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ENQUIRY No 96 - BARNE BARTON MARRIED QUARTERS

David, a few personal recollections of the Barne Barton MQ estate which may or may not be of interest.

To begin with, my memories of the estate go back to 1988 when one of the MQ blocks became empty and was handed over to a few dockyard staff, including me, as office accommodation. The block, in Roope Close, was occupied by four of us from the dockyard Finance department for several months and became our 'home from home'. I chose the uppermost bedroom for my office as it had superb unobstructed views of the dockyard all the way from Weston Mill Lake Jetty, which was under construction at the time, right down to South Yard and beyond.

I didn't have a car in those days so my daily travel by bus from Plympton to St Budeaux was a fairly long commute. The journey would take at least an hour and a half on good days, but at other times would drag on for over two hours followed by a 10-15 minute walk from the St Budeaux bus stop up to Roope Close. Not a pleasant experience in the rain!

Because of the super views from my office/bedroom window I could easily follow progress on the construction of Weston Mill Lake Jetty which involved the launching of enormous hollow concrete blocks into the water from a slipway. Surprisingly, although they each weighed 2000 tons they could float and be 'tugged' into final position in the lake before being sunk and filled with aggregate. Before the launch of the first block Port Admiral Devonport came to my office for a general overview of the site and a briefing on the launching plan – possibly the last time a serving sailor visited the MQ.

Shortly after this I recall being almost drowned by an unexpected torrential rainstorm that hit St Budeaux and Barne Barton as I walked to work through the estate without raincoat or brolly. As soon as I got to the office my soggy clothes and shoes went straight into the airing cupboard. Almost immediately my phone rang and I found myself talking to a very senior Whitehall civil servant who was querying a previously approved and accepted financial Investment Appraisal relating to the new jetty (my area of responsibility). He wanted a new one with changes. The conversation got quite heated as he was insisting on things that I knew would be detrimental to the overall project. It got so bad that I eventually told him to stand by whilst I opened my window in order to shout down to the site foreman and tell him to stop work and send everybody home as continuing the project would be pointless because of this telephone call. This seemed to really annoy my caller who made a quick verbal comment on my attitude before slamming the phone down. I never heard from him again. I must admit to having some satisfaction from the incident as he was probably sat in a plush Whitehall office wearing an expensive pin striped suit whereas I was in a MQ bedroom wearing nothing more than very damp Y fronts!

On another occasion having been called to attend a meeting in the dockyard I quickly made my way up to the nearest bus stop in Poole Park Road. To my surprise a little toddler was sitting all alone in the middle of the road. There was no-one else around and thankfully no traffic either.. I immediately picked him up and started to look for clues as to where he'd come from. There were none so I began knocking on MQ doors to find his parents. Incredibly no-one in the vicinity knew him. I even asked the driver of the bus I was hoping to catch but he hadn't seen him before either. Having let the bus go I was left literally holding the baby! I continued to knock on doors with no luck until I eventually came to the RN Community Centre where a sort of 'Mothers Meeting' was being held. With briefcase in one hand and baby in the other I barged in totally embarrassed but hopeful that some-one there would know the little fellow. Luckily one lady recognised him and gave me directions to his MQ which was some distance away. Mum wasn't home so I handed him over to dad who was full of apologies for not knowing that the little one had found a way out of the garden and was missing. I don't think mum would have been too impressed if she ever found out. I eventually got to the dockyard meeting two hours late with an excuse that I'd certainly never used before!

Our Roope Close MQ was kept clean by a cleaning lady who was married to a serving sailor and lived a short distance away in another MQ on the estate. She was a very efficient and likeable lady and maintained good standards throughout our occupancy. She told us that she only cleaned in the mornings because she had a night time job and needed to rest during the afternoons. To our surprise her night time job was far removed from cleaning - she was a stripper in Union Street.

Anyway there we are, Barne Barton as I remember it – a nice time shared with some very nice people in a rather unusual but 'homely' workplace.

Paul