

# 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](mailto:rbatiste@guernsey-press.com)

In the second part of our new Great Guernsey Companies series, **Rob Batiste** hears more happy memories of the American electronics firm that took Guernsey by storm for more than three decades. Here, former Tektronix employees recall its novel approach to employment and the halcyon days of generous profit-share, special summer working hours, sick-leave entitlement ... and legendary Herm picnics that would have today's health and safety officers up in arms

## Tek that - and party



The annual Tek Picnic in Herm was a firm fixture in staff members' calendars.

(1195105)

**GREAT  
GUERNSEY  
COMPANIES**

**T**EKTRONIX was many things to many people in its 32 years ensconced at the heart of island employment - but for all its

successes, it was never flash or boastful of its position. 'We kept a low profile, partly in my mind because we were a profit-sharing company,' said Al Graham, the locally-based European finance manager for the firm, which wasted no time in expanding on its arrival in Guernsey at the tail-end of the 1950s.

'Tektronix made a tremendous difference to Guernsey. It was the leader in an evolution of business relationships and in how to run a company.' As well as the Victoria Avenue and La Villiaze factories, the business ran an office in the then-new Albany office block in the heart of Town, overlooking the bus terminus and harbour.

'We topped out at about 600 staff [manufacturing only] in the early '70s,' recalled Al. 'And

in 1973, we decided to put the European finance sector in Guernsey.'



The firm's locally-based European finance manager Al Graham enjoying one of the many social events. (1195106)

That move added numbers to the wage bill but the company went from strength to strength.

On top of the hundreds on the manufacturing side, a further 120 people worked for Tektronix Ltd on the marketing side.

All the while, the staff were being well paid and having a whale of a time. Peter Sirett - these days the Environment minister - cut his working teeth at the company and, just like Simon Hollyer-Hill and Doug Eley, would probably have still been there now but for the economic conditions and competition from the likes of Hewlett Packard, which triggered the decision for the firm to depart.

Nothing but the fondest of memories live on for Tek's former staff. 'There were so many things

happening at the company,' recalled Doug, 'be it advancing within it or taking part in the sports and social events.'

One of the big annual functions was the Tek Picnic, when all the staff and their immediate families went across to Herm and youngsters from the local children's home were invited to join them. 'To see the children's faces when they realised that the drinks and ice creams were free was a picture,' said Doug. 'Because of the social side, there were obviously many romances that took place between employees - and I was fortunate, like many others, to meet my wife-to-be.' Tek was a caring company in the extreme and provided all

employees with health cover through its Mutual Benefits club.

'The company gave a two-week paid sick leave period a year and if you didn't use it then it carried on, accumulating on an annual basis,' said Doug. On top of that, the profit-share was paid out twice a year, in June and December.

'Being an American firm, we utilised many ideas that some local firms viewed as totally radical and we always heard such gossip as, "They'll be gone soon and then what'll you do",' recalled Peter.

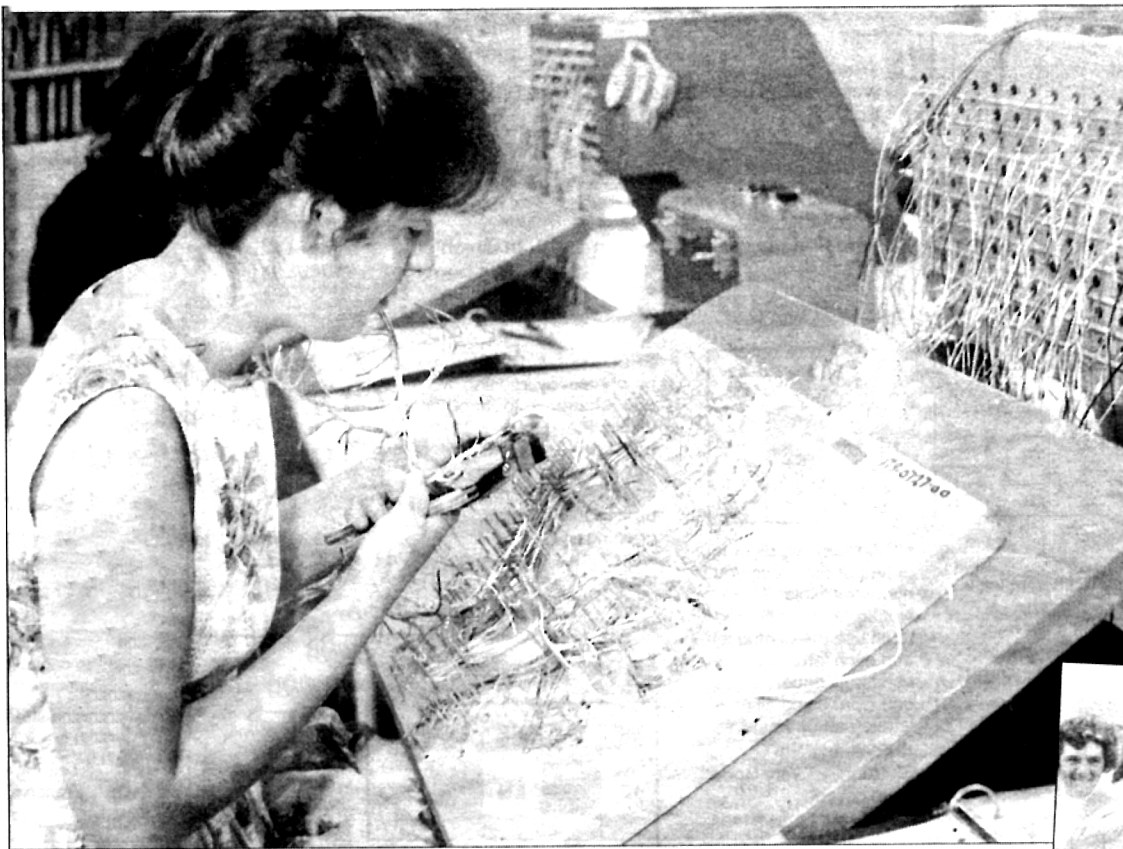
'We had a pension scheme that we joined when we first started, even though most local schemes started at age 21, and we didn't have to directly contribute a single penny. "The funding came as part of our twice-yearly profit-share, which saw every employee worldwide sharing in the success of the company. It was a considerable attraction and I recall that the highest was a June payout of 32.4% - although eventually the figure did drop to as low as a few per cent when the industry met competition from Japanese firms.'

Tek employees were also, incredibly, allowed to make the most of the summer months, as Peter remembers.

'We started work at 7am in the summer and 8am in the winter, finishing at 3.30pm or 4.30pm, but eventually working hours were set permanently at 7.30am until 4pm.

**N**ew job opportunities abounded at Tek, Peter recalled.

'After some four years spent working in every part of the production process, I knew how



Some 600 people worked for Tektronix in the company's heyday here in Guernsey. (1195094)

to make transformers, capacitors and precision resistors and was able to solder and build complex mechanical and electronic assemblies,' he said.

'Tek positively encouraged people to learn new skills and, with a twice-yearly pay review, rewarded those who succeeded. Our pay reviews were what we today know as appraisals and were used to inform us of our progress and to clarify where it was thought we could improve. I moved into the test

department in 1967 and joined a group of some 30 technicians and engineers, some home-grown and some army licence holders from a forces background, who were given 16-year licences.

The bench was the standard 6ft by 6ft open-on-one-side variety that was used in every part of the production area. Overhead lighting was turned off, so that it was possible to see the often dimly-lit cathode ray tubes, and lighting comprised angle-poise lamps at

each bench.

'I was to spend what was probably the happiest time of my life in that environment, where I discovered a natural aptitude for troubleshooting non-functioning equipment and started to specialise in what was for some a "black art".

'I later travelled to several countries in

Europe to troubleshoot faulty equipment and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.'

**D**uring the late 1980s, Tek became the first company in the island to become certificated against British Standards as it introduced a quality assurance system that was second to none. Peter became involved in that system and for the final four years of the company's existence in the island worked with engineers around the Tektronix empire to ensure that the equipment produced was safe and 'quality assured'. 'The company was the first in the island to introduce flexitime and soon we were all seeing the benefits of this radical approach to employee relations. We repaid that by working harder and smarter.'



Current Environment minister and former Tektronix employee Peter Sirett - pictured here sporting a moustache - at one of the infamous picnics. (1195107)

## Electric dreams

**S**IMON HOLLYER-HILL made further progress through the ranks than most, as well as impressing with his sporting skills in the various Tek sports teams. 'It was life-changing for me and I regret that the company ended its operations here,' he said.

'We were young together and going into an environment where everyone seemed to be in their 20s. I wished it had gone on for a bit longer.'

Simon remembered that not only was the calling of everyone from top to bottom by their first name unique for Guernsey, so too were the working hours at a time when it was normal for islanders to

work Saturdays and have Thursday afternoons off.

'I don't think there was anyone doing a five-day week when I started in 1961. We all worked an eight-hour day, which was longer than most, but it was everyone - whether you were in the factory or in the office and a boss.'

Simon chuckles when reminded of the Tek Picnics, being one of those employees who volunteered to be overnight sentries for the food, drink and other supplies that were dropped off at Shell Beach on the evening ahead of the big family day out.

The picnics were awash with

games, refreshments, live bands and events such as the Miss Tektronix competition.

'Those days were certainly memorable and I am sure they stick in the minds of everyone who participated,' said Peter. 'To be asked to help out in the pre-picnic preparation was an honour and the selected band would gather the night before at the slipway by the Yacht Club to load crates of minerals, tents, food, games and various stalls and sideshows. We used Alf Taylor's Herm boat to get the gear to the island.'

'Setting up took hours and the climax for the work gang was a game of softball on the common, followed by a meal at the Mermaid. Health and safety would have had a heart attack if they saw all the antics of the weekend.'

**B**ut, as the saying goes, all good things come to an end.

'It was with many of the staff in tears that we were informed at the beginning of January 1990 that the company was closing down,' recalled Doug.

'By the middle of the year, Tek was gone. 'I, like many others, would, I'm sure, have stayed with Tek until retirement had it stayed in the island.'

Fortunately for him and most Tek staff members, the employment situation in Guernsey 21 years ago was a lot healthier than today and Doug returned to work in an advocate's office, just as he had



Employees and family members set sail for Herm, where there would be games, refreshments and live bands. (1195098)

started many years earlier. Al Graham was as sad as anyone when the company ceased to operate here. 'What I was pleased about was that everyone I knew went on to decent jobs when Tek quit.' But Tektronix had one more trick up its sleeve before it went. 'We were the ones who set up the Young Enterprise scheme in Guernsey - and that flourished. It

was devised from a US scheme called "junior achievement",' said Al.

'The logo was "committed to excellence" and that's exactly what it was. Every employee was encouraged to maintain standards of excellence.'

That 'E' word summed up the Tek story in Guernsey. It's long gone but, of course, not forgotten.

**'Health and safety would have had a heart attack if they saw all the antics of the [Herm] weekend'**

Former Tektronix employee Simon Hollyer-Hill



One of the highlights of the Tek Picnics was the Miss Tektronix competition. (1195103)