

Mark: this a bio I was asked to do for our local Mens' Shed magazine.

(<http://www.theshedonline.org.au/mens-sheds/profile/gosnells>) - another subject. It's a bit blokey, so I've changed some bits, (in green) to avoid embarrassment! Ignore the red bits!

I will send another .pdf with photos of models, explanations etc. This is the easy bit!

---

Chris Beckett 1955 – (believed to be still alive, if not always apparent)

Brian suggested I write this – not as a vanity-puff, but because I'd expressed an interest in being a Shed Supervisor, so as to be able to extend the opening times – so I'd sent him my CV, to prove (at last) that I wasn't a murderer, fraudster etc. He did think my life had been "interesting" (as in police enquiries?) and I might like to give my background, so other Sheddies understand me a little more (been trying for years to do that with 'er indoors,) so here goes, a few high and low-lights ....

Skipping over my early life, when I learnt to guzzle, fart, and demand women's' attention (skills for life, hey guys?) I was dragged up in a city called Norwich (Nar-ich) in the UK. Famous for Mustard, Canaries.. er thats' about it.

Added: Tuckswold Infants -1960-62?

Harford Juniors – 1962-1967?

City of Norwich Grammar – 1967 – 1972? (stayed on to 6<sup>th</sup> form)

Precocious, I published my first book on Norfolk Railways at the age of 16. And found a stick book. (thats porn in the UK)

I hated school – but did reasonably well. Mr Fitch was my mentor. As an 18 year old, and with "B" in the surname list, I had to present the first Paper (I'd never done one before), in my first week (had had one of those, at least, before), to a group of 12 woman (I wish), entitled "Contraception in the 1600s\*". The London School of Economics liked to drop you in the deep end, and my face was scarlet. Before pool dyes were used. (\*fish-skins, if you wonder).

On my way to real work, I managed to scrounge funds from the Government to employ myself and 11 others working on the North Norfolk Railway to assist with the volunteers for 3 years. Lots of new skills learnt – overhead arc-welding - ouch! – and how to manage 11 hoodies into doing a job they were finally proud of – which really did gave me a "hands-on" (fists WERE allowed) background to my real work.

Real work was kicked off by my father-in-law-to-be: "Git yerself a proper jorb if yer gornt to wed my daughter". Good incentive. Should have ignored him, but that's hindsight.

The best of times, the worst...I joined one of the seven sisters oil companies in 1978 as a "Gas Co-ordinator". We sold 40% of UK Natural Gas through our Terminal, juggling producing fields to maximise revenue. One pipeline was shared with a Dutch company. At 0600 each morning, we had to swap meter readings, as a 0.05% error was likely. Bony Dugger couldn't get out of bed, so he always used to "agree" my readings. Another way of making the company a few bucks (well, £1.8m per year) was to get the receiving company to agree to use USA rather than Imperial meter standards. More bony duggers said yes – which made a fortune for my lot as there was a 0.18% difference.

**The worst: as a 24 year old, having to identify 13 bodies in a morgue, after we lost a Wessex.**

One day in 1982, a mate rang from our London HQ to say Houston had shipped a mainframe (I was using PDP11s at the time, so was an obvious choice to ask – not!) and what could we use it for? We hurriedly got BT to install a private line up to my place – 256kb – and I got (to become "my" in due) comms guys to add a 16k channel to our line-of-site microwaves (control systems only then: no voice, that was all done by radio) to extend the network. OK – what to use it for? Well, I set up a 3GL db to track our "persons on board". Logica much later bought the rights to their "Vantage" system – wish I'd personally patented it.

Many years followed in the computing world. Secondment to IBM for 2 years to help write what eventually became Microsoft Office, teaching shift-workers how to use a "bloody puter – ne'er ave one t'home – I bought her a telly, what more could she want" - but got fed 3 times a day. Installing the first offshore LAN on a Swedish Flotel, which lost its' anchors in 7 days of stormy weather (**there is a song, Geoff, but it took me 2 days to get my land-legs back**) – when queried by RT (**radio-telephone**) "why isn't LAN not on the WAN network?" I was able to say "Lost at Sea" (Well, on its way to Sweden to have new anchors, but certainly out of (line-of) sight!)

These were interesting times. Became proficient in an IBM programme called FSP/DCP. Huh? <BR>, and any other web code is easy to read, as this little old code became known as HTML...

I also – I was in London by then – responsible for all sorts of odd things. Board Secretary (very bored). When the Chairman said he was closing the free staff canteen, being subsidised at a loss of £250k, I objected and he gave me a year to turn it around – which I did. It was because the "big-wigs" were treating their mates to top class cuisine, free. Didn't make me any friends - outside of the starving masses (ie me).

Other highlights, apart from audits in Africa and the Far East (ever got in a canoe to flee from natives, wielding sticks, under a fence which they didn't know about? Yah), was presenting (simultaneous translation to 14 languages) to Directorate 12 of the EU in Brussels – 400 people. A good friend got me to overcome my nerves by saying "Look, they're no different to you, they all evacuate their bowels in the morning" (I think that was how she phrased it – maybe not).

By 1992 I had returned to Norfick, amalgamating departments so that IT, Telecoms and Control Room electronics across 60 locations with my 42 crew, landed in my lap – ouch again – but only 24 to 240 volts. Because we kept buying and selling Fields and Companies, I had to organise teams to integrate disparate systems, often on a 90 day deadline. Interesting, **bloody hard work**, challenging and scared the poop out of me at times, as some of the other “sisters” wheels moved exceedingly slowly. (ENXXO, GB, PB, CORA, HELLS – work out the anags. for yourself), Inheriting other company’s staff was a bit of a nightmare. Weeding out was not fun. **I also got an MBA from York University – don’t bother is my advice – and** churned out a couple more railway books.

Technical challenges such as the call from Immarsat – “Your main satellite carrier has lost it fuel, we can squeeze service on to a back-up for 2 days” (we got another supplier within that time-frame, fortunately satellite was so expensive so it wasn’t a big part of our network): negotiating, as a Director of a BP subsidiary, with 12 other companies across the North Sea to set up “The Southern Ring” – 10/100 GB microwaves hopping from one platform to another – we had the main hops and landfalls, so we were able to charge a few quid (!) for the others to join in....Spent a couple of years on part-time secondment to the Home Office re technical aspects of Gas terminal/Offshore Security – from electric fences to hacking. The HO had few experts, but after Special Branch found “The High Wycombe Suitcase” which contained plans of all the Terminals, so they felt they had to do something. Of course, everyone had disparate systems, so....

Good times, and the years rolled by – good pay, expenses, but no loose women (I’d met, and married my dearly beloved in Bermuda by then (Jean: I don’t like being jabbed in the ribs – stop it now!)) - but in 2008 “disaster” struck: I fell out with the UK boss, over where control rooms should be cost-effectively situated...offered a full pension and full redundancy (**3 years pay if you’re nosy**) to **bugger off**. I did, and saw many parts of the world, several times over (meanwhile running our local Tory Party, Social Club; setting up a Village Archive, being a councillor for the Tories etc in the UK). **Funny, that boss was sacked by the French owner a few years later.. and... the control room project went ahead. By then I couldn’t give a fig, because I’d settled in Gosnells, after 12 years of spending vacation and retirement here, and in this wonderful country (Yup, Australia, if you’re wondering). And** although looking back, I had a varied career, so much of it was supported (read: shut up Chris and listen to me) by the great guys I worked with – they never worked for me.

We’ve settled pretty well, and have got involved in many aspects of our community – local railway research, croquet, home-caring Joeys, etc: but the greatest joy is for me the friendship of the GCMS\*

**We moved because most of Jeans’s family had previously migrated to Australia. I love the weather – when it hits 110F you do tend to glisten a bit...**

Bullshit aside – and all the above is true \*(again) – I’d do it all over again – for double the price perhaps.

\*Note to Editor: will this do? Please say OK by signing a greenback.