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‘A proper job’

A career in computing was not planned. I had worked towards joining the (UK) Royal Navy, as a lad attending the Skinners’ School in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, in the 1950s. I was a member of the school cadet corps, and as a 16-year-old I had signed up to the school and university branch of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. I was called for service in 1956 while still at school, and only escaped going to war when the captain of HMS *Ocean*, on his way to the Suez engagement, realised he had schoolchildren on board. We were unloaded onto HMS *Vanguard*, the only battleship in the British fleet, and kept in a secure environment for two weeks, as Prime Minister Anthony Eden had not publicly declared that he was sending gunboats to Egypt. At the time, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies was negotiating for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The experience of being aboard the *Vanguard* further whetted my ambition to be a sailor.

My ambition was partly satisfied when in 1958 I was offered a place, and officer training, in the navy. My dad had served in the Royal Air Force during World War II, qualifying as a codes and cyphers specialist; he had to sign my application. He was, however, loathe to sign the mandatory 29-year service agreement, asking what would I do when I demobilised as a 47-year-old lieutenant commander. He suggested I undertake a university course and then decide if I felt the same way. With the study I had taken to get into the navy, I was able to procure a place at the University of Leeds, studying civil engineering. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Leeds, but was unsure about spending the rest of my life in Wellington boots in and around building sites.

Figure 1.1: Schoolboy and sailor, Royal Naval Reserve service on HMS *Zest*, 1957.

Source: Author's collection.

'Grow up, son. Get a proper job, the same as everyone else.' That was mum and dad's resolution to my uncertainty when I arrived home at Tunbridge Wells in 1961, after three years at the University of Leeds, with a shiny new civil engineering BSc and an understanding of the design of hyperparabolic shells. I also had a girlfriend, Audrey, who I hoped would be my wife. I had fulfilled the two principal ambitions I took to the North of England as an undergraduate. At Leeds I had also taken the coursework of a new curriculum BSc (Econ.) in business management and I had passed these final examinations in addition to the degree course — not well, but passed.

What to do next? I had spoken to the faculties of medicine and law at Leeds and made enquiries of Kent County Council for an extension of my education grants. I was keen but unrealistic in thinking that events would let me drift into continuing my student lifestyle. It was not to be.

That one sensible conversation with mum and dad had me back in the real world. What was a proper job? I targeted Friday's *Daily Telegraph* employment pages and responded to four generic advertisements that were seeking 'an ambitious graduate'. I was invited to two interviews.

IBM was looking for trainee salesmen. At the time, IBM was the world's largest information technology company, with 80 per cent of the market of what was then called 'electronic data processing'. IBM had placed three of the advertisements I had answered, with slight variances in the text and reply addresses, and was not offended that I had picked it out more than once. Nothing was said about my multiple applications when I attended IBM's office in London's Wigmore Street for an interview. I was shown into a dingy little cubicle where an IBM aptitude test and answer paper awaited me. This was unexpected, but I was naively confident. It was a bright, sunny day outside and beams of sunlight cut through grimy windows, showing the dust in the Soho air. This diffusion of sunlight highlighted that the original aptitude test booklet had been previously completed by another candidate — the pencil indentations were obvious. I tried to ignore that I had answers in front of me and started off with my own responses on the answer paper. 'This is stupid,' I thought. I was getting the same answers as my predecessor. So I copied out those answers, completed the sections that were unanswered, and spent some time checking my answers. I rang the bell for attention as the clerk had asked me to do when I was invited to take the test.

The clerk arrived and was quite concerned.

> 'Can't you do it?'
>
> 'Well I have finished and checked the answers.'

She countered:

> 'You should not have finished this quickly. The HR manager is still interviewing another candidate. You'll have to wait. I'll process the test, but you will not be able to see him for another 23 minutes. Please wait here.'

She brought me a newspaper to read.

After precisely 23 minutes she collected me, and I went for my interview with the HR manager, who was big, sweating, and smarmy. He got up from behind his desk.

> 'My name is Godsland; whenever you think of me, you will think of heaven.'
>
> A silent 'Yuk — this guy is a real creep.'

The interview was short. IBM's assessment of me was that I was 'probably unemployable in a commercial sense'. Mr Godsland counselled that the aptitude test analysis showed that I was probably more suited to academia as a career.

Undeterred, I attended an interview at the National Trade Press (NTP) in Drury Lane and was interviewed by Dai Watkins, a young Welshman with a lived-in face. He was a very keen Welshman. Many are, it's a national trait. Dai explained that he had joined NTP — the trade and technical publications arm of the Daily Mirror Group — straight from the London School of Economics as an economist and statistician. He had outgrown the job, and I was being interviewed as a potential chief statistician and economist to replace him. He was leaving to set up his own marketing consultancy.

There was something familiar about Dai Watkins. I let him continue to enthusiastically explain the market research aspects of the job, particularly regarding new journals in the emerging technical industries of the early 1960s. Then I remembered: I had played rugby the previous Saturday for the Blackheath Rugby Club Second XV in a trial game at the Rectory Fields. Dai had played on the right wing; I had played on the left wing. He remembered me when I made him aware of the connection. In no

time at all I was in front of the NTP managing director, S. Chas Burt, and Dai was recommending me as a suitable candidate for the job. Mr Burt agreed with him, and I negotiated an annual salary of £850 — £50 more than I had heard any of my pals getting as civil engineers. That was OK.

The next day I had a telephone call at home from Mr Burt. 'How do you feel about attending an introduction to data processing course at IBM, starting Monday of next week?' Of course, I had to agree to that.

I was back at the IBM Wigmore Street office, but did not see Mr Godsland during the four weeks of attendance at the course. It was a good course, with about 20 participants, all male, mostly accountants. We were taught to use the IBM Series 3000 system hardware and how to program the plugboard system. We learned to program the system using wires plugged into a control panel to carry electrical signals around and through the equipment, rather like the old-fashioned telephone operator control panel. A full board required a cover to stop wires being accidentally knocked out. Changing a program could be a nightmare, feeling your way through to the backplane and several inches of cables.

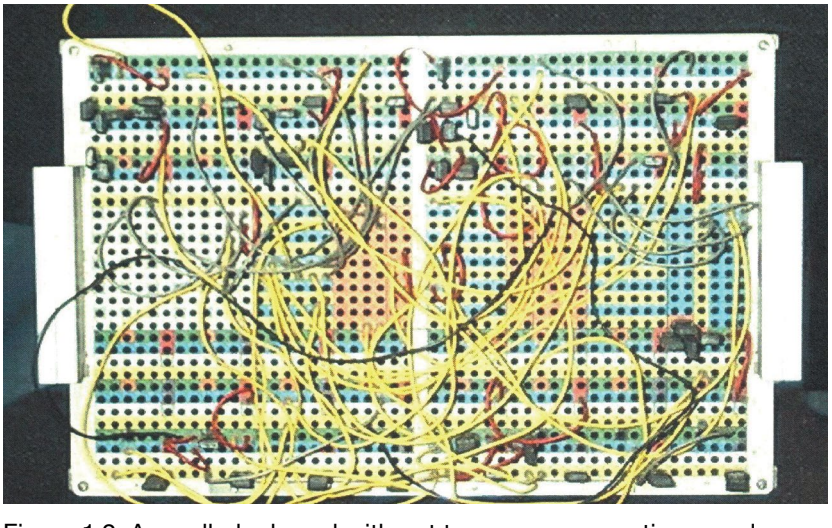

Figure 1.2: A small plugboard with not too many connections made.
Source: Wikipedia Commons.

The Series 3000 was a punch-card oriented system, with the choice of an 80- or 90-column card. We learned on a 90-column card system. The system was, at that time, an unannounced IBM product from IBM Germany. The course material was all very new to me. We had done some

theoretical programming at the University of Leeds, writing basic routines on coding pads, verifying instructions as well as we were able after they had been punched into paper tape, and reading our output as produced on the computing department's Ferranti Pegasus system, which had been installed in 1957. As civil engineers, our university computer experience consisted of three lectures and the chance to write and run a simple test program using the Fortran programming language.

Figure 1.3: The University of Leeds Ferranti Pegasus as installed in 1957.
Source: Author's collection.

The Series 3000 course was certainly a hands-on experience. The lady teacher was excellent and very patient in explaining business processes to me, as I was the only person attending the class without business experience. It was all going well until, at the end of the third week, it was announced to the class that IBM Armonk (the IBM headquarters in the US) had cancelled the IBM 3000 system and would instead extend the life of the IBM 420 Alphabetical Accounting Machine in the UK. This was a bit of a blow, but we kept going on the now redundant equipment and completed the class.

It was another blow to realise, when I got to NTP four weeks later, that Dai Watkins had left, and was not able to perform a logical handover of responsibilities. I had seen Dai at rugby training and played a couple of games with him, but we had not really talked about work. I had inherited Dai's secretary, but she was very pregnant and was waiting to quit working.

My first morning at work, I experienced S. Chas Burt's notoriously autocratic approach to handling people first hand. I had found Dai's old office and was sitting there talking to my secretary, asking her what to do in order to start work, when the telephone rang.

'Come up here!'

was the concise and clear instruction. It could only be the boss, and I asked for directions to his office. On this occasion Mr Burt was more than charming.

'How did the course go?'

I replied that it had been fine, although I had some problems with business processes, and had found the final test paper and test routine exercise somewhat tricky because of this.

'I am still mixing up credits and debits.'

Mr Burt told me not to worry.

'I think you have done really well. IBM has given you a score of 78 per cent for the course, which was higher than the class average. I want you to take on the role of data processing manager as well as being the market research manager. You can use a computer for your statistical work.'

'Thank you, Mr Burt. But … what does a data processing manager do?'

'Well, Chris, I cannot really tell you. We have never had one before. We had an IBM 3000 on order, which is why you attended the course, but, as you know, IBM has withdrawn that product. We want you to buy us a system to automate the readers' enquiry department. The manual systems cannot cope with the volumes we now have, and we are introducing additional magazines every few months.'

His further advice was for me to talk to his secretary, who would tell me the name of the IBM salesman who looked after the Daily Mirror Group account. She also introduced me to George Martin, who ran the classified advertising department, and who seemed to be Mr Burt's deputy.

George Martin was an ex-army officer, the holder of a Military Cross. A large man with a receding red hairline, he controlled a large, open plan office from a corner vantage point. Radiating outwards from this point, everyone else, mostly young men, sat in small cubicles. Today they would be called telemarketers, but instead of sitting at a computer screen they had newspapers and a telephone in front of them. Their job was to scrutinise the classified advertisement columns of rival publications for prospective buyers of our more directed service, and ring advertisers and convince them that their money would be equally well, or better, spent putting their advertisements in the relevant specialist technical journal published by NTP.

George introduced me to Jean Smith, the supervisor of the readers' enquiry department, the responsibility for which I had just acquired. In addition to classified advertisements, the NTP technical journals also carried display (mostly full-page) advertisements, which were given a code number. Each journal carried three pre-paid postcards listing the advertisement code numbers from that issue. Our readers were encouraged to circle the code numbers on the postcards as a request for more information. Jean and several ladies sat at typewriters and typed out readers' names and the relevant code numbers, which were then sorted and sent to the advertiser. If the reader was interested in more than one item, their name would be carbon copied onto a second piece of paper. Some readers would seek information on several products, so names and details were typed onto flimsy paper in order to get as many legible copies as possible. Company librarians from the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East were prone to ask for additional information on every product and service mentioned in every issue of the journal. Jean had not been told that her department was going to be upgraded to a data processing environment.

My status allowed me a secretary. Dai's ex-secretary only stayed with me a few days, so I placed an advertisement in the *Daily Mirror* and quickly selected a super girl, Hilary Cutna, to help me. Hilary was 21 years old, like me, and had secretarial and accounting experience. She and I set out to learn our new jobs together. Another source of help was the NTP marketing director, who took us under his wing and looked out for us in every way. A short session we found invaluable was when he sat us down to explain how to write a business letter.

> 'Always start with "I am writing to …" and explain simply the reason for the letter. Always keep your initial letter to a single page. Sign the letter off in the way you would expect the recipient to address you when he calls back as a result of the letter.'

This was simple stuff, but was valuable to us both.

Hilary and I agreed on some objectives: to learn the reader enquiry business in order to be able to select the best data processing system; to select a suitable system while handling the day-to-day market research responsibilities left by Dai Watkins; and to learn the journals and the idiosyncrasies of each.

We had something like 40 specialist technical journals, with titles such as *Electronic News* (NTP's first newspaper format publication); *The Watchmaker, Jeweller and Silversmith*; *Engineering Materials and Design*; *Interior Design*; and *Laundry and Dry Cleaning News*.

Dai Watkins had recommended that I try and regularly read one of our publications for an insight into the trade and in order to learn its language to use in surveying the readership. I had an office on our floor of Drury House. Also here were the display advertising manager of each publication, editors and clerical staff, and George Martin's empire of classified advertisement salespeople, who were young, keen, and ambitious to become display advertising representatives. The older magazines were subscription based, but NTP increasingly added controlled circulation publications, choosing to whom it (initially) sent the publication free of charge. Lists of professional people in each of the specialist markets covered by a journal were our potential readers; especially valued were that group of readers who had previously used the readers' enquiry system. We sold access to these readers to advertisers as potential buyers. Lists of names were our lifeblood.

What was becoming increasingly important for the advertiser to know was the profile of the readers of a particular magazine. It was an easy job to work it out for *The Watchmaker, Jeweller and Silversmith*, as the largest part of the mailing addresses included the word 'jeweller' or were in London's jewellery quarter of Hatton Garden. The magazine's circulation was small — perhaps 3,000. Dai Watkins had been conducting readership surveys by sending out questionnaires to a sample group from our circulation lists to be able to define readership profiles. We submitted the results of the survey to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, and the figures were

published by the bureau for the benefit of potential advertisers. *Electronic News* had an unknown readership, although the original mailing list had been compiled from the membership lists of engineering associations. However, when a reader made an enquiry we also asked, on the submitted postcard, for his or her job title, as well as giving a multiple choice list of industries to which he or she might belong, and codes for articles and products of interest.

Mr Burt had been sold on the idea of data processing enabling him to capture readership profiles of readers who made enquiries. He also expected to be able to replicate the list of enquiring readers for the display advertising manager to use as an inducement for follow-on advertising. NTP had ordered the IBM 3000 system following an intensive IBM sales campaign prior to my appointment.

The IBM salesman was Robin Brown. I asked him to come in and see me. He was quite unflappable about the cancellation of the IBM 3000 series and followed the party line, suggesting that the IBM 420 would do us just as well, or maybe the IBM 424 WTC Computing Accounting Machine (with solid state computing device). I learned very early that IBM never made a specific recommendation. The sales argument was that the buyer would only need to consider an 'IBM A' or 'IBM B' solution. IBM salespeople were taught not to discuss or even countenance the thought of a competitive supplier.

Robin Brown was an excellent companion. He had been a Guards officer during his national service and was not much older than me, around 27 to 29 years old. He had a lovely story about standing guard along the route of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation eight years earlier, in the rain, dressed in his red tunic and bearskin cap. The guards had been provided with Horlicks tablets for sustenance during the expected six hours of duty. He had taken his from their wrappings and put them in the breast pocket of his tunic, where they melted into a sticky mess and obvious stain, for which he was subsequently charged and disciplined.

Robin did his best to walk me through the requirements study that led to his proposal for the IBM 420 plus a card sorter and 12 IBM 031 card punch verifiers. I also asked International Computers and Tabulators (ICT) and De La Rue of Paris to bid. All three suppliers recommended similar plugboard systems. I was secretly favouring the De La Rue bid, as product training was to be in Paris. Perhaps Robin sensed this: IBM came in with an offer too good to turn down. As we were a disappointed IBM

Series 3000 customer, IBM would provide the IBM 420 equipment free of charge for one year, with delivery in two weeks. No further consideration was required. I knew that much about business.

The quick delivery of the hardware put me under immediate pressure to find a suitable office, as the existing readers' enquiry office housed just eight desks, and we were installing a large processor with in-built printer — the size of a pair of sideboards — the card sorter, and the dozen card punch verifiers. I needed to find four additional staff to work the card punches, someone to conduct initial training in the use of the card punches, and to learn the purchase of consumables (cards and printing paper), as well as a printer for continuous paper to feed the printer, with different stationery for each journal. And somehow I had to program the IBM 420 with the help of manuals. Luckily, I had only recently done the IBM course, albeit focusing on another hardware system. Although I did not have the equipment, I was able to plan and chart the route of signals from the card reader on the 420 through the arithmetic and comparative processes to the printer. Market research would have to be put on hold.

The equipment was installed over a weekend. We had to partly close Drury Lane for the heavy-duty mobile crane to lift the 420 processor and printer into the building through the second-storey window space. The card punches and card verifiers were installed at the same time. IBM 031 card punches did not come with the drawer space or modesty panels that the copy-typists were used to. A rush order overcame that difficulty. I had not budgeted for the hire of the crane and the removal and replacement of second-floor windows when estimating costs.

But we got things going. At first we accumulated a backlog of work as we learnt the new equipment and the tricks of the trade. An early shortcut we used was not verifying the punched data. Verification involved a duplication of the input process and cards were notched to show if they had been checked or corrected if necessary. This was obviously of huge advantage in an accounting application, but it was not working for us with a free-form input of names and addresses — with cards formatted with names, first line of address, second line of address, and so on. As copy-typists, each lady had adopted her own style of input and, to an extent, her own set of abbreviations. Our reader enquirers did not help the process either, as many left out a lot of information and would use their own forms of shorthand. We looked at standardising the input, and therefore the verification process, but it did not work. So the decision was

made not to verify. This upset IBM through Robin Brown, and resulted in the first of the letters in which IBM suggested to Mr Burt that its recommendations were not being followed and this would prejudice NTP operations.

If the reader enquirer was requesting a follow-up on more than one item in the journal, he or she entered more than one product code. Some people asked for additional data on up to 100 items. We therefore duplicated the name and address punch cards the appropriate number of times, marking each name and address card set with the code number requested. The names and addresses were then sorted, in the card sorter, and printed on the 420 processor. The initial program was relatively simple and involved a new page list for each change of code number.

The covering letter to the advertiser was also printed through the system using continuous stationery, pre-printed with the journal name, upon which we listed the advertised item's code number, a short product description, and the relevant reader names and addresses. We originally intended sending conventional-sized letters to advertisers, but I soon changed them to a smaller size, which would not require folding, with the advertiser's address showing through a window envelope. To improve the look of the output form, I had the journal stationery printed without sprocket holes, to save the stripping task, using the platen-feed feature — this brought another letter from IBM to Mr Burt.

Other quick equipment changes included upgrading the punches from the IBM 031 to the IBM 026 model. The travel of the card through the IBM 031 was directed via a formica strip into which notches, at the position of the column that was the start of a new field, were cut with a sharp knife or a purpose-built notch guillotine. With continuous use, the notch in the formica became larger through impact and the field positioning became erratic. The IBM 026 punch allowed us to punch a master format card which controlled the fields. We also upgraded the IBM 420 processor to the IBM 424 model and acquired a faster card sorter. It has to be said that IBM accommodated these changes at similar advantageous rates as the original offer, and we only paid the nominal difference between the list prices — keeping a credit for the equipment that was initially delivered for the first year. We used a huge number of cards. They were expensive. Subsequent study has shown that a large part of IBM's profits were from the sale of punch cards. Dai Watkins, with whom I kept in regular contact, had a Canadian pal called Dan Smith who had brought

his company, Precision Data Card, to the UK. I used them. Another IBM letter to Mr Burt suggested that the Precision Data Card stock was of inferior quality. That was three letters, and I had hardly started.

The system was working quite well. The advertisers certainly appreciated getting printed names and addresses of readers with an interest in their products. Some asked for multiple copies of lists in order to cut them up to use as stick-on addresses for their sales force. We were also, at times, very quick. This was especially the case when new magazines introduced the reader enquiry service or a new magazine was introduced. At times this caused delays for the established journals, but I tried to gloss over this deficiency. Eventually we would have as many as 26 data preparation clerks. Our floor of Drury House had originally been used as a paper store, so we had no reservations about putting the tabulator on the floor, but when we were using the printer — and we often printed for 10 hours a day — the reverberation of each line, with the printer operating at approximately 60 lines a minute, was obvious, and at a noise level that would not be permitted today.

We were able to identify 20,000 readers in the general engineering business who had made enquiries through *Electronic News* and *Engineering Materials and Design* and use these names as a subscription base for a new weekly newspaper, *Engineering Weekly*. At this time, NTP was extending its relationship with QB Printers in Colchester, which was implementing web-offset newspaper technology, which gave us the promise of colour.

Electronics was a fertile market in the early 1960s. We introduced a glossy journal called *Design Electronics* and were able to define a narrow readership profile for early copies of this magazine, which was circulated only to persons who had told us they were electronics design engineers. I compiled the lists, but the technology did not extend to us being able to print regular labels, so we continued to use steel plates with impressions of the reader's address to print journal wrappers.

I extended the use of the data processing equipment when we had to implement a full subscription fulfilment system for a small, paid circulation monthly magazine. IBM was most interested in this application and issued the set of NTP guide notes, which I had written, within its supported applications library — application descriptions were something that was missing in this hardware-oriented data processing industry. The work we were doing was also of interest to our Daily Mirror Group parent, International Publishing Corporation (IPC), and I joined the group data

processing committee, led by Bernard King from the Daily Mirror Group head office in New Fetter Lane. IPC acquired an early IBM 1401 system and, when it was available, the first IBM 1440 in Europe, as well as an early IBM 1460. I did some assembler programming on the 1400s and got a feel for storage media other than punch cards.

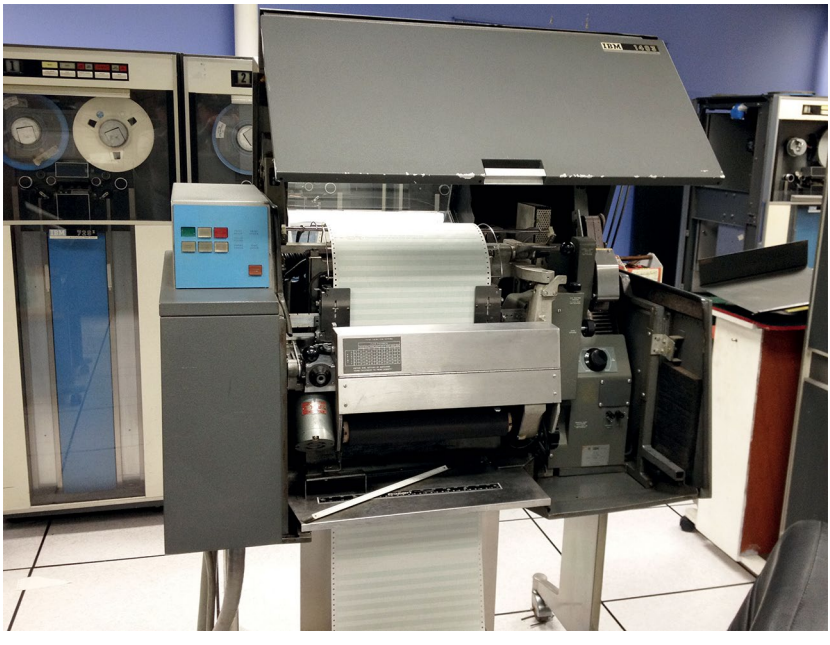

Figure 1.4: The IBM 1401 of the early 1960s incorporated tape drives as storage media for sequential processing.
Source: Wikipedia Commons.

I did some advisory work with Ken Cohen, the data processing manager of Tothill Press (another IPC trade and technical publishing house which later merged with NTP) during the implementation of its reader enquiry system, using ICT equipment. It was again a punch card and sorter system, but incorporated a typed reader enquirer name and address that was photocopied for the advertiser. The card was used in much the same way as we used it, the difference being that we incorporated the name and address details within the punch card rather than on it.

I may have given the impression that IBM was a difficult supplier. This was not really the case. I learned to appreciate that IBM was being careful in covering themselves in a developing industry. I always enjoyed Robin Brown's input as our salesman, and we became good friends. Robin was

promoted within IBM and was replaced by Tony de Glanville. Tony was equally personable, but was more interested in the main IPC account, which I also understood. We had regular faults with the card punches and sorter, and the IBM 424 processor demanded regular preventive maintenance. Rod Smith was the IBM engineer we saw the most of. He was excellent. If he and I ever had too many beers at lunchtime, we would retire to a position hidden from view behind the card sorter, endeavouring to replace the electronic brushes and switches that comprised the basic sorting mechanism. This was a preventive maintenance job that had to be done some time, after all.

I did not find it easy to manage the punch room, especially when it got larger. The girls were more worldly-wise than I, and would try and manipulate me in any way they could. I tried to hide behind Hilary Cutna, and later Audrey Davies who became my personal assistant, but eventually I employed a punch room supervisor. The early days were not always easy. Mr Burt sent for me one day to ask why I was favouring one particular punch operator (let's call her Gabriella), and giving her one half-day a week leave of absence. The union had raised it as an issue. Gabriella had been told to explain her domestic situation to me by her doctor, who had also called me to discuss her situation. Gabriella, an Italian, had married an Englishman and come to London. They had never properly consummated their marriage (I did not want to know this): 'Tom is so big. I get so very nervous. My body goes rigid.'

My schoolboy counselling did no good. Hilary was unmarried and Gabriella would not discuss it with Jean. Her doctor had suggested remedies that might relax the woman, including the three-hour psychiatric sessions for which I gave her leave. The other girls in the office had complained to their shop steward about the favouritism I was exhibiting — if only they had known. Mr Burt listened, but quite correctly told me it was my problem. He suggested I talk to the shop steward.

Within the printing business, the shop steward is known as the 'Father of the Chapel'. Wally Sollioux was NTP's Father of the Chapel. He and I discussed in masculine isolation what we might do to overcome Gabriella's problem and drew cards to see who would take responsibility for coming up with a solution. I lost. I was so relieved. To this day, I do not know how Wally addressed the issue, but Gabriella certainly became

less erratic, and I would quite often see Tom when he collected her from work at the end of the day. They eventually appeared content in one another's company.

I had other responsibilities in NTP apart from the new data processing adventure. Dai Watkins had left a readership survey to be completed. He had also pointed out that it would make sense for me to join the Market Research Society and take a postgraduate statistics course at his alma mater, the London School of Economics, which was in easy walking distance of the office. I took his advice and enjoyed both activities. Our readership survey contained the obvious questions, with tick-a-box options to prompt answers. Dai had been working on the basis of 10 surveys per year. With some 40 journals on the presses, this meant we would survey the readership every three to four years. I have to say I found Dai's approach a bit amateur, although this attitude might have been due to the enthusiasm generated by my attendance of the London School of Economics class. The school's pub was also a convenient watering hole and meeting place for guests.

NTP contained a wealth of characters. Tony Gottelier and Roy Shorter, who were the same age as me, were working as classified advertisement telephone salespersons when we became pals. They could not have been more different. Tony Gottelier was polished and refined, public-school educated, and very much a man of the world. Tony was destined to be a star in our mundane workplace. Roy Shorter, his competitor and colleague, was just the opposite: a proud East Ender with Cockney emphasis and aspirations. As a team they were outstandingly successful as telephone salesmen and were soon promoted to be display advertisement representatives — with business cards and, eventually, business cars. Perhaps to keep Tony's feet on the ground, he was appointed as advertising manager of *Laundry and Dry Cleaning News*. Roy furthered his apprenticeship with one of the technical magazines before getting the job of advertising manager for a new publication, *Building Industry News*, which was a huge success from day one. George Martin, who had been the manager of the classified advertising department, was appointed to one of the flagship publications, *Engineering Materials and Design*. His journal, which was perhaps 300 pages thick every month, generated a huge number of enquiries and George kept the pressure on us for rapid turnaround and inventive presentation of facts and figures. He was also close to Mr Burt and was therefore a useful ally.

Perhaps my best pal at NTP was Dick Gibson, an older Dubliner with one of the less fashionable household textiles journals, which was without the reader enquiry service and which may have helped us stay friends. Dick always seemed a bit of a loner. I enjoyed his company, and after a couple of years we began to socialise. Dick would accompany Hilary Cutna to the London theatre with me and Audrey, who became my wife after I had been at NTP for about a year. Audrey moved from Middlesbrough and we settled in an 1890s terrace house in Orpington, 30 minutes by train from central London. Audrey was a school teacher.

I took advantage of *The Watchmaker, Jeweller and Silversmith* magazine. The advertising manager, having done his best to dissuade me from marriage, introduced me to a manufacturing jeweller in Hatton Garden. I met with Mr Chalfen of H. Chalfen and Company at his office. We chatted with one of his jewellers for a while before walking into a huge safe, a room lined with velvet-lined pull-out drawers, upon which sat cut diamonds. My purchase was destined to be modest, but Mr Chalfen and his colleague played the game to the full, and I was left with a choice of two diamonds that were only marginally more expensive than my upper spending limit. One diamond did look bigger than the other. I was invited to inspect the colour through an eyeglass to make my final selection. I went through the motions and emotions while in the background an assistant questioned Mr Chalfen offering me the smaller of the two, which was of 'exceptional colour and should have been in a higher price bracket'. It had to be a con, but it was so nicely done. I bought the smaller stone and Mr Chalfen had it mounted as a solitaire in a platinum setting. I was happy with my purchase — I still am. Less happy, initially, was my future mother-in-law, as I sent the token of our engagement to Audrey in Middlesbrough, in the North of England, via Royal Mail and the small (uninsured) parcel had been left on the doorstep. But it had got there. Audrey was happy, which is what mattered.

Figure 1.5: This is the only work photograph I have from the National Trade Press days. Note the bowler hats on the hatstand. I owned a bowler for just one day.

Source: Author's collection.

The chairman of NTP was Vere Sherrin — tall, silver-haired, dignified, and every inch my image of the successful businessman. Mr Sherrin was a director of the Daily Mirror Group and held several other directorships. Mr Burt introduced me to the chairman's son, Graham Sherrin, who I helped with some exploratory market research. Our work resulted in the publication of a new weekly newspaper, *Medical News*, which was jointly published by NTP and *The Financial Times*. My little team took considerable care with the development of the circulation list, having conducted a small postal survey to determine if doctors would read a newspaper — even one written specifically for them — such was the volume of material these people could expect every day. We were surprised at the level of pre-publication interest and absolutely overwhelmed by the response to a readership survey conducted after 12 months of the

publication. The response rate was over 60 per cent, and the two open-ended questions elicited pages of difficult to read script. The response was reflected in the advertising revenue the publication generated. It was a huge success. *Medical News* was a prestige publication, and its offices near Harley Street reflected that success. Mr Burt was pleased to have been able to offer NTP expertise to *The Financial Times*.

I also did some work with the Daily Mirror Group with readership surveys. I put together some basic questionnaires and conducted personal interviews in the street, mostly at the exits to the London Underground, with readers we could see carrying the better known of the group's publications — the *Daily Mirror*, *Woman's Own*, and *Woman's Weekly* amongst others. The high-profile editorial teams of these consumer publications were much less amenable to any suggestions arising from market research than their trade and technical editorial colleagues, especially when I suggested we reprint a two-year-old edition and see if any readers noticed.

Commuting was a way of life for London office workers. During my first year of work I travelled the 40 miles to London from Tunbridge Wells with my younger brother, Butch, who was then working in the estate office of St Bartholomew's Hospital. He was a commuter for the 40 years of his working life. Butch and I took the bus to Tunbridge Wells Central Station, or to Tonbridge, to pick up the Hastings–Charing Cross train. He had been doing this for a year already and had a group of pals who met every day in the same carriage of the train. It was a cheerful group of young people who — initially — unintentionally made life a bit noisy on the hour-long journey. Older travellers were as equally set in their ways as the youngsters and an uneasy truce was eventually achieved.

I quickly conformed to the train platform etiquette. The regulars would congregate on the platform in anticipation of the train, talking together. When the train approached the platform, we formed a single line in order of the time we had arrived. The single line was positioned directly opposite the place where the train door was expected to stop. Once through the door, the rush was on to your own preferred seat or alcove. We even knew the drivers, including those who were consistent in where they stopped. If the driver did not play the game correctly, the single file queue would break like the drivers at the start of the 24-hour Le Mans race, chaos ruled, and it was push and shove with energetic elbows to tussle to be first to the door. The South-East Railway system was known for its problems.

Ice and fog were always good for long delays. The platforms would be filled to overflowing and a new strategy prevailed. We nearly all carried a square key that gave access to the guards' van and we would travel in that space. The railway police were not happy with this situation, so we would leave the train at a run, alighting prior to the train stopping, mostly avoiding any confrontation with the waiting railway policemen. Butch told me that the situation has improved 40 years on: the trains stop at less stations, and with maturity has come the opportunity to arrive in the office later. His same group is still travelling. Commuting becomes a way of life. The commuter knows no better. Thank goodness I escaped that fate before becoming too set in my ways.

London had its advantages. I learned to make the most of theatre. The cinema did not appeal nearly as much. Audrey and I enjoyed a monthly evening out with Hilary Cutna and Dick Gibson, and there were very few shows we did not enjoy. Our office in Drury House overlooked the Drury Lane Theatre stage door and some of the dressing rooms, and we regularly met the current crop of performers in and around the Covent Garden facilities we shared. Laurence Harvey was a real favourite when he was appearing in *Camelot*. There were always young women waiting for him to use the stage door. One evening after seeing a show, Audrey and I were walking my father- and mother-in-law down Maiden Lane, a back lane of The Strand, when we collided with an elegant man coming out of a stage door. The gentleman doffed his trilby and made a great fuss of my mother-in-law to facilitate her passage. She never forgot the experience — she had been feted by Rex Harrison. *My Fair Lady* played for several months in Drury Lane, and Rex Harrison, Stanley Holloway, and Julie Andrews became familiar to us.

Just prior to Christmas 1964, Tony Gottelier at NTP sold me four 5-shilling tickets to a show to be held at the Hammersmith Palais. Tony recommended we enjoy a new singing group and predicted that they would become very successful. Audrey and I took my brother Butch and sister Libby to a concert by the Beatles. We knew we were to experience something special when we were offered £5 each for our tickets as we fought the crowds to get into the theatre. We had tickets to the full set of future pop stars, at that time unknown, managed by Brian Epstein. The Liverpool-based set of artists included not only the Beatles, but Gerry and the Pacemakers, Freddie and the Dreamers, Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas, and Cilla Black. My 16-year-old sister screamed herself hoarse. We did not hear very much, but it had been a memorable evening.

Everything was going quite well at NTP, until Christmas 1964. I had damaged my right knee playing a game of soccer in Corsica while on summer holiday. This required the removal of a torn cartilage and had me on crutches and absent from the office for six weeks — which is why I had chosen to have the surgery done at Christmas. Despite it being the holiday season, six weeks was too long away.

Two things had happened. One was a move by another manager to take over the readers' enquiry department. His authoritative, more disciplined approach had met with success while I was away. He had also discovered that, in my absence, one or two of the punch room girls were secreting reader enquiry forms in their desks and prejudicing the integrity and timing of the system. The other was a move from Drury House to new offices in Bowling Green Lane in Clerkenwell, quite close to Smithfield Market. A merger of NTP and the Tothill Press was on the cards. I managed to keep Hilary and Audrey, and we looked to make more use of technology in the research-related activities I had joined the company to pursue. The Daily Mirror Group had the IBM 1460 system by this time, and I looked at converting the magazine subscription fulfilment system to run using magnetic tapes or disks as the storage medium. There was also quite a bit of work through the Daily Mirror Group data processing committee, and I became more involved in computers.

I had learned through experience but was conscious that the only training I had had was in punch card tabulator technology, and I thought to make a career change to computers. Bernard King, the Daily Mirror Group data processing manager, had been impressed with what he was being told by Honeywell, and arranged for me to meet with them. I also spoke to the UNIVAC division of Remington Rand, and it was UNIVAC I joined in mid-1965.