

LOOKback

Our regular look at Guernsey's yesterdays celebrates the island's rich heritage and its people. Send your memories and stories to rbatiste@guernsey-press.com

Tek know

**GREAT
GUERNSEY
COMPANIES**



Al Graham, staff no. 18 on the Guernsey payroll, is hidden in the dark shadows of this picture taken at Victoria Avenue in the first year of operation locally. Also pictured are John Thompson, Arthur Ball, John Neale, Don Alvey, Peter Fulwell, Val Le Tissier, Val Davidson (the very first person hired locally), Vera Despointes, Jean Wallbridge, Bob Gurgan, Harold Allen, Diana Gaskin and Norm Gardner. (1188120)

In today's world that appears to revolve solely around money, precious few employees feel like they are part of one big, happy family. But back in the 1950s, Guernsey saw the welcome invasion of an American firm that seemed to offer job satisfaction to all its staff. In the first of our new Great Guernsey Companies series, **Rob Batiste** focuses on the electronics firm that brought a radical new approach to employment - and hears about the popular 'Tek' technique...

IT WOULD be a bold claim to make, but not an outrageous one. Here goes: Tektronix had the biggest impact on the Guernsey workforce that the island has ever seen. The quarriers J. W. Mowlem & Co had been massive 'players' the previous century and into the early part of the 20th, but they cannot ever claim to have been revolutionary in the manner of the American electronics business that arrived on our doorstep 53 years ago - and for more than three decades set standards that the Guernsey working man and woman wouldn't previously have dreamt of. You will have to dig deep to find an unsatisfied former Tek employee and there were more than 700 of them at its peak. The vast majority have nothing but the fondest recollections of the company. Old Tekkies truly loved it and would happily still be working there today had it survived the worldwide electronic wars. 'A superb company,' is Al Graham's succinct summing-up of what Tek meant to him and to the island.

Peter Sirett, now the Environment minister, was one of hundreds who cut their working teeth out by the airport and has nothing but wonderful memories of the company he joined aged 16, straight out of school. 'The year was 1962 and my first pay packet was the princely sum of £5.25 in exchange for 40 hours of work in a building full of modern technology and happy people, who I came to regard as a second family.' Simon Hollyer-Hill joined Tek a year earlier, in 1961, and by the time it closed had risen to manufacturing manager, as well as the undoubted batting star of the company's fine cricket team. 'A special company ... a great one to work for and it was the nearest you got to fun in going to work,' he said. Doug Eley, another of the company's top cricketers, arrived via work in an advocate's office and a host of Tek social functions which - along with Simon Hollyer-Hill's prompting - convinced him he must join, too. He was not disappointed. 'I couldn't believe how relaxed the

working environment was, but also how everyone "got on with the job". It really was a big, happy family.'

Having joined as an accountant, Al Graham - as popular and down-to-earth a senior manager as you are ever likely to find - finished his career as the electronic giant's European finance manager. He is as qualified as anyone to comment on what Tek meant to Guernsey and how, importantly, it was viewed within an ever-changing island. 'Tek was a real novelty to Guernsey. It came with a new ethos to management and staff relationships,' he said. 'They weren't paying over the odds, but they provided competitive wages and everyone - everyone - was on first-name terms.' The 1960s may have been swinging musically and in the factious disguises of fashion, but bosses were bosses and in Guernsey, like just about every place in Great Britain, there was a hierarchy that involved calling your superior 'sir' - or, at the very least, 'mister'. But Tek changed all that and much, much more from the day it arrived from Oregon,

USA. In no time, it became one very big family and islanders clambered to join it. The plusses came in so many guises. Al Graham takes up that side of the story. 'There were the little things, like if it was your birthday, you would walk into the canteen and find you had a birthday cake,' he said. 'The other element, of course, was that they had a profit-sharing scheme and a third of all profits went to employees. I received almost 40% of my wages in the first year.' For virtually every employee, Tek provided a free and easy attitude to work, which was appreciated by all and brought about dedication and graft. 'There was no authoritative hierarchy,' recalled Al, who was among the top branches of the tree. 'Everyone talked to each other normally and one thing the company facilitated was that work area reps would once a month meet with the management to air any grievances or problems. Communications were very good.'

Continued overleaf



The purpose-built and state-of-the-art premises at La Villiaze, to which the company soon moved and which is now occupied by Specsavers. (1195096)

Guernsey was Tektronix Inc.'s first overseas venture. The company had been formed in 1946 in Beaverton, Oregon, and in a short time became one of the world leaders in the making of oscilloscopes, an electronic-measuring instrument. But by the tail end of the 1950s it was clear that the company needed to venture into the European market. Overseas production facilities were required and Guernsey was chosen specifically as it enjoyed a 20% tax rate and the local government was very receptive to its arrival. 'We got to 100 employees inside a year or so,' recalled Al. 'And within two or three years we had grown to the extent that we were looking to expand and at where we might create a new factory. I remember we shopped around and looked at Doc Best's field at L'Eree.' The American firm eventually settled on an old greenhouse site owned by the former exporters D. W. Holmes at La Villiaze.

Building a factory larger than anything Guernsey had ever seen, and out in the sticks, did not come

without unexpected problems. One of the biggest and costliest was to get a worthy electrical supply to it. 'Tek had to make a capital contribution of £75,000 for added electricity from St Sampson's to La Villiaze.' Long before the move was made from Victoria Avenue to purpose-built and state-of-the-art premises at La Villiaze, it

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Al Graham

was almost by accident that the company arrived in little old Guernsey, said Al. 'The whole Tektronix project was headed up by Al Harriman, who arrived from the States,' he said. 'The story is that he had heard of an Austin Healey car

being on sale in Guernsey and when he came here found that the Victoria Avenue premises were vacant. It had been operated by Fabriques Industrielles, who were based in Lancashire. They pulled out and Tek were able to rent it.

'When they concluded that we were here to stay, Tek bought it from them.' In the early days of Tek in Guernsey, most of the company's sales were made to the UK, being concerned with qualifying its locally-made instruments for duty-free entry into the UK under the Commonwealth preference rules.

'Staff-wise, we didn't have the competition from finance, but we did have to bring in unified electronic engineers from the UK and get housing licences for them,' recalled Al. But Tektronix found favour with the local authorities and had great allies in men such as Louis Guillemette and Edward Collas. They were here to expand and stay a long while.

NEXT WEEK: Part two of Tek life, including the annual Herm excursions, Miss Tektronix competitions and the fight to stay competitive in a fast-changing electronic world.

Tek facts

TEKTRONIX was formed in Beaverton, Oregon, in 1946. At its peak and after more than two decades of continued expansion, it boasted more than 23,000 employees.

Tek was the world leader in oscilloscopes, an electronic measuring instrument.

It set up its first overseas manufacturing plant at Victoria Avenue in Guernsey in 1958.

- The principal reasons for choosing Guernsey were:
 - 1: An empty and readily-available building at Victoria Avenue
 - 2: Adequate labour
 - 3: Straightforward negotiations with a helpful States of Guernsey

- 4: The unique company philosophies and policies were said to be suited to an island with no significant form of industrial tradition
- 5: Communications with the UK very good

- After building new factory facilities in 1963 the company had 80,000sq. ft of floor space, plus a newly constructed warehouse and cafeteria which added another 1,200sq. ft. In 1977 a second building of 14,000sq. ft is completed at La Villiaze to provide accommodation for Tek's order processing, distributor sales and date processing activities.

- The European Operations Centre was based at The Albany in St Peter Port.

- In 1964, Tektronix increased its world coverage even further with the commencement of a joint venture with Sony in Japan.

- In 1967, Tektronix bought a UK-based company manufacturing low-cost oscilloscopes under the trade name of Telequipment, which was replaced by Tektronix.

- Tektronix owned subsidiaries in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the UK.

- In 1990, world electronics market conditions cause Tektronix to end its operations locally.



One of the many happy workers. (1195097)



The company's social scene thrived. The Tektronix cricket team is pictured here at the KGV in August 1980 - Simon Hollyer-Hill is on the far left of the front row and Doug Eley is also in the front row, second from the right. (0983706)



The former Tektronix premises in Victoria Avenue, which had previously been used by Lancashire-based Fabriques Industrielles. (1195110)