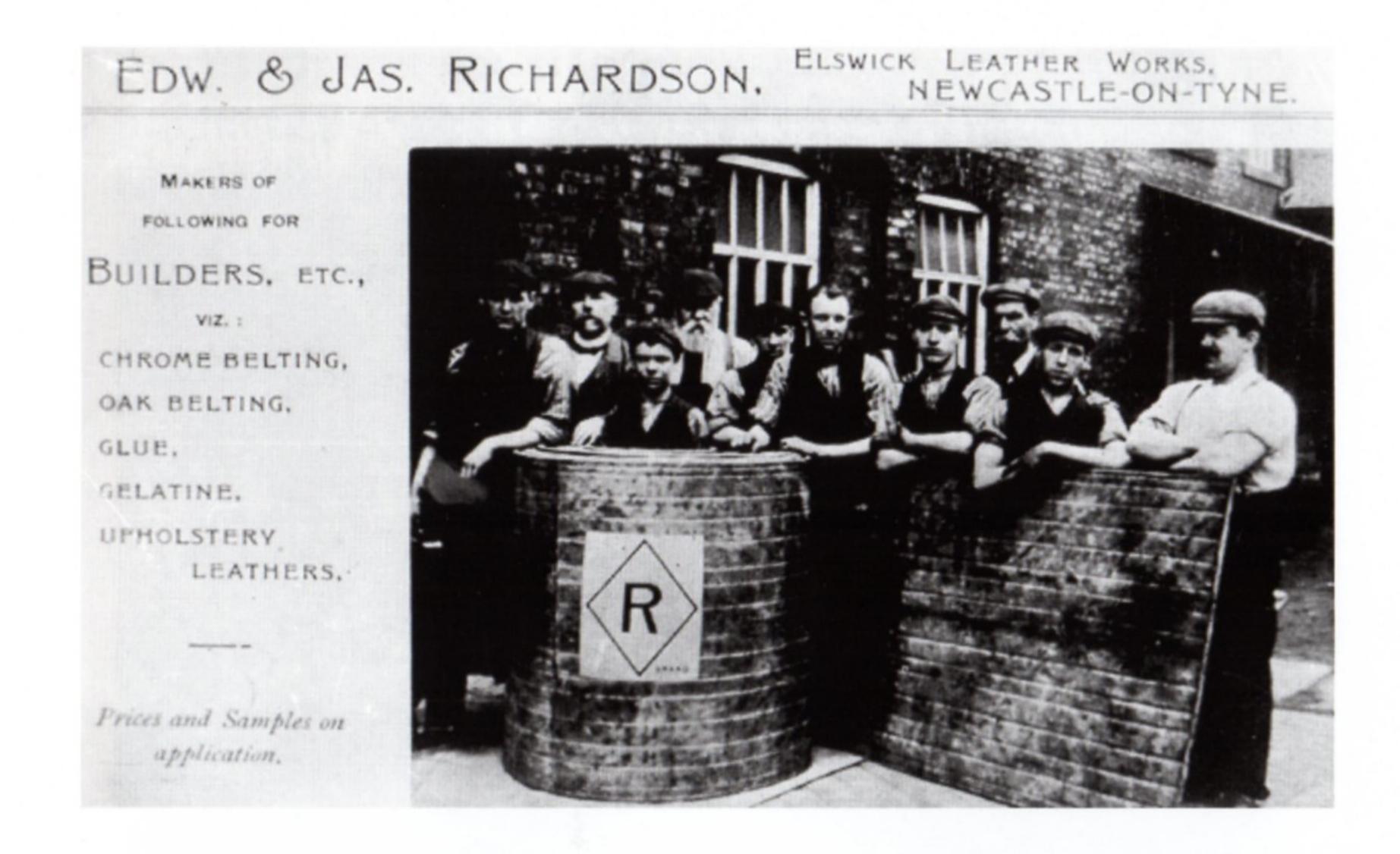
Above: Lemington iron works, glassworks and power station, c1905. The old Tyne Iron Works, established in the 1790s, was the first fully integrated iron works in the north east. After it closed, part of the site was used for the Lemington Power Station built by Newcastle and District Electric Lighting Company in 1903. Remnants of these old industries, such as parts of coke ovens, are still to be found on the site.



Above: Delaval Colliery, pictured in 1905. One of the area's many coalmines, it was situated below Armstrong Road on the east side of Delaval Road which at that time continued south almost to the river.



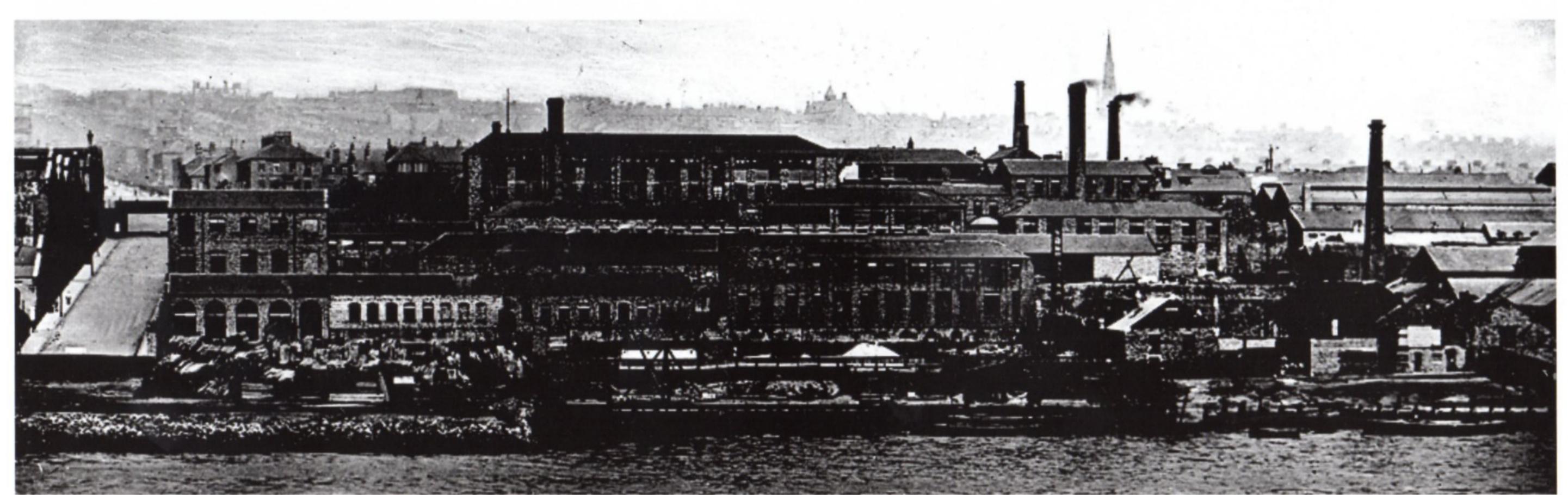
This quarry on Benwell Lane opposite where St James' Church still stands today was one of several stone quarries operating in Benwell and Elswick in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Pictured here c1912.







Richardson's leather works at Elswick opened in 1863. It operated here for more than a hundred years, remaining a family firm for most of this period. The advert (top left) dates from c1910. The picture above shows leather finishers at work, c1898. Leather tanning was an old-fashioned industry, and many of the manufacturing processes at Richardson's remained essentially unchanged for a century. Top right shows workers in the tanning shop c1947. The leather works occupied a large site on the riverside, pictured below from the south, c1930.





The 20th century saw a growth in jobs in the service sector as well as in manufacturing industry.

Denton Road Co-op (above), c1920. There used to be dozens of Co-op shops across the west end, many of them selling a variety of produce from different departments. Before the advent of pre-packaging and self-service, many people would be employed to weigh and pack goods and serve customers.

Wingrove tram depot (below), c1904. The development of public transport was another growth area





Armstrong opened a second engineering works at Scotswood in 1899. The period following the Second World War saw employment and production decline dramatically at the Scotswood works until it was finally closed altogether in 1979. Just three years later the bigger Elswick works closed and production was transferred to the old Scotswood site with a fraction of the previous workforce.

Pictured below: No 12 Shop at the Vickers-Armstrong Scotswood works, c1950. Pictured above: apprentices at Armstrong's works, c1863.





As well as coal mining itself, there were various other local jobs linked to the coal industry.

Pictured above is the area known as Paradise, viewed from the south bank of the Tyne, showing Benwell fire brick works. Next to this is Paradise Pit and the coal staithes which served other local pits via a waggonway which ran through St James' graveyard and down Atkinson Road. Image c1880, © Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.

Below: members of the regional Mines Fire and Rescue Service pictured outside their base in Scotswood Road, probably in the early 1940s. Soon after this the service moved to Benwell Towers. ©Maureen Hope.



Stan Brown

Stan Brown was born in 1923 in Albert Place in Elswick.

Stan's father Archie Brown worked at Vickers Scotswood factory as a moulder, but this was during the Depression and the work was not regular. For a time he worked in a steel mill in Stockton, living in lodgings during the week and cycling home each weekend to see his family. Between jobs, the family had to resort to the infamous Means Test in order to survive.

"Those days there used to be a Means Test man used to come around and inspect your house. And we used to have a piano, and the Means Test man says, 'whose is that?' And he says 'It's not mine, it's my brother's', and he says, 'where's your brother?' 'He's

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Stan pictured with his older brother Gilbert, outside their home in Grove Street, Elswick.

working in Shildon', and he says 'Well, either your brother takes that away or you'll have to get rid of it'. And he had to get rid of it because he wouldn't have given any money. That helped them to get a little bit of Something to keep the family on."



The family had to move house several times, piling their belongings into a handcart which they hired for sixpence from a place on Churchill Street, behind Scotswood Road.

Stan left school at 14, and started work for a furniture company on the West Road.

This was heavy work, delivering parcels on foot, with the help of a barrow for the larger items. In 1938, at the age of 16, he moved to Vickers Armstrong's shipyard as an apprentice caulker.

"There was no CVs or whatever, you just went into a shipyard"

"The shipyards were going like wildfire in them days. You see, you used to just go to these places and you got started. There was no CVs or whatever, you just went into a shipyard. You knew you were going into a hard thing, like. They were just picking up for the war then. In fact, when I started in the shipyard, they were building the King George V battleship. There was only a keel plate laid when I went there. That's the first view I got of the shipyards was this great big flat steel thing, and I said to the lad, 'what's that?' And he said, 'that's the King George V'."

Stan worked in the shipyard for over 40 years until retirement. During this time he helped to build all types of naval vessels, including cruisers, destroyers, aircraft carriers, landing craft and submarines. He worked on the Ark Royal among others.

"You were always there at the launches. 'I built that, you know'. That was one of the best parts. When the ship went off, you felt a little bit of pride. But the number of ships I've been on, you just forget it. I had my life out of it and that was forty years"

"The caulker - he stopped ships sinking"

"There was joiners, shipwrights, driller, caulkers, burners, welders - you name it, they were all in there. In fact there was even a saw mill in there for cutting all the different shapes of wood.

When they built the ships in those days, they were built in long plates, and they were lapped on to each other to make the shape of the ship. Now these plates were all riveted together. They were full of holes, hundreds of holes, thousands in fact. And once the rivets were put in and these plates were put

together, the ship took its shape. And we used to caulk the edge of that plate where they met each other, to stop water getting in. We caulked these edges and then they filled these tanks with water where you had caulked, and if it came out then you stopped it leaking. That was the job it was. It was a pneumatic tool I had. It was worked by compressed air. You were forcing metal against metal, steel against steel. You had to do this or you wouldn't have had any ships!"

"It was a dangerous place"

"Safety only came in as you got more modern. You didn't get a hard hat or nothing. You see the photos and they've just got a cap on, they just had their own working clothes. You didn't even get boots or anything. My ears are gone because I was using the pneumatic machine. It was a crescendo of noise, nothing else. And you didn't get hearing aids or anything like that in them days, you know. We used to push cotton wool in our ears, and it was a bad thing to do really, but we used to do that just to eliminate the noise. I used to work on a pneumatic machine and that tool that used to cut the steel used to get red hot, and they used to give you one glove - and that was the one for the left hand! It's funny when



you think of it, but that's the way it was in those days - rough and ready. You were known as rough and ready workers. But it was a living, put it that way. People used to look down on the likes of shipyard workers, but the point is you had to get dirty to get the job done. It was a dirty job."

"It was that or you didn't live"

"You were on piece work. I've seen me go up onto the deck above and get an odd piece of flat wood and stick it over the part where I was going to work below. You didn't worry about the weather nor nowt else, you just got on and you knew you had to make that tuppence a yard or fourpence a yard. That's the way it was. I didn't like the winter but I didn't like the summer neither. When the steel's getting hot, when the sun's burning on it and it's 90 degrees, you come out like a wet rag.

I worked on submarines as well. They were terrible. It was just a tube, that's all they were. They were all very awkward things to work on, because they used to have a double shell on them, and you had to work in-between them making them water-tight and all this. I think I must have been mad, but you did it and it was that or you didn't live - or your family didn't live."

Albert Purvis

Albert Purvis was born in Charlotte Street, Elswick, in 1931. From here he was evacuated twice during the war, returning to complete his education at Atkinson Road Junior Technical School.

"We went from the coal yards down in Railway Street. The train was absolutely filthy, that was how I remember it - real old, old carriages. We all went to the church hall, lined up against the wall, and local people came and said 'I'll have that one, I'll have that one', and away we all went to different places. The funniest memory I had was when my mam sent for me to come back from Carlisle. I came down in the train by myself and I knew there was a war on and we were fighting the Germans, and I really honestly remember I thought we would see German and British troops fighting outside the station."

Albert Purvis pictured in 2014 at Denton Burn Library

"Work was fairly easy to come by then as apprentices"

Leaving school at 15, Albert went to the new apprentice training school at Vickers. He had also been accepted as an apprentice at Parsons and the Gas Board but chose Vickers mainly because it was just along the road from his home.

"They had just started the apprentice training school and I was in the second batch in the apprentice training school which was just above 29 shop in the middle of Scotswood Road, not far from Gluehouse Lane. You didn't start your apprenticeship until 16, so I spent six months in the apprentice training school. We were building big huge presses, bigger than a house, to press out motor car bodies and parts. And then I was transferred into the workshops, and I was sent to Scotswood works in 15 shop. 15 shop was probably the biggest machine shop on Tyneside. It was about a quarter of a mile long, absolutely jam-packed with machines. How there wasn't more accidents I don't know, because you could hardly turn around in it because of the machines - there was hundreds of them, and a lot were belt-drive. It was an environment that wouldn't be put up with today."

"The turner operates a lathe with the spinning truck and metal in it, cutting it to various shapes, and the fitter is the guy who gets all the bits and he assembles them"

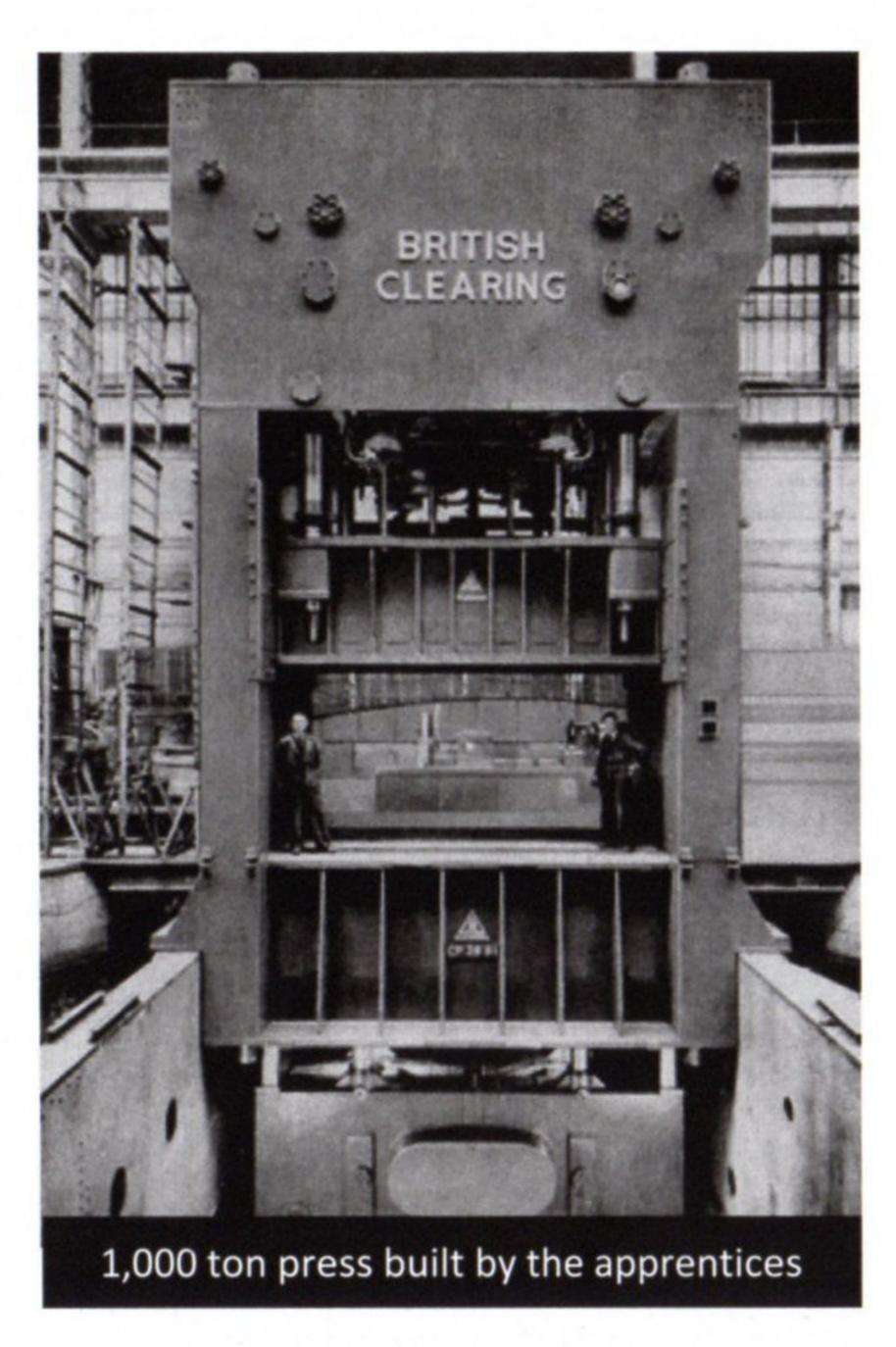
Albert finished his apprenticeship as a fitter and turner at the age of 21 after spells in the armaments drawing office at the Elswick works and the jigging tool offices at Elswick and later at Scotswood. He remained at Vickers Scotswood, progressing through various jobs until he became machine shop manager, until the works closed in 1979. Jobs were not easy to come by in 1979, and Albert spent a year working in India and a further period out of work back in England before returning to work at Vickers once more.

"Vickers, they were by that time primarily building tanks at Elswick. They had massive orders for the Shah of Persia for instance. And there was a lot of adverts in the paper for various jobs. I thought, I can do one of them, any one of them. And I applied and I never got an answer. So I said, I'm going to burn my boats, and I wrote a letter telling them what I thought of them. I was asked to go for an interview about a couple of weeks later. I started back at Elswick actually and we were there for about six months before they transferred all to Scotswood. And I was there until I retired.

When I got to Elswick, they had quite a few NC (numerically controlled) machines and a number of CNC (computerised numerically controlled) machines. While I had been unemployed, I had started on a course at the Poly about computers, and it stood me in good stead. The production engineering department were using computers a lot so I got to start back there. And I finished up actually in charge of the jigging tools, which was back to my old job, and I was there until I retired."

"There was an awful lot of skills lost on the shop floor"

"A number of the lads that I had working for me doing programmes for the machines, when they were doing the programmes for the machines, they would type in what speed the spindles would turn at, how fast the tables would move, how many teeth in the cutter, etc etc - they would have that all calculated so that then the machinist didn't make any decisions. In the old days the lad on the lathe, he would decide what machine tool he would use, he would decide how fast he would cut it at, and decide what materials he would need. So a lot of these skills - knowing like the load on the tooth of a cutter - depending what material you were using you had to be careful about what speeds you used - but the programmer did all that for them. While I was there we bought some very big machines that they could cut a whole tank body on."

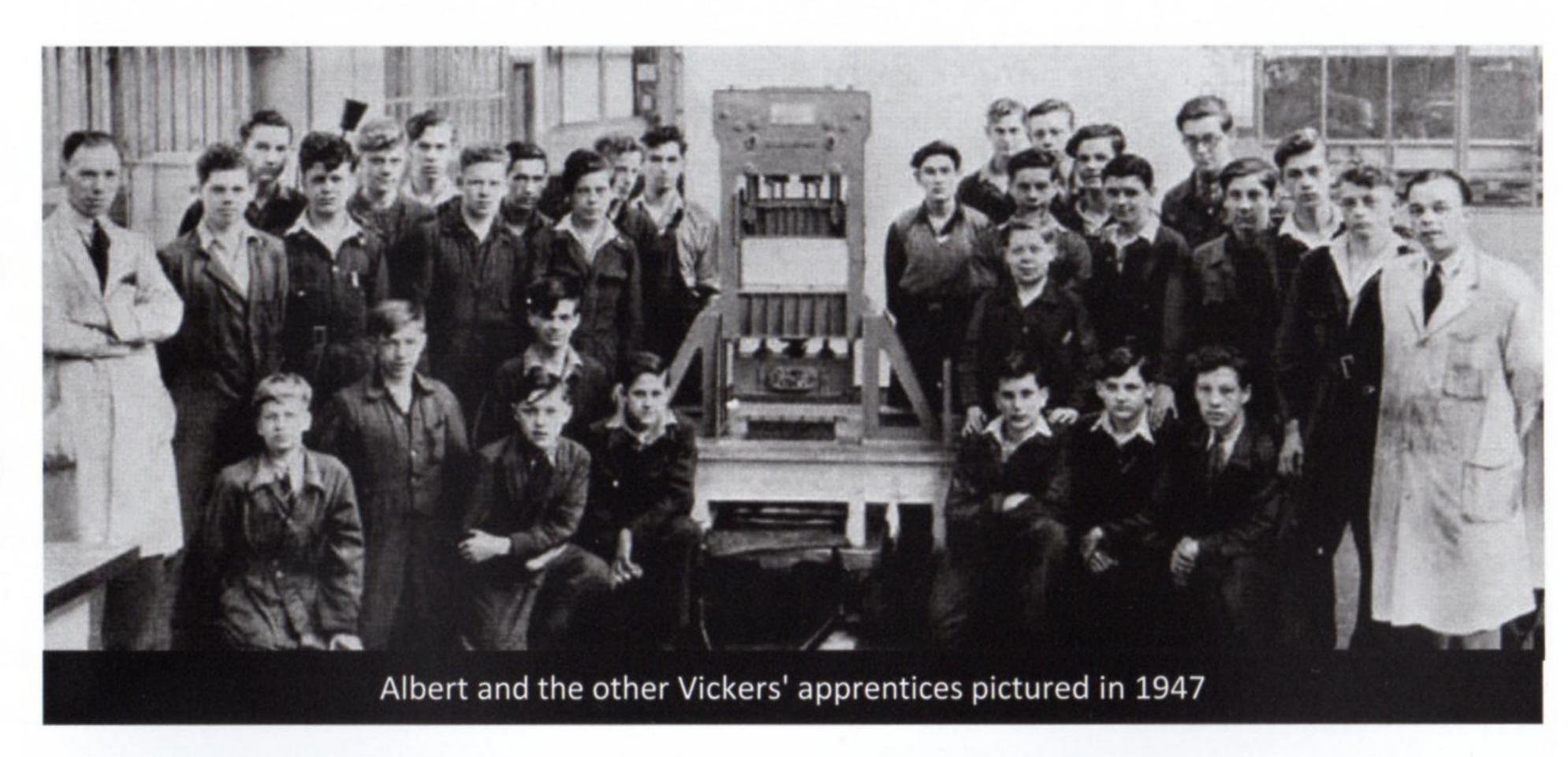


"I just think it was a disaster when Scotswood closed"

"That was probably the most traumatic period of my life. When the major announcement came, it was like somebody had cut your legs off. Quite honestly, I thought I had a job for life. I think a lot of people did. When Vickers closed I think a lot of people got a shock.

There was all sorts of goings-on, various meetings and what not, and quite a few of us managers got together and said we are working for a living as well. So for my sins I volunteered to go to the Scotswood Labour Club when the shop stewards were having a meeting, and the press came in and wanted to take photographs. And of course the first thing they did was give all the shop stewards a pint of beer, which is the image they wanted to portray. And there was a certain individual stood up and asked the meeting to ask me to leave because I was management. And eventually I stood up and I said, 'I am working for my living, it is my job, I've worked in this factory all my life and it is as important to me as it is to you. I might be a manager but I am staying'. And when they went on the protest march to the city hall there was myself and another manager decided we cannot not go. And I went up to the far entrance by the Scotswood Bridge and I joined them, and that was it. But it didn't make any difference unfortunately.

I do believe it's not just closing a factory, it's losing the expertise and the men. Closing a place like that instead of mothballing it or reducing it and keeping it ticking over, I think that was a big mistake. I sometimes bump into a lad who used to work for me, and he pushes trolleys down at Asda. Every time I see him I think he was a tip-top lad at his job."



Fred Millican

Fred Millican has lived in Newcastle all his life apart from a three year period at the beginning of the war when he was evacuated to Carlisle. The family lived in Gloucester Street, just off Scotswood Road, in a big house shared with two aunts and two uncles.

After leaving school at the age of 15, he started as an apprentice at Vickers Elswick works, and worked for the company for more than twenty years before leaving in 1964 to go into teaching.

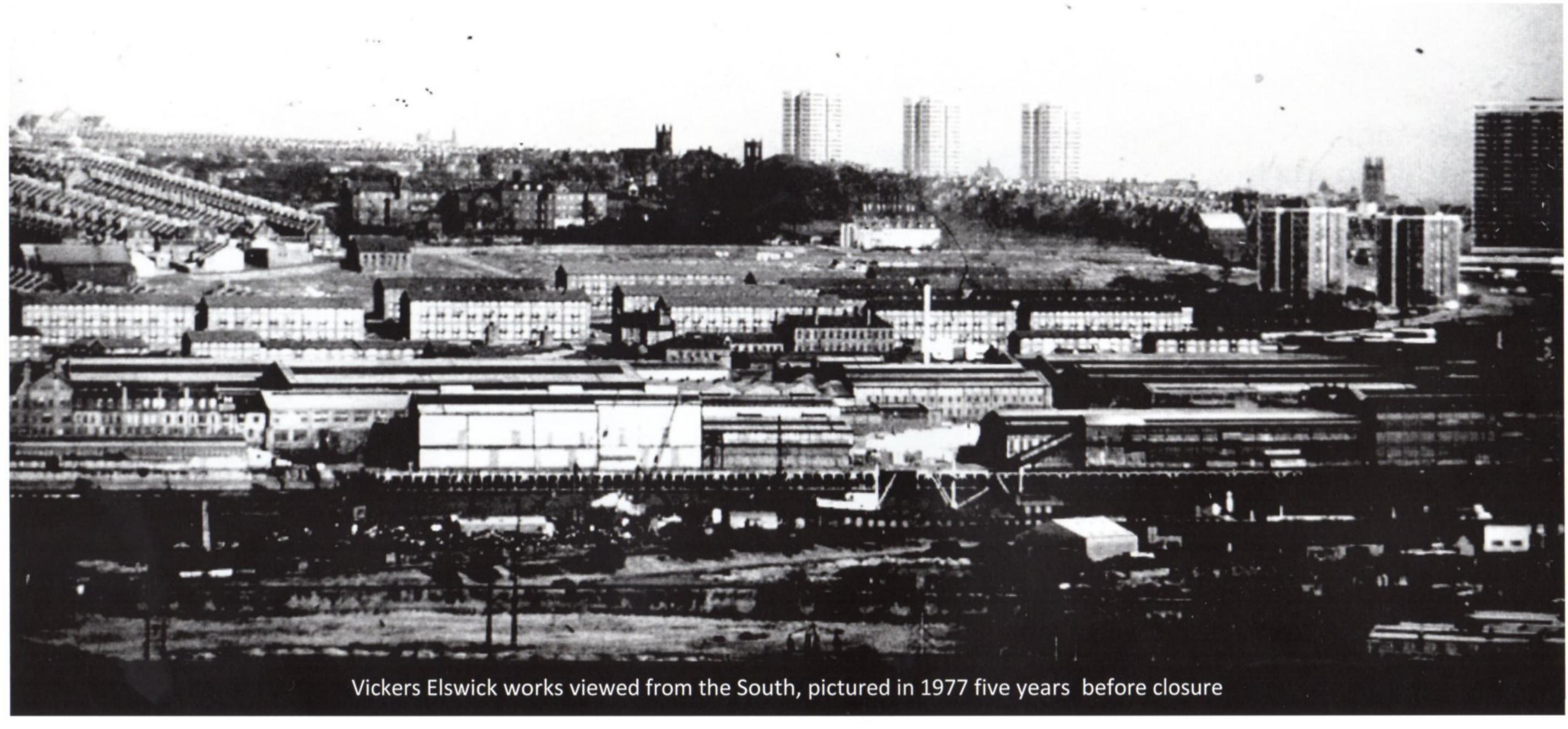


"I had no ideas what I wanted to be, to be quite honest. I took my school certificate as it was then, and got what they called matriculation standard which meant you could potentially go on to university. But in those days very few people went to university. My father and grandfather and his father had all worked at Vickers. My father was a fitter and turner and he was friendly with the chap who was in charge of the metallurgical laboratory. And he got me an interview and they said OK. One of the little things you remember: this boss, after we'd had a bit chat he showed me around, and he says 'This is a heat treatment furnace. At the moment it is busy heat treating'. And it was on at a low temperature and it was full of pies.

So I duly started work in 1942. You were called an apprentice because that was the age, you couldn't be anything else. Technically the proper apprentices were the ones that were in the factory, doing training to work machines etc or various other departments. You got paid the same rate as the apprentices."

"All that's gone now"

"In the lab there was five of us altogether. And what we did was we were responsible for fault-finding. If something went wrong through the materials then it was our job to sort out what was the matter. And we were responsible for the temperature control on these big furnaces right throughout the works. You could go anywhere, the whole works from one end to another, and in those times the works then went from what was called Water Street along Scotswood Road along the riverside right through to roughly opposite where Dunston Power Station used to be. All that's gone now. And I was in the lab probably till I was about 24-25, and then I went out into the works in charge of the heat treatment - this process where you heat things up and cool them down to make them tougher. The heat treatment department was roughly in the middle of the works, and my office was actually built out over like a cliff, and underneath it there was some arches."



"It was quite a family firm"

"The thing about Vickers was I always felt, despite its size - and we are talking about 20,000-odd workers - it was you could nearly say a family firm. There was fathers and sons etc worked at it. It never had a reputation for paying a lot of money. It was quite a family firm. But eventually round about towards the fifties it started to change. They got one or two whiz kids in who were going to move mountains. Unfortunately it didn't have a very good effect."

"Vickers could have made anything"

The thing about Vickers, Vickers could have made anything. You know literally, start from the raw materials and they could have made anything - and they did in fact. It was quite a thing. You name it, they probably made it. It's not as if they were a car factory where you are making things to go in the car. There was such a variety of things being made. There was a Vickers car, I think at Scotswood works, in the early 1900s, but I don't think it came to much. I'll tell you another thing they made after the war - steam rollers. That was at the Scotswood works. At one stage they made the whole thing starting from scratch. And one big product they tried to get into was earth moving equipment. They were setting up in opposition to the Caterpillar tractor. I suppose mainly the tanks, the guns, the mountings and the cartridges, that was the main sort of end product going out of the works, and all the bits and pieces were made to go into them."

"Some of these were really ancient"

"We used to use a quite a lot of the old tools. At one time it was known as Elswick Ordnance Company and some of those were really ancient. They were working fine, but they were old machines. And after the war, when they got some new machines, my goodness, everyone went to have a look at these marvellous new machines. So obviously there were new machines, but in lots of the main engineering works there were the old ones that had been in probably before the First World War and from time immemorial."

"Interesting health and safety thing"

"There's this big pit 65 feet deep and they weren't using them all the time. Every time they were mounting a gun we had to go down and check that they were alright. So you went down this steel ladder. When you got to the right height you put your leg in to see. I can't help thinking the health and safety people wouldn't approve of that now."

"Officially you weren't allowed to have tea at work"

"When I was in the heat treatment department, some of the furnaces were most inefficient and one of them in particular we used to use to boil the kettle for the water for the blokes. If you were a director you went along at 4 o'clock and had your cup of tea made and poured by the nice ladies in the directors' canteen, but if you were a worker you weren't allowed to have that. But they used to come sneaking in sometimes with their little cans tucked down their trouser leg."



Mick Brady

Mick Brady was born in 1943 and has lived in Benwell all his life. His first job, on leaving St Joseph's School at 15, was in a local shop. After this he became an apprentice printer in the Sungold building in Benwell. This was followed by a spell working for Richardson's leatherworks in Elswick. After the leatherworks closed, Mick worked on the buses first as a conductor and then as a driver.



"The interview was very quick"

"I left school at one o'clock on a Friday. You got your mark, the teacher shook hands and said goodbye, and I walked to where B & Q is now which was then the Low Monty Pit. And I went in there and asked for a job. He said: 'name?' I said: 'Brady.' He said: 'who's your father?' I said: 'Eddie.' He says: 'start Monday.' It was as simple as that. It was £2/17/6d a week. We came out of there and walked up what was the old Denton Dene to the shops at Denton Square, and there was a shop there that had a job in for an order boy, and it was £3/17/6d, which was a pound more.

So I started in the shop as an order boy. You would take the orders on a Saturday and during the week we were in the back shop and we would weigh up the sugar which was in the old blue bags, you would get the butter barrels in and cut the weights according to your different customers, you would also have your bacon - you would learn to bone and cut and display and all that.

This was EH Askew's. Askew's was an initial step up to what you have now, because a lot of it was self-service. You could get tins, and at the end of each row you had to have your specials which was always two pounds of sugar and a tin of peaches! "

"Everything was all manual"

"Askew's was part of the Moore's Group, which Sungold was as well. That was the warehouse, which was previously owned by Jennings the bakeries which used to have the horse and carts, and I used to go as a kid for 3lb of broken bread twice a week. I had lived very close to Sungold. I knew they had a printing department and I enquired through the manager. 'Would I like an apprenticeship?' I went to Sungold House and I signed my indentures there as a silk screen technician.



The best way to describe it is your artist would do this week's special offer, and that may have five different colours in it, and that would have to be printed five times in those days. It would be a bit like painting with numbers. All the ones would be blue, or the twos would be red, and every other colour would have to be left off, and they would be stuck onto your silk screen. The colour went through the screen. You took your squeegee and then you poured your paint into the left hand corner and you would take it along and bring it back with your squeegee and then you would bring it right through with both hands. It was amazing the amount of pressure it took. And it would come straight off your screen into a heater which was about two or three metres long, and you would catch them at the other end and hang them up with pegs. Also within the department was something like a one-armed bandit, with coloured tape about four or five inches wide running through the machine, and you would put your bits

of plastic into the moulds you were doing and you would pull the one arm down and it would be stamped with heat as well. So it more or less burned the colour into it and that's how you got your 2/6d per pound whatever.

And it was all done by hand. This was all done in a warehouse of about 30 yards by 15 wide. Even when you were finished you would have to stack them all up. And they all went to the guillotine and they were all cut and stacked up, and taken away for distribution. We'd be doing hundreds. We had two screens going in there. Rows and rows of them pegged up at any one time. And woe-betide anyone who walked through them.

Part of the apprenticeship as well was stacking them up - all the mundane jobs! I didn't finish the apprenticeship because by the time I was about 19 they decided they were closing in that area and were going to South Shields. And South Shields in those days, with public transport, was a long way. So I left."

"It was absolutely minging"

"I went to Richardson's leatherworks. I was a driver there, and you'd just sit at the wheel in all weathers. It was for transferring the hides and other materials to be used in the departments. It would come in completely as hides, straight off the cows. In the summer, did it ming! It absolutely stunk. It went out as leather. And they all went to Northampton, because Northampton was the biggest shoemakers for hide at the time.

It was probably one of the happiest jobs I did. It was a great place that, to work, but unfortunately we hadn't been modified for probably a hundred years, and it closed. The job was interesting. Everything was different. The work staff was great. Most of them were families - generations. There was no health and safety. It was as simple as that. It just didn't exist. That would be in 1960-61. But, having said that, it was a good job, and we always thought we were better off than the people up the road, which was Dobson's pickles."

"The conductor was in charge"

"I went from there to the buses, what I thought was for the Christmas, and I stopped there till I finished, after 25 years. Started as a conductor and then went driving. A bus conductor's job really was, they were actually in charge of the bus - not the driver. Although the driver was on obviously more wages, the conductor was in charge. The route I was on was the service 12 from Two Ball Lonnen to Walker. The back loader - no doors, no heaters. You had to run



up and down stairs to keep warm."

Ted Clark

Ted Clark was born in 1940 in the village of Longframlington in Northumberland.

Leaving school at 15, he worked first as a coal miner, later moving to Newcastle in search of a wider choice of jobs. After a spell as a bus conductor, he started work for the North Eastern Electricity Board as a labourer working on installing and replacing electricity supplies. Living first in Elswick and then Arthurs Hill, he later moved with his family to live in Denton Burn.



"Living in the country - and excitement like that!"

"I was born just at the beginning of the war. And we had at that time soldiers billeted in our village. They commandeered the nearest hall, and in the plantation they built temporary barracks. And there was soldiers came from all over the British Isles stationed there, waiting to go away and fight. The Memorial Hall was taken over for them where they had their meals and everything. And us kids thought that was great. Living in the country - and excitement like that! All these armoured vehicles, the tanks, soldiers running around, different soldiers, kilted soldiers, all from the British Isles. We used to go out in the morning and we were never seen again until teatime, mebbe later than teatime. Where were we? When the soldiers were in the mess room having their lunches, we were all there, having ours."

"Even do your own ironing"

"I left school at 15. I wasn't at the village school. I was at what they called the camp school. Not a borstal, not a correction school. This arrangement had been brought about just shortly after the war, where if you were resident in the county, you could, when you reached the age of twelve and a half, put your name down to go to this camp school at Bellingham. Which meant you had to reside there from one term to the other. When you're twelve, in the first term, you did get a bit homesick, but you daresn't show it. It was a mixed school. You could see the girls crying, but we used to bite our lip. I was

there a couple of years, and I think it's the best thing to put you on the road of looking after yourself. You had to make your own beds, you had to put your own buttons on, look after yourself, even do your own ironing. The headmaster was a military man, and he just run it like a boot camp."

"Straight down the coal mine"

"You can imagine the village is 25 miles from the city. What else was there to do besides agricultural work? Always a job on the farm if you wanted it - which I didn't want. And the other only opening was the coal mines. The 1950s the coal mines were still booming. If you went down the pit at 15, as soon as you reached 18 you could go on to piece-work. You were making a man's money at 18. And that was an attraction. But you couldn't get piece-work at the colliery I went to until you were 21, because it wasn't a very large colliery. It was called Whittle Colliery. I used to cycle five miles a day there and five miles back. And eventually saved a few coppers and I got a motorbike. I



was about the first young'un to have a motorbike.

I was never on the coal face. I used to run coal tubs - transport the coal tubs from the coal face. The conveyor belts took the coal to the main gantry where the conveyor belts is, and you used to fill these little tubs with coal. I left the pit because I thought if I did get on piece-work I'd be like all the rest at 21, and I'd be there until I retired with ill-health or something like that. As the guys got older, they would be taken off the coal face. There was some fellows there, one or two of them were well in their seventies. 1962 I left. So I had about six years there. In those days you could walk out of one job and into another. "

"The streets weren't paved with gold"

"We came to the town and unfortunately that winter, 1962, there was a little bit dip in work. So I got a job what not many people would like. That's why there were vacancies. I got a job on Newcastle Corporation as a bus conductor. Straight into the town. Didn't know the town, didn't know the streets, straight on the buses. It took a while to get to know your way around.

Split shifts - the conditions were terrible. Started at half past six in the morning, worked till about 11 o'clock then clock off, go home, and come back again at three o'clock. And it was a split shift. Then worked to cover the Ministry, the Vickers - duplicate buses like that. Busy buses, like the ones doing Reyrolles the electrical engineers down the Fossway. Used to do extra buses to get the workers back home.

When I was on the buses, I did see this advert in the Chronicle: North Eastern Electricity Board require labourers at their Durham Street Branch. I fancy that. So I wrote in and I got an interview. Sitting at the interview, I'm a guy from the country that's supposed to be a bumpkin. The engineers and the chief engineers, the foreman and the supervisor was sitting there, and they asked me my experience and things like that. They says, 'do you have any interest in sport or anything like that?' 'Oh yes, I play rugby and cricket.' Straight out – 'That's great, we have a sports ground down Wallsend.' More or less saying, 'you've got the job'. Got the letter saying start October 21st 1962.

Durham Street, Newcastle. What a right crew there was there! Cables, cable networks, housing estates, restoring supplies. You understand the cables are all in the footpath. They were all to be dug out, so that was the sort of jobs were employed for. Changing the systems. Every now and again there would be some old network would have to be replaced. That kept us employed.

It was nationalised in 1947. It was a job for life, but later days that arrangement had changed. It went private - maybe the mid-eighties. It made a big difference. We were all allowed to buy shares, which we did. There was an arrangement where you could have money deducted off your salaries that went to shares. And then the time came when the Americans took over the company and the shares were withdrawn."



Brian Cowey

Brian Cowey was born in 1936 and has lived in Benwell for most of his life. Forced to leave school at 15 after the death of his father, he found an office job with the National Coal Board. He worked for the NCB for more than 15 years, leaving in the 1960s as waves of pit closures began to ravage an industry that had once dominated the region.

"I went to Pendower Secondary Commercial as it was then. It was a good school. Anyway my father died when I was just turned 15. He was only 54, been poorly for a long time. The First World War wrecked his health. With one arm gone he had to teach himself to write with his left hand. Lots of things he couldn't do around the place. Anyway I had to leave school to get a job, and I got a job with the NCB. In those days jobs were easy. You had your pick really. All the industries, all the pits



and the shipyards, the heavy engineering down on Scotswood, they all had the supporting things - the administration and all the things that go with these big industries. So jobs were plentiful. You more or less had your pick really.



So I left school which I wasn't very happy about. I was going to stay on in the sixth form, but you need to survive. It was difficult for my mother. I got a job with the NCB in Collingwood Street. I was always comfortable with office work, and that type of thing, clerical work. I've never been one for the mechanical side of things - engineering, anything like that. My father was in insurance and I suppose he probably thought that was what I was going to do, but insurance always seemed a bit dry to me. But there again I just sort of fell into this job, and just sort of progressed from there."

"The NCB was all over the town"

At that time the National Coal Board occupied several office buildings across Newcastle, including Milburn House at the bottom of Dean Street - one of the earliest multi-storey office buildings in the country.

"We moved from Collingwood Buildings down to Proctor House down The Side, and then we moved from there to Milburn House, which was nearly all NCB in those days. And they decided they would put them all under the one roof, and they built this big place at the southern end of the Team Valley, which is now I think Sainsbury's or Presto or something. The Coal House roundabout, they call it, because it was Coal House, believe it or not. So everyone was in there."

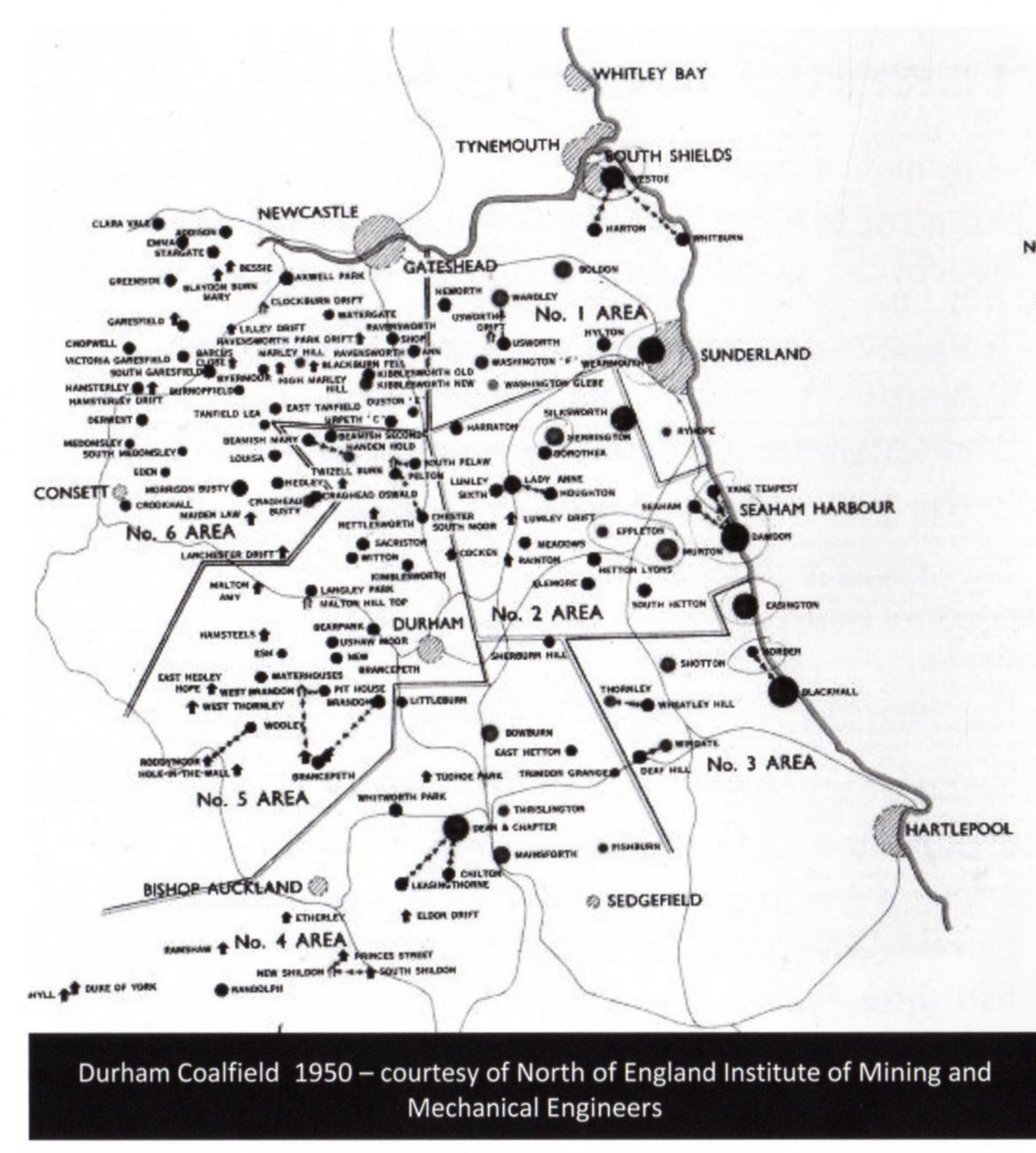
"I started off as an office lad"

to be built on this estate

Opening the post and date-stamping it, and making sure that the various letters went to the various people, and if anybody wanted a sandwich at 10 o'clock you had to go and get it. And then you slowly got shown the various things that had to be done, various returns that had to be made out. And then

you had all the post to put up later on. It had to be taken to the central point where it was all collated and taken by somebody to the post office. At the time the main post office was opposite the cathedral. It's still there of course but it's no longer a post office. First thing in the morning you used to have to go. And all the office lads used to meet there and collect the post, and take it back to the bosses.

I started off as an office lad, which was what everybody does, and then you slowly move up in the clerical world. I finished up on the transport side of things. All marketing. In other words, we looked after where the coal was going to finish up, on your doorstep and your coal house, and this type of thing. They did have their own wagons. You would see National Coal Board wagons flying about the place. But there was a lot of private hauliers did them as well. We used to hire the



hauliers in. The various collieries used to phone and say we need half a dozen wagons at such and such a pit - six o'clock tomorrow morning - and we used to arrange all that. And then there was the railways as well."

"Your job was safe"

"And I was there from 15, then I was called up for a couple of years to do my bit in the RAF, then I came back. And of course you whole attitude changes. You think should I be doing this or do I fancy something else? But anyway I stayed with it. Your job was safe. In a nationalised industry, plenty of good jobs - until of course there was this decline. I did alright out of it, the NCB, I suppose."

"The writing's on the wall here"

"By the middle sixties, when I was thinking the writing's on the wall here, there's a lot of them had closed, and there was a hell of a lot more to close after that. Sad really.

I suppose you can say it's better than it was with the dirty big wheel and smoke belching out, and all that sort of stuff.

Dirty wagons coming



in and out. But it was people's livelihoods. And of course a lot of the pit villages were built round the colliery. And they had a community spirit which seems to be lacking nowadays."

Tommy Luscombe

Tommy Luscombe was born in 1926 in Ramshaw Street, Elswick, near to Scotswood Road. After leaving school at the age of 14, he worked as an errand boy before starting an apprenticeship in the shipyards. He worked as a shipwright at Swan Hunters until the 1980s when he was made redundant.

"You know Scotswood Road, Vickers Armstrongs, the munitions factories and all that. So that's where I was brought up. Now we had various houses. In them days you shifted from one street to another. The landlords were a little bit tough and if we were behind in our rent and that we only had to just shift back to the next street.

There was eight of us. My father originated down south, and when they were looking for labour, people from all over would come up and get started at Vickers Armstrong."

"I want to be a shipwright"

"I was at school till I was 14 and then I got a couple of small jobs. The first job I took was a butcher's errand boy. Our streets was all steep around there. I was only 14 and I handled it for at least six month and it come into the winter. A laddie of my age! I had a big area, plus a heavy basket full of stuff on the bicycle. And naturally I gave it up. And then after a couple of weeks I went to the town and there was a fish shop, Phillips they called it, a proper fresh fish shop. But they served all the town for their fish, whatever fish they wanted. Well, I was a lad that went round with a basket on a bike, and I just done the best part of Newcastle. That was with the fresh fish and that, for hotels. And one of my journeys happened to be going down to the shipyard, to the canteens down there, and serve them with their fish. And as I was taking it there into the canteens and looking around and seeing all the fellows working there and this and that, and I got in conversation with a couple, and I asked them about what's what. He says, 'just come down, see the foreman'. He says 'Well what do you want to be? Do you want to be a plater, shipwright, joiner, what?' I says 'Oh, I want to be a shipwright.' And that was it. And then I become a shipwright."

Tommy's apprenticeship lasted for five years, from age 16 to 21.

"Got ten shillings and six. Six o'clock in them days in the morning till 12, then we were on our dinner break, then five o'clock when we finished. And more or less, as we got older and the war years come, we were working nine o'clock at night."

"I started to serve my time. I was sent to work with the two journeymen that was proper shipwrights, and they would have shown me what to do so I could fit in. Looking at it, it was a bit daunting at times when I was watching what they did."

"The name itself speaks for itself - shipwright"

We had to put every compartment, every shape, when it was brought to us on the berth. They were all sections, you know. We had to fit all the sections to the deck and that one to that deck. And we used to do the lifeboats - there were the lifeboat arms to hold the lifeboats. And we used to make a pattern so the lifeboat would fit snugly to the side. Then these is the two wings to the bridge - we had to screw them in with nuts and bolts, and then the welder would come and weld it.

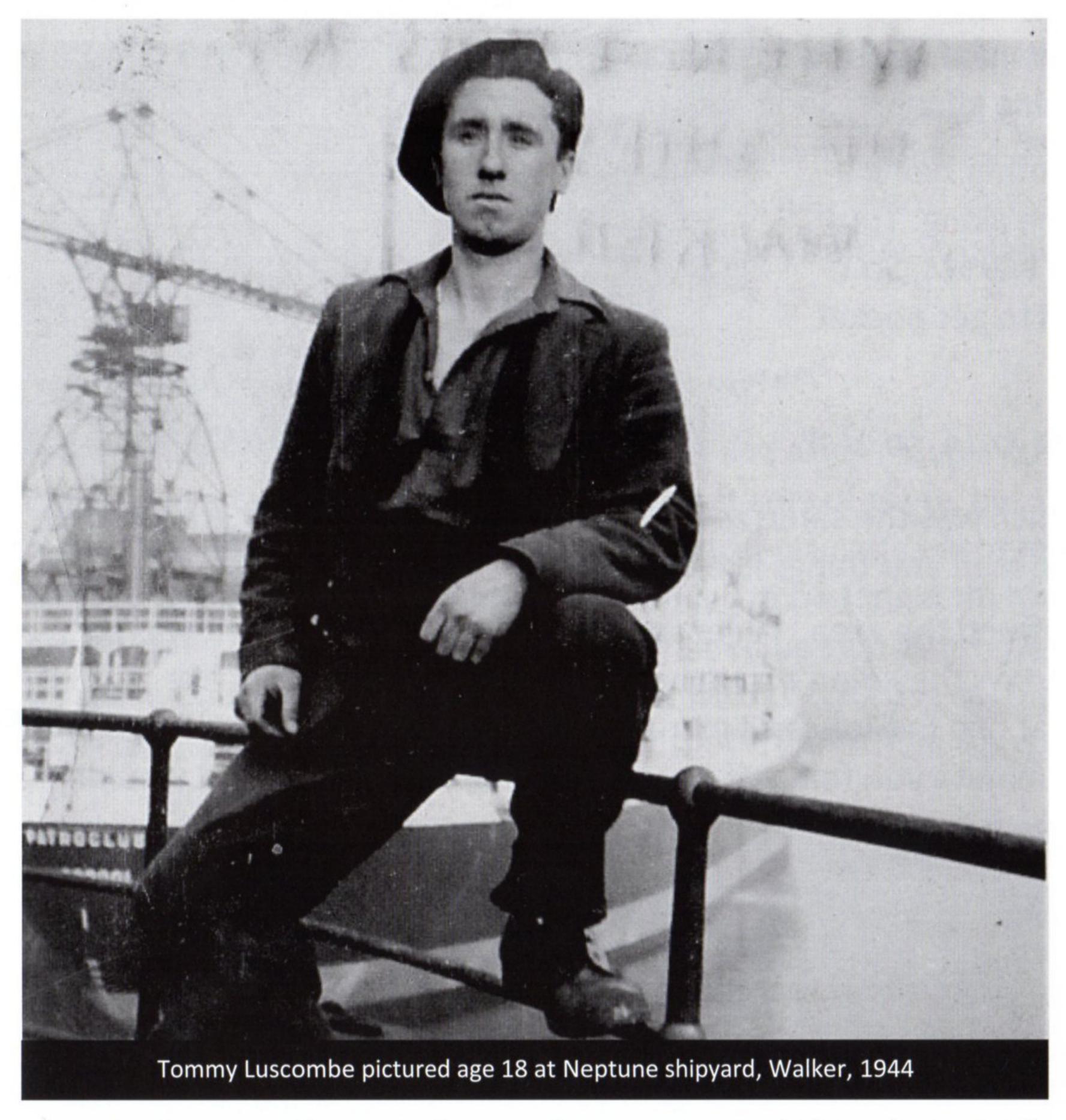
See this staging. There's no handrail on them. But that's the way the ship progresses. You've got to build it up from the bottom, you see."



"When you're working in the middle of the winter, it was horrible. We all worked in some bitter winters"

The shipwright was also responsible for launching the ship when it was built.

"Oh, we launched the boats. You see, underneath the ship you've got what you call the sliding ways for them to slide on We had to take them shores out underneath here. And it's terrible the noise, because you're taking them shores out. It's coming down, isn't it? The weight of the boat, as we take the shores away and the blocks, the ship settles onto the ways, and you can hear the creaking and groaning, and you're only relying on them two ways that holds it. And I was always pleased to get out from underneath there. Because that's the shipwright's job, you see."



"And down you go"

I just had an ordinary cap. We all had caps then.

A hundred feet up. When I first started in Mitchell's, the staging to work off was only two planks, nine inches broad, so you had two - that would only be 18 inches. No hand rail. And we could easily have fallen over, no bother. But you had to use that for getting around the ship, you see, on the outside.

There was quite a few accidents. Some of them ended up with people getting killed. But at the finish they fashioned, you know, like a fishing net but heavy. Heavy rope. And it was stretched underneath. They had the staging in first and then that was underneath the staging, and if anybody was to fall they'd be held by the net.

I was lucky meself once. I'm on the staging and there's an 80 foot drop. And I was doing this work at the top of the deck underneath the ship. That was our job - to get the position and then we would screw it down with bolts and lugs, and then the welder would follow and he would weld the bottom. I was on the staging and me eyes was on the job. And unknown to me the person that had done the nightshift job had shifted the staging. And when the stager comes he puts the fastening on either end and secures it. Well, the fellow that done the job on the night shift hadn't put it back. Well, I didn't know. I had just sent my mate to make the tea, and I says I'll finish this job. And I went along, my eyes on there. And little did I know I'm walking along the plank and all of a sudden it just went down. It was only luck or instinct. As I fell, I grabbed the top of there and the planks went away under my feet. I heard it hit the bottom. And I just inched my way long. And when he comes in with the tea he says 'You're looking white'. And I says 'You'd be bloody white...' We reported it. There was supposed to be a safety man, his job was to see that you were safe. He says 'You're still walking aboot'."

"I was finished in 1981. I even applied to go to Germany in a German yard, but nothing come of it"

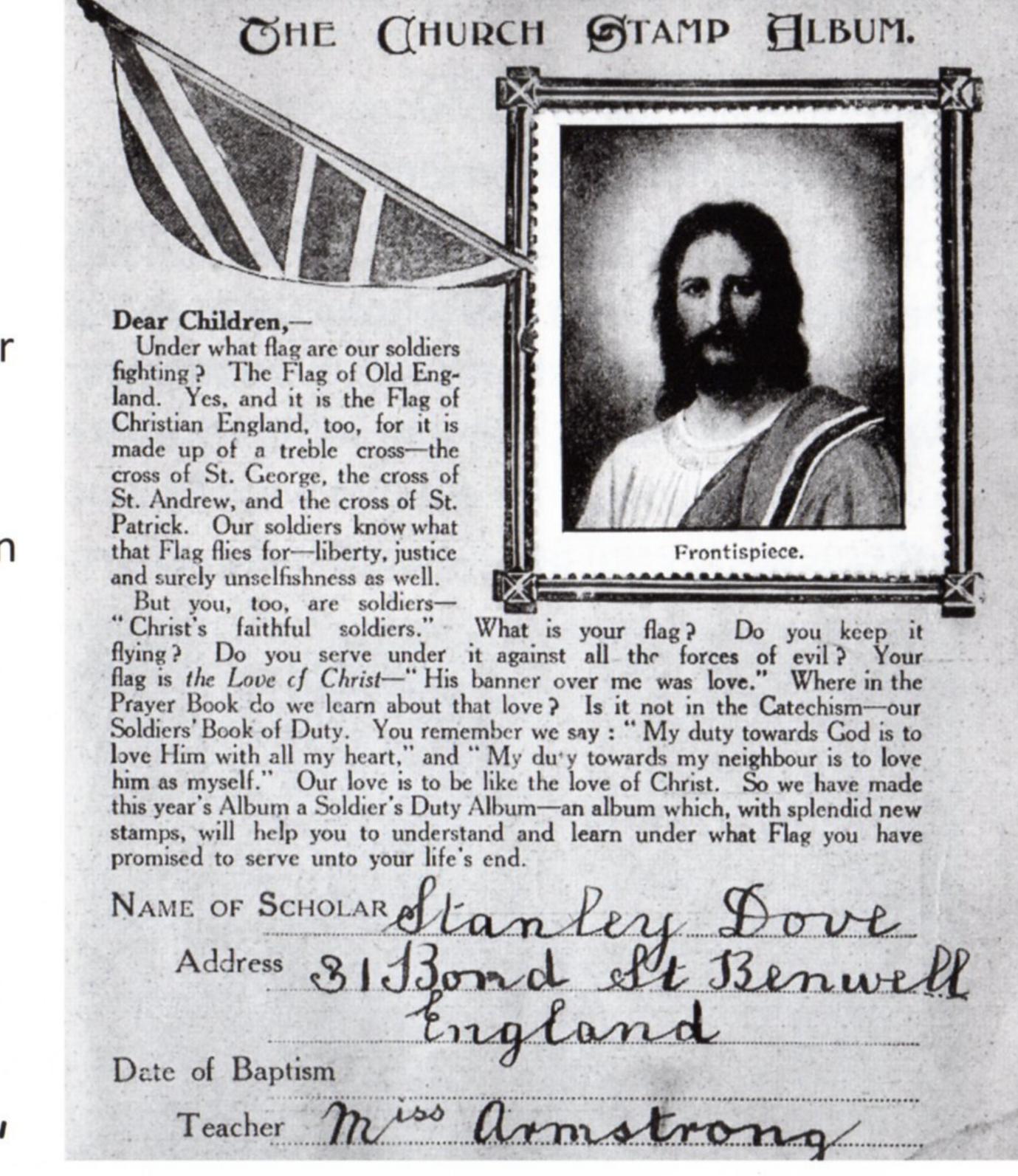
Stan Dove

Stan Dove was born in 1940 in Hampstead Road, North Benwell. His father worked at Vickers and was also a signaller in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserves, serving on the battleships Ramillies and Warspite during the Second World War. When Stan was only three his father died, leaving his mother a widow with three young children.

After leaving Canning Street School at the age of 15, Stan went to work for the Co-op for eight years. Later he worked as an insurance agent for the Prudential, and then in a number of different manufacturing jobs.

"I had to go straight into work with my mother being a widow. I just had to take any job that came along. You see my mother had no income, she was a widow. So I gave the money to my mother, and I used to get pocket money."

"You just did everything you were told to do"



"I worked in the Co-op for a long time, which was the same as my grandfather, because my grandfather worked in the Co-op. He was like a wagon man and things like that.

I worked in the Co-op for various shops around the area. I even worked in High Cross when it was an ordinary customer service shop. In them days they didn't have health and safety and things like that. If it had four walls and a roof on! I worked at one in Gloucester Street, you used to walk on the floors and the floors used to go 'boing, boing' — any minute you felt as if you were going to go through. I wouldn't like to repeat the stories of what I saw.

Gun Brawing Office,
Elswich Works,
6-10-1820.

Me Stoker

Dear Sir

I beg to apply for a situation
as a juneor clerk (providing you have a vacancy)
For the last year I have been working in the
Brawing Office helping an order clerk
I am now risteen and have had a good
general education.

Enc sed

is a testimonial as to my qualifications
and character from the Headmarter of
Camping It School. Should my application
be successful I shall endeavour to give
every satisfaction

I remain,
Jours respectfully,
Starley Dove.

I worked on the counter, and the bacon – boning, In those days they had to bone their own bacon like a butcher, slicing it. And different odds and ends. You just did everything you were told to do. Cleaning windows.

Groceries were like dry stuff, like tea, sugar, things like jam. Provisions were like your butter, your bacon, peas, beans, different things like that. And you stood at one and got served there and then you had to go to the opposite counter and you got other things. You had check numbers and you paid for it at each counter. Butter used to come in round barrels. You had to carry them in, and you used to put them on white plates – big plates. And sugar used to come in loose. We made them in blue sugar bags. They had to be packed into 2lb weights, they had to be proper weights. Before my time, they even used to pack tea. This must have been the war time. In my time the tea came in already packed. But peas and beans and sugar, you used to be on a whole day. The whole shop, Monday morning, all the staff used to be on - weigh-up day. And serve the customers at the same time.

Some of the big shops where they had the good sales, I used to slice the bacon for Friday, Saturday morning when they were really busy. In them days the Co-ops just used to be open to one o'clock on a Saturday. Later on it started to be open all day on a Saturday and I got a bit sick because I wanted to go to the football!

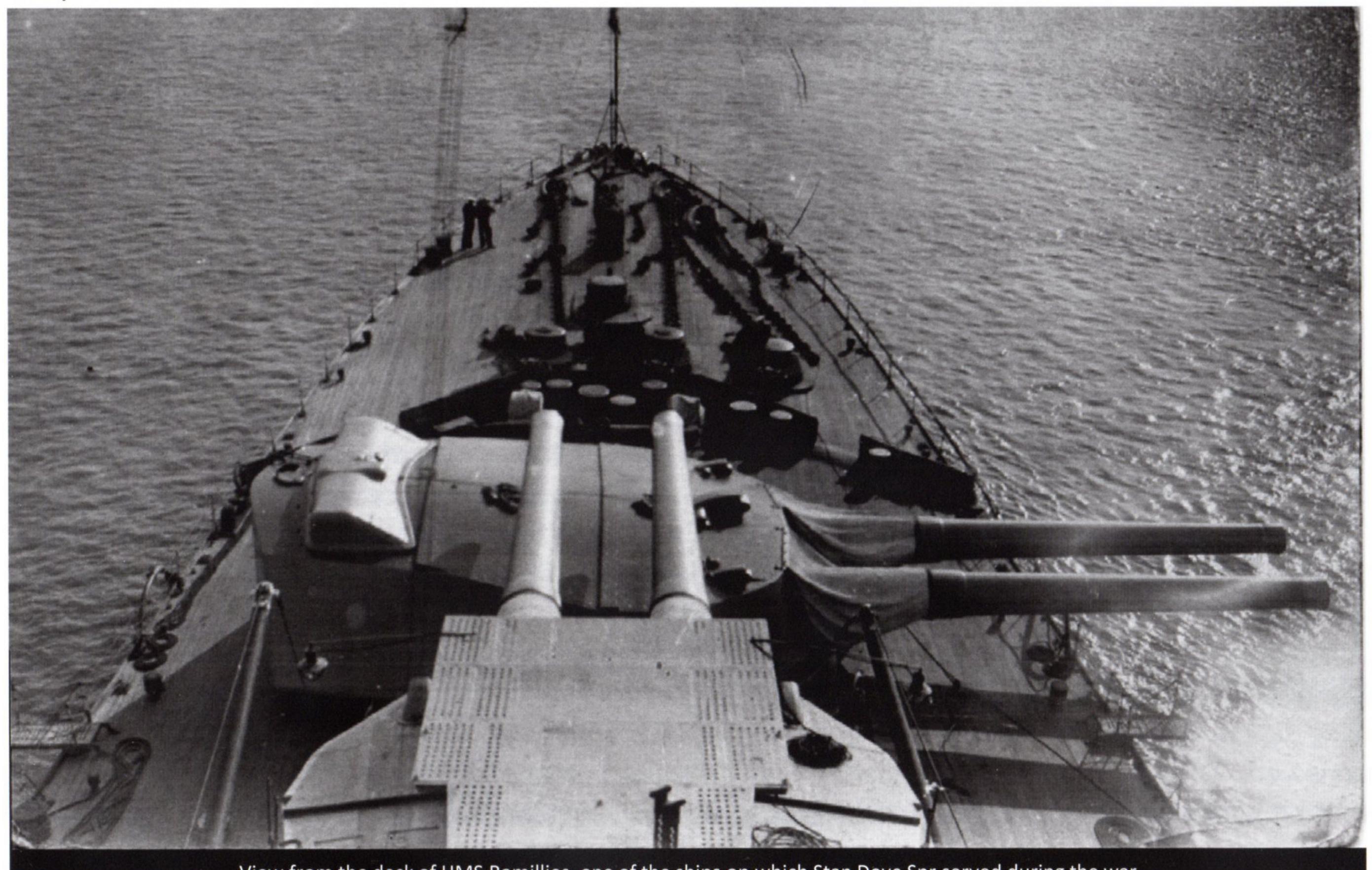
Buckingham Street, when I first went, there was a confectionery, a greengrocers, a butchers, and a grocery and provision shop. And piles of staff. And then I went back and there was only half the staff there."

"You had to be beck and call to everybody"

"I went into insurance - Prudential. You had to be beck and call to everybody. I was an insurance agent over Gateshead for quite a long time and I had a lousy round, all the poor places I got. Some good people there, but some rogues. I would collect weekly. You were never finished. You were hardly in your own house. You had to do all your own books - debits and credits - which I never minded because maths was my best subject at school. Life insurance and fire insurance, and different things. You'll have heard of the original penny policy. Everybody had them. But you didn't go just to collect them. They were allowed to have so many weeks in arrears before you lapsed them out. They don't collect now. They do it by bankers order."

"They are all going to foreign countries"

"I worked at Dunlop's in Team Valley. I looked after machines, which was entirely different. It was working in a factory and you got oil and that sort of thing, but I quite enjoyed it there. And then I was made redundant and I went to another place – Lucas's – where they made filaments for lamps. I worked there, which was a filthy job. They are no longer up here. Dunlop's is no longer up here. They are all going to foreign countries. I've trained up two different lots of people for my own job. I trained up these Chinese. They used to come in with two different coloured shoes on and pants half way up their legs, they were that poor, and yet they'd sent them from China to learn my job. Then they took the production out there."



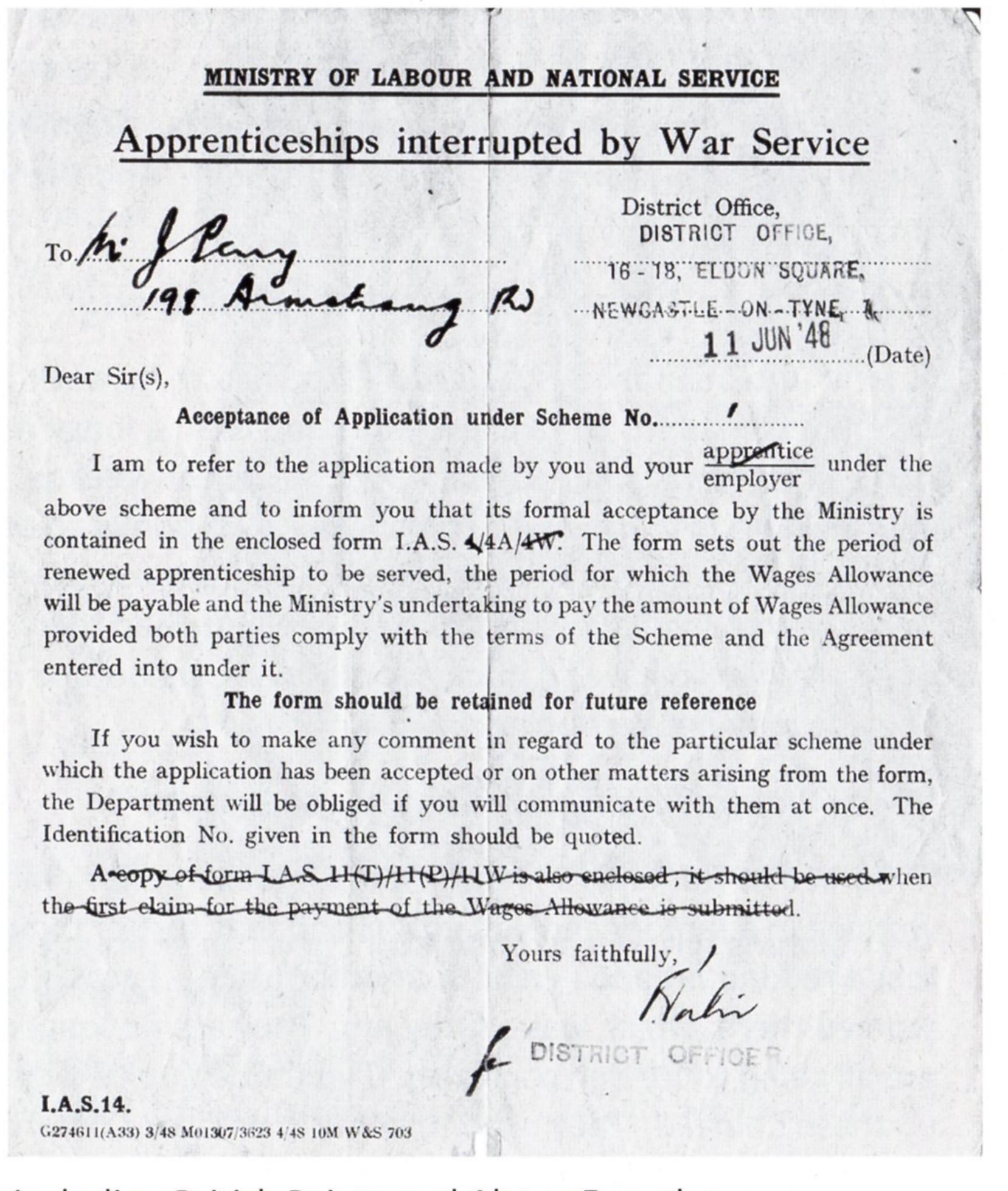
View from the deck of HMS Ramillies, one of the ships on which Stan Dove Snr served during the war

John Perry

John Perry was born in Hugh Street in Benwell in 1927.

John was not the first member of his family to work at Vickers-Armstrong's. His great-grandfather and his grandfather were engine drivers, and one of his great-uncles worked as an engineer and another as a brass founder. John's father attended Vickers' school on Scotswood Road, paying fourpence a week for his education, and later worked at the factory. Even John's mother worked for the company for a period during the war.

John went to school at the old South Benwell School, known locally as 'Coxie's' until the age of 12 when he was evacuated the day before the start of the Second World War. He returned home at the age of 14 to start work, finding a job at George Blair's foundry in Gateshead. Two years later he moved to Vickers Scotswood factory to start an engineering apprenticeship. At the age of 18 he was called up for service in the army, returning later to resume his apprenticeship.



Later John worked in a succession of other jobs, including British Paints and Alston Foundry.

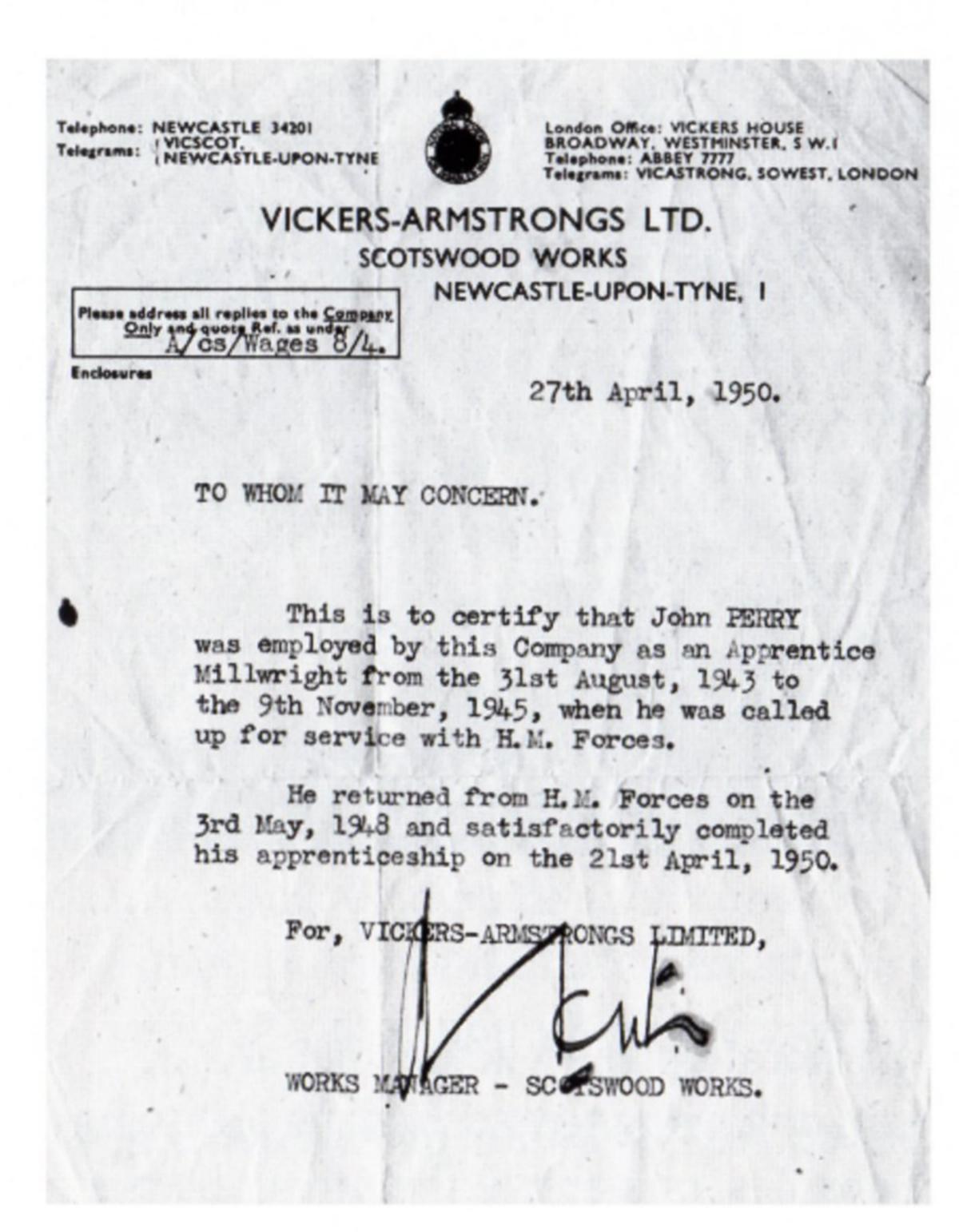
"I could walk down the bank and I'm there"

"I was evacuated the day before war started. I was only away two year, because I would be 12 when the war started, therefore I would come back at 14 to start work.

It was always word of mouth. You just said to people, 'is there any jobs going?' And they just said yes. I had three brothers and they'd all gone into engineering. I wanted to be a joiner, but my mother just said, 'your brothers are all in engineering and you'll go in engineering'. In those days at 14 you did as you were told. I was told I had to go in. I went over to Gateshead and I went to this factory gate, and I went and found my brother and he took us up to the office and that was it. I went on the Friday after breaking up for Christmas and they just said start on Monday. And that was it.

So I started work at George Blair's in a foundry. It was the Gateshead side of the river Teams. And I was there till I was nearly 16. And what happened was, we had a quoits team, and lunch times we used to go back of the foundry to play quoits, and sometimes we weren't diligent in getting back in for one o'clock. And one day a boss came the other way, and we were all summoned up to the top office and suspended. So what happened was we all said we can't afford to be suspended, we're not putting up with it, so we walked from Teams over to Team Valley, altogether, about six of us. There was a Vickers Armstrong's factory, although it wasn't called Vickers, it was one of their subsidiaries. It ended up making big printing presses. So I said I'll go to the Vickers factory and when I went I was duly interviewed. They said, 'well, you're nearly 16, you can start an apprenticeship here if you wanted to'. I said, Team Valley, it meant a tram and a bus. And he says, 'or you can go to Elswick or Scotswood, we'll find a place for you'. Well, at the time I was living on Armstrong Road opposite Atkinson Road School.

And I said, 'Scotswood's better because I could walk down the bank and I'm there'. So I started at Scotswood.



This was the Scotswood works. When I was there we made tanks. We made submarine engines. We made locomotives after the war. Printing presses. Dying machines for cutting out, like, car body shapes - the big presses that pressed these bits out from a sheet of metal. All kinds. Vickers even made motor cars and aeroplanes."

"You can't work in a factory and not be in a union"

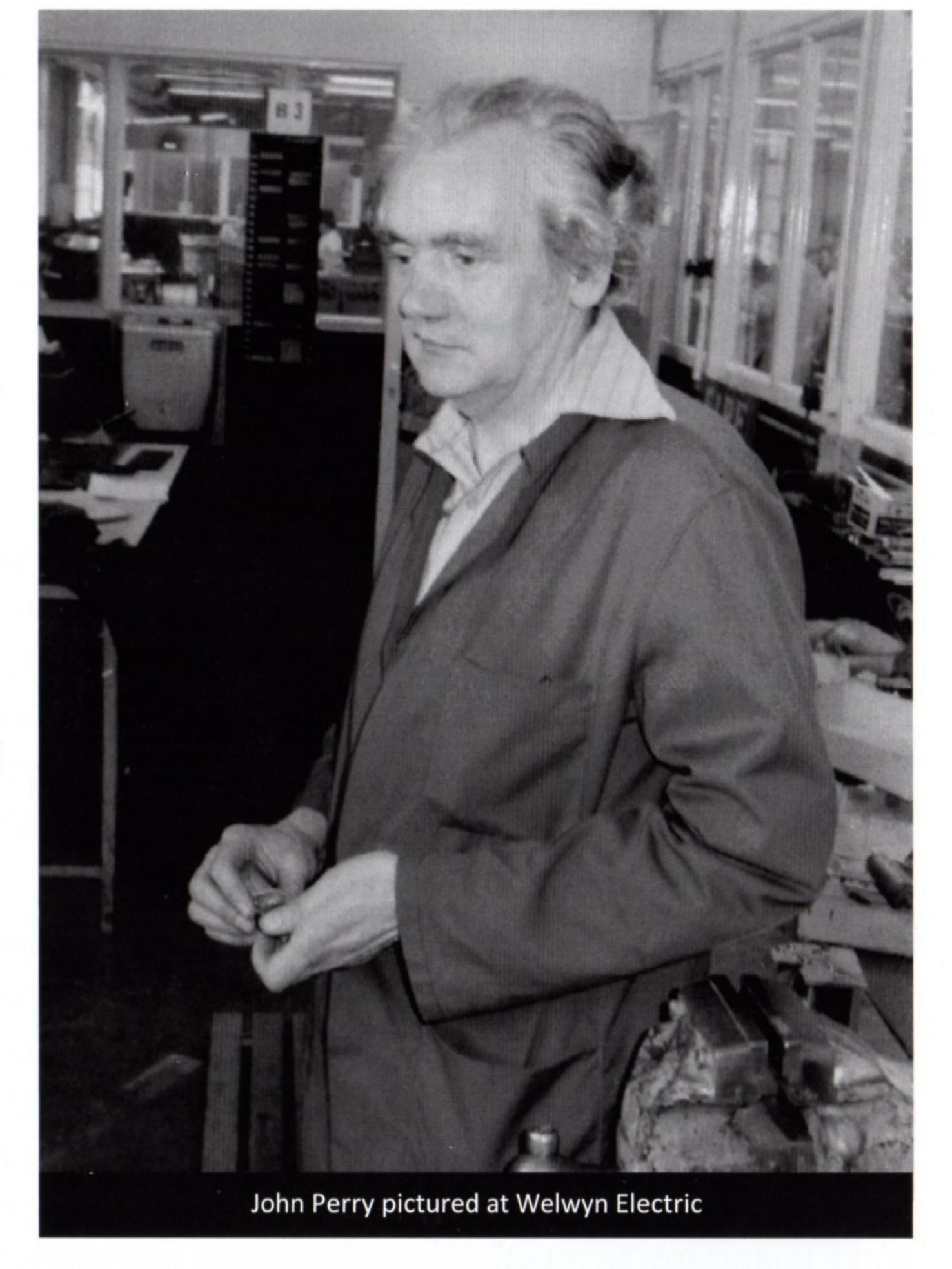
"Even as an apprentice, you had to have a union card. And what we did, the shop stewards had a committee and they ran everything, and we decided to have a junior shop stewards committee. It was more social than political, until the Glasgow lot said they were going to organise an apprentice strike. It was never known because, if the workers went on strike, the apprentices weren't allowed. It wasn't a huge thing and it didn't last long. Did we win? More or less. We did get a pay rise out of it, and slightly better conditions.

I started at Scotswood, just before I was 16, and I was there until I was just turned 18. I was 18 in the August, and in the September I got my calling-up papers. They reckoned we were in safe jobs, because of armaments, but because we'd been organising strikes, all the committee of the junior shop stewards - every one of us - ended up in the army within a month. Friends I went to school with, they stayed and were never in the army. But we said it's funny that all the junior shop stewards in Vickers Armstrong's both in the shipyards, Elswick and Scotswood, all got called up in the army."

"Where's the health and safety?"

"Say you had something square and you were facing it off and boring a hole in it, you didn't even have a guard over it. Goggles! No. Hard hats? No. At the most you got steel toe caps in your boots, but you bought them yourself - they weren't supplied. Accidents happened. Lots of funny little accidents.

You talk about health and safety. The roof of the foundry took fire. The roof was wood covered with felt. In a foundry! Sparks! And it took fire one night and I was at work. No safety. I just went up a ladder with a hosepipe onto the roof."



"In those days you could walk out of one job and into another then. I was never ever unemployed"

Roger Broughton

Roger Broughton was born and brought up in London. He came to Newcastle in the mid-sixties, initially living off Westgate Road, after completing a degree at Hull University followed by a two-year graduate apprentice course at British Aircraft Corporation.

Roger worked for several years at Swan Hunters, designing their first computer programmes for building ships. After leaving here, he went to work for Newcastle University where he was responsible for installing and maintaining the university's earliest computing facility. He continued to oversee the development and management of the computing lab until his retirement in 2002.



"Most of my time I spent at the wind tunnel"

"It was a two-year graduate apprentice course at British Aircraft Corporation at an actual military airdrome. It did the test flying of the aircraft. At that time the main one being tested was the Lightning, and this had two jet engines and the pilot basically sat on two jet engines, one above the other. So the Lightning had half the power of the Concord. Most of my time I spent at the wind tunnel, where they'd have a model of an aircraft on an arm and then there was enormous bottles that got compressed air in them and then that air would be let out and it would go supersonic down the wind tunnel for 20-30 seconds. And while it was going past the model could be manoeuvred in all different ways, and there were strain gauges that measured all the forces on the model. They still do that, but increasingly they can do computer simulations."

"I had to learn about building ships"

"I got a job at Swan Hunter's shipbuilders, because they'd just got a new technical director who's got a degree in naval architecture from Newcastle University and he'd just joined, and they were about to get a computer. When he found there was an active mathematician looking for a job, he gave me a job. So I had to learn about building ships. And I had an office just off the drawing office where there was loads of guys with great big boards drawing ships, designing pipe work and everything. So I had complete freedom. I could go anywhere I liked in the shipyard. I could go and look at them bending enormous steel plates. I could clamber over ships that were part built. And the drawing office, of course, I learned a lot from the guys there. Basically the shipyard cut and bent steel to make the ships, which when they were finished they just slid down the slipway in to the Tyne, hoping they didn't hit the bank on the far side.

Anyway the computer came - IBM System 360 Model 30 - and the main purpose of the computer was to do the wages, the orders, the office stuff, but this technical director who hired me, he wanted to use the computer for ship design. And to do that we had to have a different operating system. The clerical people use a basic system called Basic Programming Support, but I couldn't use BPS for doing the ship design stuff so I had to put up a different operating system. I couldn't do that in the day because all these other clerical people worked on it during the day, so my use of the computer started about 6 o'clock, and my first task was to install an operating system on this machine - and that was not simple like it is now, you just put a CD in or a floppy disk and it immediately installs an operating system. No, this meant hours of punching cards. The deck was over a thousand cards which were like the instructions that told the computer how to generate an operating system for this particular computer with its hardware, its magnetic tapes and disks and so on. And it took me two or three months to

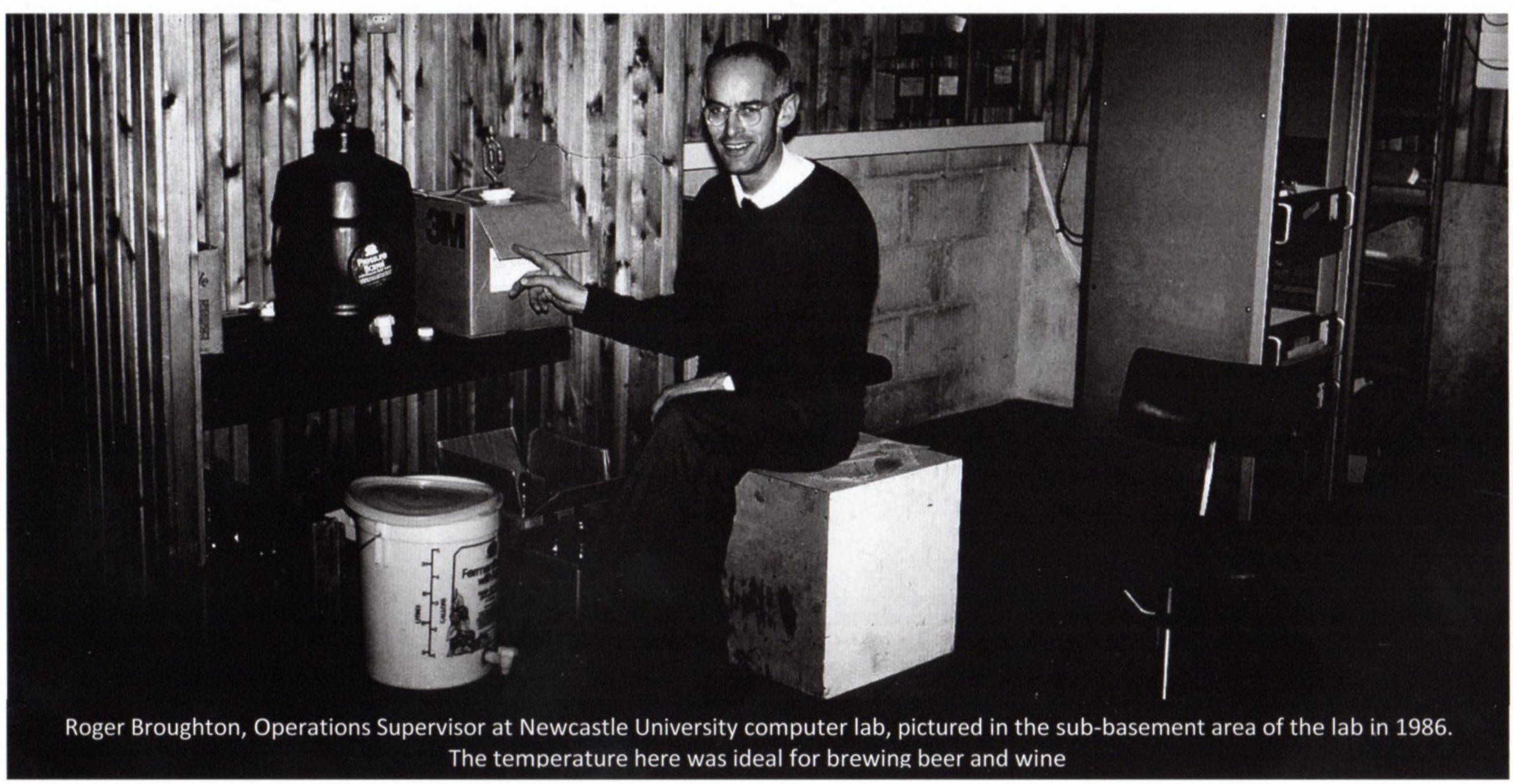
generate the DOS operating system that would finally work. I would go home with a great big computer listing which I had to riffle through to find out where the generation had failed, and then next day I'd go back and alter the deck and then wait for my turn. Eventually we got a disk operating system working and then I started to write programmes for ship design. This took a couple of years to do this. And the programme worked but they didn't necessarily believe this programme was correct so they did the calculations in the old way and also Lloyds of London, the insurance people, did their own calculations for this ship. So there was three sets of results for a ship. It was only after I left they told me that the results from my programme were the best, because once the ship was actually launched they could check the results."

"It was a new computer in a brand-new building - Claremont Tower"

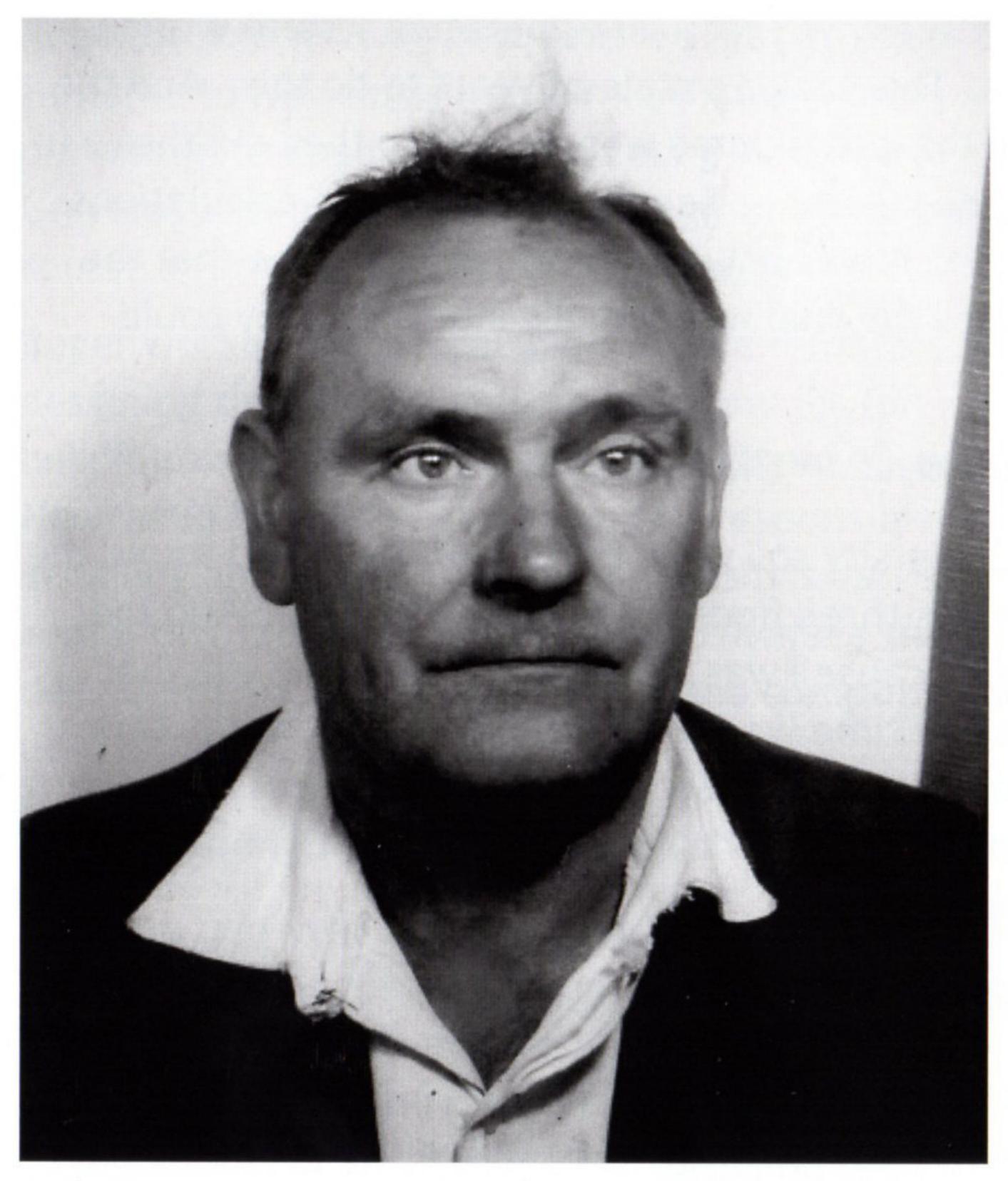
"I heard there was big computer going to go into the university so I went to the university and found the professor and I said I'd like a job. The computer room was three floors down below ground. And the computer came and I worked along with other people, because I was probably the only one who had any experience of generating an operating system. At one time we were running 24 hours a day seven days a week. And quite soon I became what's called the Operations Supervisor. The job was supervising the operations of that basement room, and I also then had managerial responsibility for the operators as well, and also supervising the operation of the computer."

"It's difficult to think of anything modern that had so little power"

"The original mainframe computer I installed at Newcastle University would have cost millions of pounds. It had lots of cabinets. The main cabinet is the central processing unit, and this would be nearly seven feet high and a metre wide, three metres long, and that just contained the central processing unit. If you opened the cupboards up, there would be lots of panels and there would be lots of wiring connecting things together and there'd be ribbons connecting each of these units, and inside you'd find lots of circuit cards plugged in, and there were enormous power supplies. Connected to the CPU was what's called channels. Connected to the channels would be control units and connected to control units would be devices, such as one for card reader, one for printer etc. So there's all these cabinets scattered all over the room and you had to be able to get round them, you had to be able to open them up to service them and repair them, so it's a big room full of big boxes. A domestic laptop now is much more powerful than that 360. The first computer was a million instructions per second and one mg of ram. The 370 was about 5 million per second - tiny. It's difficult to think of anything modern that had so little power. My laptop will be gigahertz - that's thousands of million instructions per second. Modern computers are terahertz - millions of millions."



Sid Mather



"They put us on the horse and cart"

Sid Mather was born in 1930 in Montreal, Canada.

The family returned to Britain when Sid was three, living first in Clara Vale and later moving to Benwell. Sid's first job after leaving school at 14 was a delivery boy for the Co-op Dairy. At the age of 16, he started an apprenticeship as a plasterer, a job which he did for many years, with a break for national service in the 1950s.

"You never stayed at school in those days. There was plenty of work and you needed the money. It was July 1944 when I left school on the Friday, and on the Monday I was working for the Co-op Diary up at Cowgate delivering milk. In 1945, I got a job as an errand boy for Hector Powe's the tailor in Grainger Street. It was a high-class tailors and I was just an errand boy, but I actually finished up selling some of the suits and things like that. But the thing was, I said to myself you'd be better getting a trade. So I left after a year."

"First of all I went on the wagons, and then they put us on the horse and cart. We used to do one or two little streets in Fenham, and then we went along Studley Terrace and we done Tamworth Road and them streets, and then we done Stanhope Street and around there. And they called the horse Hector. The horse, he stopped at the bottom there, and we used to put 18 pints of milk in a crate and we had two crates of milk, and then the horse would be way up the street and he would be practically inside the doorway where he knew he would get his crusts. And he would stay there until we caught him, and we would fill up again, and he would be away to the next house."

"Anything in plaster, we used to cast them there"

"I was 16 when I started serving my apprenticeship as a plasterer for a decorative plaster company which was in the bottom of Leazes Park Road at the time. And that's where I spent quite a part of my apprenticeship behind the stables where they were - casting plaster, cornices, figures. And at that particular time we were doing one of the main shops in Newcastle, and what happened was I finished up doing nearly all the shops in town. So I was making these plaster casts for the job, and I was also wheeling them down on the barrow to do the job. And I was giving them a hand to fix it too. I used a barrow a lot in them days to transport them. And I would think nothing of having about ten twelve-foot planks, four tripods, a couple of dozen plaster boards, and a bag of plaster, and wheeling it up to Gosforth, Jesmond. And the only time I had any difficulty was at Barras Bridge and you went up onto the North Road and there's a steep bank just outside the Hancock Museum. After that I was alright.

We would go in these shops to do the cornices, and it was nothing for us to be working all day Saturday, and on the Saturday night we would go into Fenwick's and Bainbridge's and we would work all night plastering, and maybe work all the next day plastering to get the job finished. And we would do heads for them and we would do a lot of breasts for the shops to put women's clothes on them, and we occasionally made full models. I done it all.

In those days the casts were either made of plaster or made of jelly or wax. There was dozens and dozens of moulds, cornices and things like that. And they were all stacked up in a room and kept in case

they were needed for the future. Plaster of Paris sets in about five, ten minutes. But what you used to use was glue size, and it come in like a hard form and you had to boil it and melt it down, and when you melt it down you put a bit of that in the pail and you had to gauge that so you done the job. When you were finished it would begin to set, so you had to judge that. If you got too much in, you were waiting and waiting. if you got too little in, the plaster set on you so you couldn't complete the job.

The job suited me greatly because there's no way I could have worked in a factory or the shop, going back to the same place. The beauty of the job was I got onto various jobs in various areas, and that suited me champion."

"So I was on fire"

"I received the papers to say I was going across to Korea. So I done a few weeks in Japan, and I went across to Korea. And I was in the RAMI, in the workshops, and the job of our unit was to collect all the broken vehicles, tanks, from behind the lines, and we used to repair them.

In Korea I used to drive the water truck for the unit, and looked after the petrol and the diesel points, be on guard, and the petrol point was just a hand pump which leaked a lot. And this means that my clothes was saturated, and one particular time when I was filling up, the vapour backfired, set the whole place afire, including me. But as it happened there was people there who put the flames out. The other time we were in the canteen and the fire



went out and it was bitter cold, and this chap who was drunk tried to pour petrol in to fill it up, and I picked the can up and I'm in flames again."



Thomas Tuff



Thomas Tuff was born in 1921 in Glue Terrace, near to Scotswood Road

Thomas's father and grandfather had worked at Vickers, and at the age of 17 Thomas also found work there. During the war, he was sent to work at a factory in Blackpool which made parts for Wellington bombers. Later he was called up, despite having been in a reserved occupation. After two years serving in the army in India, he returned to Newcastle and continued to work at Vickers Elswick factory until it closed. At the age of 61, Thomas became unemployed for the first time in his life.

"On the Sunday, the war started"

"I had been working as a trainee butcher since I was fourteen years of age. I worked at this butcher's shop right until the very last day in August 1939. And then I went along and I applied for the job. And they employed me the following morning, at Vickers. That's how urgent things were then, and what the

people who run the country were knowing about what was going to happen. This was the Wednesday, and sure enough on the Sunday, after three or four days, the war started.

I went into work one morning and they said they want to see you in the office. They were getting somewhere round about twenty personnel to move away from Vickers to go to Blackpool, and they were building up a little factory there, an underground factory. It was just like being evacuated. We went to this Vickers place, and it was called Harrowside and it was near the big dipper. We were there about five years, and we made the small parts for the Wellington bomber. We nearly always did the wings. We were working 12 hours a day. All we got to do at the end of the shift was just go home to bed.

It was a bit exciting in a way because it was so new. And of course being by the seaside was quite nice. During the time the war was on, we had summer time, but they also made it what they called double summer time. And instead of altering the clocks one hour you altered them two hours. And sometimes when I was on night shift we had a break about 12 o'clock, and we went on to the promenade to have our sandwiches. And the sun's just setting - 12 o'clock at night. It was a bit exciting to be away and you were always doing things for yourself by then. You had no father and no mother to look after you."

"All the Vickers men were pretty well respected that came from Newcastle"

"They didn't have time for apprentices then. I'll tell you exactly what happened. I was taken to a very big machine shop with all kinds of machines – lathes, capstans, planers, drilling machines, gear cutting – everything was there. The foreman says, 'I'm going to show you something. I'll take you to this machine, and what you've got to do is watch this man working from half past seven till 12 o'clock when I come back and see you.' So I sat there and I watched, and I had a bit try, and we could talk to one another. So at 12 o'clock the foreman came back and he says, 'What I'm going to do now is send this man home for night shift, and you've got to carry on and do it.' And that was it. Four and a half hours. It wasn't training. I was watching. I worked the rest of the week, and I was on night shift the following week. We were making all things like screws and valves and things on a capstan. Never done nothing like that before. We were called 'dilutees'. But you know something. After I'd been there a year or two years, I was really enjoying making things.

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One of the nice things about Blackpool was that the factory was clean and it was fresh and all the machines were brand new. Another important thing was when I went there I was put in change of five capstans and they gave us five ladies to work on them. And I'd only been working there 18 months myself. They put me there as what's classed as a setter. If they made an order, I had to re-set it again and set it for a new job. Once I set it, the operator worked it. It was nearly all women on the machines. I think eventually if it had gone long enough, the women would have been setters as well. I would say altogether there were 350-400 people working in the Blackpool factory. The vast majority were women. There was tradesmen as well – people who had served five or six years. All the Vickers men were pretty well respected that came from Newcastle."

"I says 'I'll take the army. I'm too tall for the mines'"

"I'll tell you why I was called up. I was in a reserved occupation and I could have gone right through the war if I had have been alright, but one of the things that was happening during the war was that we were getting short of nearly everything. And one of the things we used to use in the factory was cutting oil. Eventually the oil became not fit to use really but we had to use it, and I got dermatitis from that. And what happened then was that I couldn't go to work, and they called us up! I said I'd rather go in the navy - but they didn't want me. So I tried the RAF and I went for an examination somewhere in Yorkshire, and I failed. This was the third time I was going back and he said, 'There's only two things we can do with you now. We can either send you down the mines as a miner or you can go in the army'."

A.B.64 Part I Slip.

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Casualties, Other Ranks, Responsibility for Notification

It is notified for information that the responsibility for notifying casualties affecting other ranks to their next-of-kin rests on the Officer I/c Records of the men concerned, and not on any department or branch of the War Office. All enquiries from next-of-kin or from any organization, etc., regarding casualties of other ranks should be addressed direct to Officers I/c Records, who will immediately take steps to furnish the required information.

The addresses of Record Offices and the units administered by them can be obtained at any Police Station.

Soldiers are, therefore, advised to notify their next-of-kin accordingly. There is no objection to this notice being handed to the next-of-kin.

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Jim Wright

Jim Wright was born in Byker in 1931. He lived in several other places over the years, including a period living in Rye Hill after he was married, eventually retiring to Benwell.

Jim was evacuated during the war. On his return, he went straight into his first job with a construction company but soon left to work on the trams. At the age of 18 he joined the Guards but had to leave because of ill-health. After a series of jobs in manufacturing industry, including a stint at Consett Steelworks, he moved back to the west end and worked as a security guard in the shipyards until his retirement.

"We didn't have a hard hat in them days"

"I left school on the Friday and I was working on the Monday, at a construction company. A steel erecting firm. Bricks, steel, everything - you name it. It was a rough job. My dad was a tram driver and he thought the job I had was too dangerous. I was working on the roofs in North Shields and my dad came down and said 'Off! Off that roof!' And I just packed the job in. But there was plenty work in them days. Today there's no work."

"You got a good uniform and that was about it"





"I got a job as a point boy, changing the points for the trams. I used to stand in a little hut and every time a tram come up I used to change that. I stayed in the same place all the time. You got a good uniform and that was about it. I was out in all weathers. It was a good job but the money was poor."

"I worked on whaling ships"

"I went in the shipyards. The lad next door to me was a painter and decorator, and he says 'Jim, I'll get you a job in the shipyards working with me.' I went in there to work with him as a painter, but I wasn't a painter. I worked in two or three of the shipyards. I was on oil ships, I worked on whaling ships, I worked on a submarine, I worked on big passenger liners and aircraft carriers. I didn't paint the outside, I painted the bridge and the main deck, and the inside - all the cabins and the boiler room and down below. They had other painters to do the outside with red lead - the rough work with a scaffold. They call them the 'red leaders'. I was out in all weathers. I used to work night shifts and all."



"I wore a bearskin hat"

"I joined the Guards. I fancied joining up, so I volunteered. I was at Buckingham Palace for a while. I was on one big parade and that was for the opening of the Houses of Parliament. I had my bearskin on and a great top coat and my rifle. The rifles were loaded but I never used them. I didn't do any killing. And I was all ready to go to Malaya when I took bad with a burst ulcer. The lad I joined up with, he went to Malaya and he got killed within two weeks."

"The whole place shut down"

"I got a job at Consett Steelworks. I was there thirteen and a half years until I was made redundant. I had two or three jobs in the steelworks. The first job was in the power station in the steel works. The last job was when I had my accident, working in what they call pig iron casting. I had to clear a line and as I lifted it up it come apart, so I had a girder smashed back on my hand and I lost my big toe. Then they closed the Consett Steelworks down. The whole place shut down. There's no steelworks now."

"The best job was the last one"

"I shifted back to Newcastle and got a job in the shipyards as a security guard. Hawthorn Leslie's they made engines for the ships. I was on the security for five years and then made redundant when they closed the shipyards down. I got a golden handshake. It was the best job I ever had. It was a very responsible job. I had to sit exams and everything to do that job. I had walkie talkies and even a truncheon. I used to work 12 hour shifts. No cameras in those days. I used to walk around with a torch, and a truncheon I never used, and a helmet. I was guarding millions of pounds worth of stuff. I had to pull people up who was taking anything out of the factory, like scrap or anything like that. There was a mate of mine who needed an exhaust for his car and he made it in the factory and he wrapped it up in a black bag and walked through with that. And he said 'Hello, Jim', and the boss says to me 'Pull him up'. I didn't want to because I knew him, but I had to. You had to go by the book."

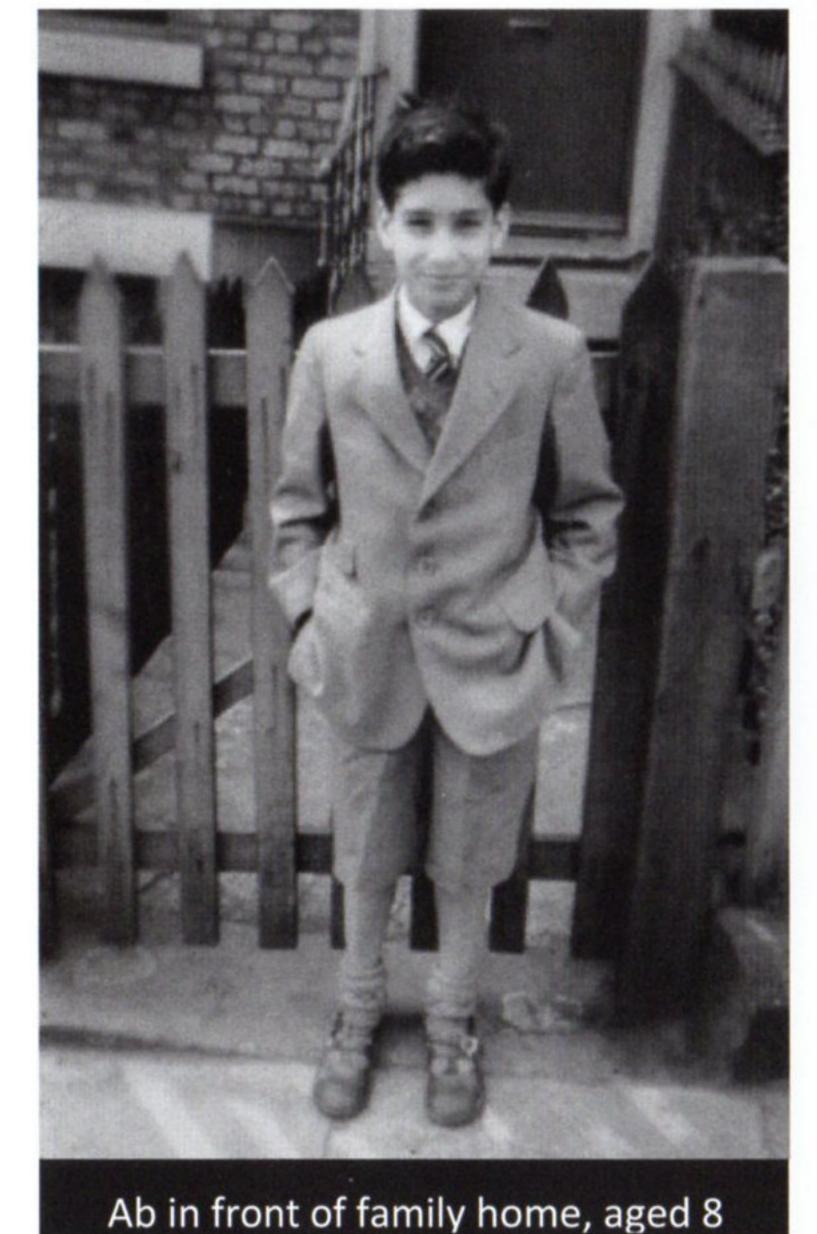


Ab Hamed

Ab Hamed lived in Gloucester Terrace from 1954 until about 1968 when his house was demolished as part of the large-scale clearance programme that removed thousands of homes across the west end. The family came to Elswick from a small village in Pakistan where they had a small farm growing fruit and other crops. Ab's father ran a successful drapery business in Newcastle, but returned to his village and farm in Pakistan on retirement.

"It didn't feel alien to me"

"I would be seven years old. I remember getting off the train at Central Station. I have vague memories of the airports and these aeroplanes - long journeys then. It took many hours, it was more than the five or six hours it takes these days. I do remember the train. It came to Central Station. I'd been on a sleeper, so the whole family was in this one cabin, and we got out and it was cold and it was damp, and we walked up Westmorland Road to the friend's house where we were going to stay. We stayed there for a couple of days then we moved to Gloucester Terrace. I remember that walk exactly. I still remember on the way the archways and wondering what they were. Everything was obviously very new to me but I could just relate to it, it didn't feel alien to me."



"On the Monday my father took me first of all to St Paul's and they didn't want me, so they said go along to Westmorland Road. So we went to Westmorland Road, and again I still remember going in there and seeing Mrs Gibb who was the head teacher, and standing in the room with her, my father explaining in broken English to her. My class teacher didn't seem particularly concerned about helping me, because obviously I understood nothing. My friends were very good and they would tell me things, and my parents helped me learn the alphabet, and I think in a few months I picked up quite a lot of language, but I still couldn't make sense of most stuff.

I enjoyed myself in Elswick. There was the park, the library, and I could walk to town quite easily, and all my friends lived nearby. I established quite a lot of good friendships and I think that helped me in a way that it's difficult to explain. We would play football and I would learn from them.

We would play in the park and hide-and-seek or cowboys and Indians and I would learn from them. I would learn about the culture, because I didn't

understand any of it really. I didn't understand about the knife and fork until I had to go to school

dinners. The first time I had to stay for school dinners I didn't know what it was, because we always ate with our hands at home. This was a mystery - and the mystery was solved very quickly. My friend showed me how to eat with a knife and fork.

There was lots of racism actually. I mean people, particularly youngsters, would shout at you, from across the street or as they were passing, names like 'darky'. That was common. Or they'd shout something which I never understood the meaning of which was 'darky whitewash'. You felt a lot of that sort of stuff from adults as well as kids. But I think it never affected me very much, largely because I had a large circle of native friends and it never happened with them, so I was insulated from it to some extent. The 'Paki' thing came



much later and was not my time. You would hear about other people being beaten up by a group of Teddy Boys or something, but I don't think I ever came across any violence myself. I never saw any and I didn't experience any violence myself in terms of racism. People might express their views but that's as far as it went."

"There's a romance about the navy, I think"

After leaving school at 16, Ab found it difficult to find work. He decided to go to college to train as a radio officer in the Merchant Navy. After several years at sea, Ab went to university and later became a lecturer at his old college in South Shields where he trained seamen in the new electronic jobs.

"I had read about the merchant navy as well and I realised that the radio officer's job was an excellent job, keeping watch two hours on two hours off. And it would give me a lot of free time to do the things that I was interested in, and also to explore wherever we went to. So it was a really excellent job. But unfortunately it was abolished in the 1990s when the global distress system was established. So this really very nice job was just no more.

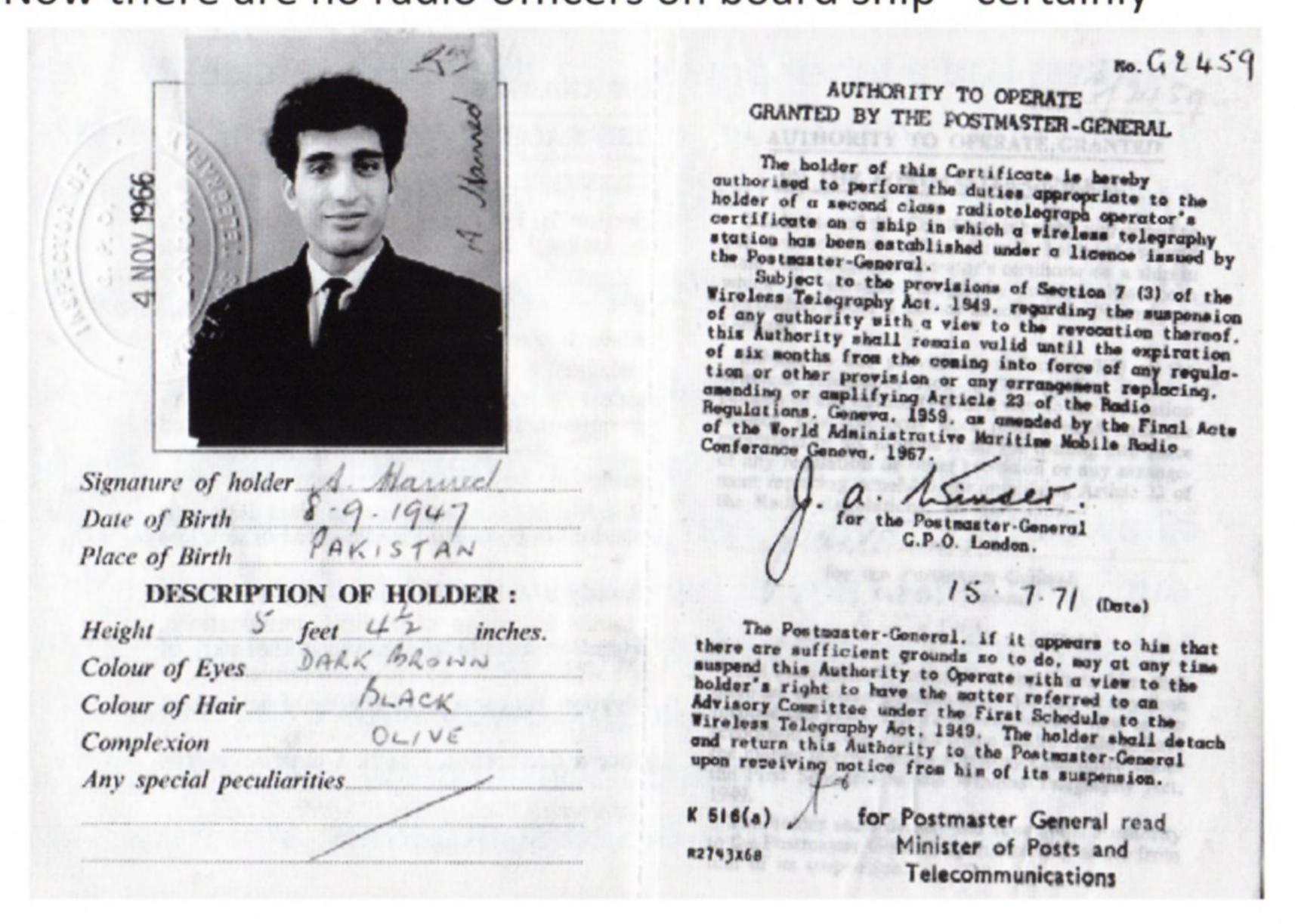
The position of radio officer on board a ship is to first of all to provide safety for the ship, and other ships as well. So you maintain a radio watch which means you listen to the special frequencies on which distress messages are sent, and also you would send a distress message if your ship was in any kind of trouble. The other thing that you would do would be to send messages relating to the operations of the ship, and you would also send messages from any passengers who might want personal messages or the captain or the crew who might want to communicate with their friends and family. So you operated the communications system of the ship. And the other responsibility was to maintain the navigation equipment.

The number of radio officers carried was an international requirement. On cargo ships, only a large ship would carry two or three radio officers. A small ship would carry one. And so you did two hours on and two hours off, but when you went off watch you had another piece of equipment which you switched on and tested and set up, and this would detect a special distress signal. I think my first watch used to start 8 o'clock and I used to finish at 10 o'clock at night, so it was most of the day. But that's only when I was at sea. When we were in port I never kept a watch because there was no danger and there was no traffic."

"It started really with the Titanic"

"When the Titanic went down, there was a radio officer on board and he sent a message and it was received by other ships, but there wasn't any particular system for dealing with these things properly. People just kept watches when they wanted to, which was a bit random. Then there was an international meeting and rules were agreed. Now there are no radio officers on board ship - certainly

not British ships. The modern system doesn't require a radio officer. Modern equipment is so sophisticated actually anyone can be trained to operate it. The equipment for meeting global distress requirements is actually automated more or less, so the need for a radio officer isn't there, not in the sense of the old radio officer. Everything is computer controlled now. The ship could actually be sailed automatically using satellite technology. So you don't need any crew. But you'd actually need some crew because otherwise the ship could obviously be pirated, of course, so they would maintain a



crew. There is talk about crewless ships but whether that will happen or not I don't know."

"We took coal from Jarrow down to Dagenham"

Most of Ab's time in the merchant navy was spent sailing in the North Sea and the Baltic.

"The first ship I sailed on that was called the Minster. I used to sail basically from the Tyne to London, and it used to go to Dagenham quite a lot. There was nothing there except the Ford plant, which we went to, and that was just cars and cars and nothing else. Then we used to go to the Continent getting iron ore occasionally or taking coal across to the Continent. The German power station in Bremen, we would supply that. And with other ships I went to Lubeck and Stettin in Poland, and Bremen in Germany, and Amsterdam. And we went to some Scottish ports as well - one of them was Methil, and they had a fish and ship shop where they did fried Mars bars. It was wonderful."



"It did seem to be derelict and then gone"

Ab remembers when the Tyne still had a working quayside and ship-related industries. This period saw the beginning of the process of containerisation which devastated Britain's ports.

"I remember in 1965 I sailed back from Denmark into the quayside, beside the Tyne Bridge. And the whole area was basically for ships. There were sheds and warehousing and stuff like that, so it did go quite quickly. I can't remember when that happened. A DFDS ferry used to land a little further down, just opposite the Law Courts. And of course there was all the shipbuilding was going on at the same time. You had all the dock yards and also the dry docks.

They use a lot of lorries now. A lot of ports have actually closed up. Containerisation was just starting, and the container ships were being built. We would go into port to load some cargo, usually in my case it was coal, but it could take weeks sometimes, and the ship was just sitting there doing nothing and all the crew, all the staff, had to be paid etc. So from the ship owners' point of view it was very inefficient. That didn't just happen with coal which is a bulk cargo. The same was true for other ships as well. Dockers had a lot of power and they did exercise it. We could be loading and all of a sudden they would all be gone. So they were looking for something to make it easier, to speed up the whole process and turnaround. Today the turnaround for a ship is about three hours."

"I don't think there's any merchant navy left in Britain"

Another major area of change observed by Ab has been the decline of the British merchant navy.

"What happened was: Margaret Thatcher, after the Falklands, having used the merchant navy ships, she allowed the shipping companies - as maybe her gratitude to the shipping companies - to actually flag out. And what they did was they went to Bermuda and other places so they registered the ships in those places, so they obey the regulations and so forth of those countries. Whereas Britain's regulations were very strict, they could get away with a lot more. They could employ foreign crews, so they started to employ Filipinos, Indians, Somali crew and so forth. So they could have much cheaper crews. We are still talking about British-based companies, and they are all flagged out basically."

MENI'S LIVES

In the West End of Newcastle

West Newcastle was formerly one of the most important industrial areas in the UK, home to diverse companies at the forefront of industrial development. After decades of economic decline and deindustrialisation, there are few traces of this legacy today.

Men's Lives captures the memories and experiences of older men from the west end of Newcastle who worked in jobs or industries that have disappeared or changed radically. It contains a selection of personal stories from older men who have lived or worked in the West End.

This book also contains memorable images of some of West Newcastle's lost industries from the unique collection of archive photographs gathered together by West Newcastle Picture History Collection.



Published by St James' Heritage and Environment Group

ISBN 978-0-9929183-0-9

A selection of excerpts from the original audio recordings is available to listen to on the St James' Heritage and Environment Group website (http://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com)

Extended transcripts of the interviews contained in this book can be viewed as part of the collection of West Newcastle Picture History Collection held at the West End Library, Condercum Road, NE4 9JH

West Newcastle Picture History Collection



