

Teds Story

My name is Ted Hills and I am currently adjusting to the stage in life called retirement, having spent most of my working life in a variety of industrial drawing offices. Looking back in hindsight I realize I've had a most interesting and rewarding adventure.

I started my design career in a Jig and Tool office designing fixtures and tools for excavator parts. During this period I spent two very happy years in the Royal Air Force doing national service as a navigational instrument fitter. Within a short period after my demob Rolls Royce started a major recruiting campaign for draughtsmen as a result of winning the order for the Tri-Star engine contract. I couldn't resist the temptation and fortunately secured a job with them initially working at Chesterfield on Turbine blade tooling and later at main works in Derby designing special purpose machines. For me this job was the icing on the cake, as it was the most challenging and creative work I had ever done. Imagine being told a critical engine component required an operation performed on it that no machine anywhere could do and then being given the job of designing the machine from scratch to do it. Design doesn't come much better than this. I can still remember with a smile a saying going round the office at that time that the difference between difficult and impossible jobs was that the impossible ones just took a little longer, Sadly this dream didn't last too long as in 1971 Rolls Royce crashed and I found myself frantically looking for another job along with several hundred others.

I must have a very good guardian angel looking after me for after leaving Rolls Royce on a Friday I started my next job on the Monday following at a company in Nottingham designing machine tools, it was a big drop in salary but the work was almost as interesting. I was beginning to settle in and enjoy my new job when out of the blue my previous boss at Rolls Royce phoned me at home to say that he had been approached by a gentleman wanting to know if I would be interested in a mechanical design position at a new company they were setting up. Never one to turn an opportunity down I went along to a very small industrial estate in Sileby and saw for the first time in my life EDM and ECM machines. They were completely different to anything I had been involved with up to that point. The process fascinated me and the thoughts of designing machines around this new technology presented some major challenges to conventional machine design concepts, I was hooked and fortunately was offered the job as their one and only design engineer. The company was much smaller than I had been used to, maybe a dozen people at the most, so there was very little demarcation of work roles, which suited me fine. I stayed with this company for the next fifteen years or so and saw it grow from a dozen people in a single industrial unit to several hundred in three factories in Sileby and units in several countries worldwide. By this time in my life I was getting a little disenchanted with the dream that had driven me with a passion earlier. Pedantic accountancy seemed to be taking away so much of the soul of engineering that I began to wonder if I should be looking for another career altogether, but if that were the case I had left it far too late.

My guardian angel must have seen my plight and smartly stepped in by instigating a move to Moss Machines in Leicester. It was here of course that I met Roger Moss for the first time. Roger rekindled my passion for innovation and put the excitement back into the design process; here was a man who not only knew what he was talking about but also genuinely loved what he did. So for the following sixteen years or so our paths coincided regularly even through company collapses and diverse job changes. I'm now free of all constraints on my time as far as working for a living is concerned, but the one thing I wanted to do before I escaped being employed was to ensure I maintained contact with Roger. This I did and now spend a small part of each week looking into the depths of Scott motorcycle engines with Roger, and keep my hand in at computer aided design, and what could be better than that.