



NIALL'S LIFE STORY

The following is the personal view of the author, names and places may have been changed or omitted to avoid any lawsuit, prosecution - none of the following ever happened and is in the imagination of the author.

My name is Niall Hutson. I was at Brymore from 1969-73. To all those who remember me and who I lent money to, I want my money back! All those I borrowed money off, sorry I am still skint. You may have read John Dickens's life story which is far more exciting than mine. We were both workshop foreman at Brymore – genetic engineering genes. John is my illustrious cousin. He is a lot brighter than me. He has been badgering me to write this. Is that legal now the cull is on? (he left a lot out of his story).

I left Brymore to do City & Guilds Agricultural Technicians' qualification, course 465 which later became 030, at Lackham College, Wiltshire. The spanner bashers did City & Guild 015! I recall somebody saying it was a bit too basic (030), he was probably right but a solid base to start on never hurts. Then off to John Wallace Titt (with 3 t's), now long gone I believe. A famed 1900 wind turbine builder, but when I was there not just agriculture machines, but buildings, wells, grain dryers. Fitting hundreds of safety frames on tractors and Duncan cabs. The final heyday of the agricultural engineer before Burgess's brought them all up. I learnt a lot. After a year back to college for Ag Tech 2, more maths. Thanks Mr Audrit. Testing engines on dynos, rebuilding gearboxes, splitting tractors, rebuilding injector pumps and nozzles.

Next scratching around for a job. I applied to the MOD and joined A&G



Making a workshop out of old
RAF buildings

(armaments and general) section, B workshop, REME wing, Royal School of Artillery (RSA). As a civy, but under a staff sergeant. Fantastic time, lots of WW2, Korea, Malaya guys with war stories, just before the Falklands war. Swing fire, rapier, FH70, blowpipe, dual hollow-nosed warheads – practising on blowpipe,

swing fire simulators a long time before PlayStations! Beat my staff sergeant, not a good idea, on the swing fire.

Fire power demonstrations for visiting government officials. Fitting radar gear to Abbot S.P.G., had to crawl underneath from back to front to get to the bolts at the front. Someone got in and started it, did I sh.. myself.



Finished workshop

Back to college for Ag Tech 3, this was a mistake, but I take the view a man who never made a mistake never made nothing. Part 3 – a lot more maths! Dynamic viscosity, recording dynamic forces on a working plough; no WIFI! All copper cabling to a travelling Landrover. Analysation of combustion gases, gland purging. Gluing strain gauges on machines, PV diagrams and stress coat. Didn't Sir Stanley Hooker (not much of an engineer) say the pen is mightier than a spanner. He was right. After a lot of brain storming, mid night cramming something clicked, and I got my full technology certificate (it's now superseded by a full technology diploma). What now? Back to the MOD? Yes? No?



Aerial grasshopper view - no guards
I am standing on the tractor roof

I joined a start-up agricultural design team, there was just me and the boss, ex-New Holland, designing a mower. At the time, a very big mower - 2 x 5-foot drums, 6 blades per drum built like a tank. There are still some kicking around. Demonstrating, I drove to Cornwall back up to Liverpool with it stuffed into a transit pick-up. Field testing, 19

hours days, 50 quid a week. If it broke, a quick repair and back testing with a Thompson 6-cylinder white bonnet Ford 5000 tractor hybrid, flat out/top gear – 17 acres an hour – mowing aerodromes. The idea at time was to



Dynamic forces on a working rotovator -
Landrover on left

remove cover to keep birds away and stop bird strikes. I even chewed my way through pressed steel planking hidden in the undergrowth.

Chalgrove, Martin Baker, Benson (Queen's flight), Abingdon, Weston-on-the-Green parachutes. Agrimech

Grasshopper, a vicious beast. The

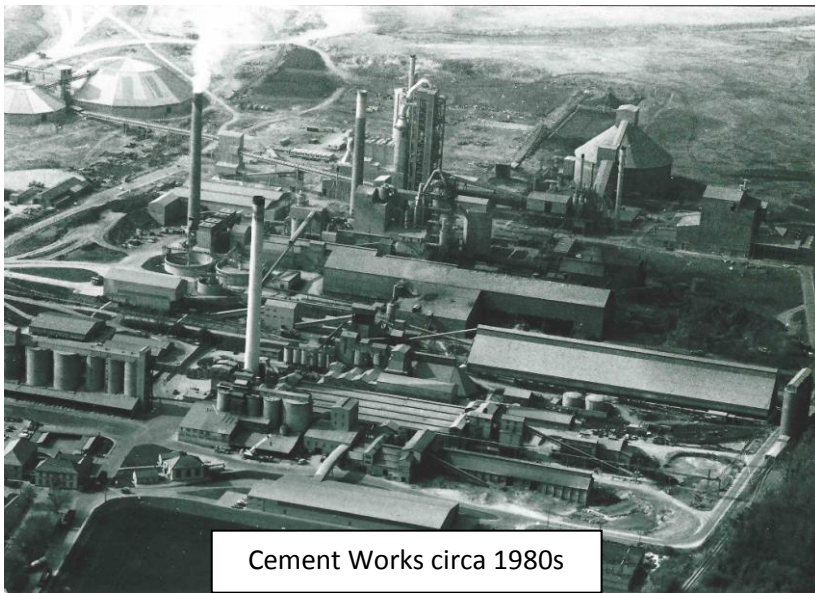
Thompson windowless, stones flicked up, some smashed the front, back and side screens as they continued to whistle pass your head. Any machine failures, quick diagnosis and repair and back testing. Up North where the nitrogen levels were so high the tractor tyres would rot and greenfly so thick you could fill buckets in football-sized clumps. Making a factory out of old RAF buildings. After mower production runs, we turned to proto-type design and development (short article in Power Farming magazine) - remember that?



Four years on I moved on to another agricultural engineer - at this point I decided that I preferred to work with my hands instead of being a desk jockey. Making stuff from 'antique' door hinges, one cwt each, for wealth nobs! Trailers, road roller conversions, combines, rebuilding engines, Ford selecto-matic remembered as 'jerko-matic' - if it could be designed, welded, machined I would have a go. In engineering I always took the view there is always a way and if you haven't done it then you haven't thought of it yet.

After 3 years, I moved to East Anglia and went to work for an industrial engineer. I couldn't get engineering out of my blood. Travelling here and there on industrial sites, sub-contracted to big industrial firms. Welding splits on boats in Wisbech harbour, welding quay side ladders (still in place) suspended by 360 degrees excavator over the river in a cage. Acetylene bottle leak fires – quick thinking operator dumped the cage in the river. Crawling around bilges in dank, smelly ships. Never went to sea always in the harbour. Bolting plates in sewerage plants, up to the knees in sewer water; gas alarms going off, 'don't leave it switched on all the time, it runs down the battery' – I kid you not! Installing mile long conveyer lines for London Brick - all the old signs in Italian from POW, WW2 and after.

The firm, long gone now, had a contract with a cement company. A very hot, dusty and dangerous place – a noted killer. Big, big engineering – well it was to me after agricultural. Good money. 14-hour days, 7 days a week. Just like



Cement Works circa 1980s

farming! Electric motors as big as cars – 4.5–6 mw. You phoned the electricity board telling them you were going to start it and if it didn't start you waited 30 mins for the windings to cool down before trying again. Gearboxes as big as rooms, gears weighing 30 tons each,

bearings £50k a pop, tightening bolts with 14lb sledgehammers and slogging spanners. Cement powder fluidised with compressed air running like water, punching holes in ½ inch plate as if it was like butter. So dusty you couldn't see a fluorescent tube two foot above your head. Crawling along two-foot-high tunnels to replace bearings, where M24 bolts snapped like carrots.



Profile cutting - Grasshopper blade holders en50b plate

And accidents? – loads of accidents. Men caught in conveyer belts losing fingers, arms; smashed hips by falling sheet steel; men doing headers from platforms two floors up – his mate takes a running dive to catch his feet and can't hang on and down he goes to only land on bales of glass fibre (he survived!). Man welding in hopper put the electrode against his chest whilst he tightened the holder, completed the circuit, cashed his chips in. Me on top of a platform changing air pads bottom cone of a silo, I was told 'yes, the silo is

empty'. As I loosen and remove the bolts the pads start pushing out, frantic re-tightening – 'silo still has 50 tons inside', would have washed me off the platform and a 50-foot dive. Men caught by slow moving belts; his friend just

managed to cut the belt before he got dragged in. Men caught in silos lancing blockages caved in and he didn't get out.

Driving trains with 50-ton tankers (we sent 1,000 tons to King's Cross every other day). 'She's pulling hard, Niall', mad Norm was driving. We jumped the tracks and were smashing saddles. Frozen brakes one cold winter, leaping off as she wouldn't make the bend at the end – she made it down to the meadow, no one the wiser! Seeing someone hitch up the wagon, moving his head between the buffers as the train lurched forward and the buffers came together and just missed him. Someone returns a breaker to the box by laying a scaffold board on the handrails 20-foot up (the board was split), down he came! 'What's that on the rail?', all you see was his ankle. Stopped

the train just in time. From then on, he walked with a limp.



Ah Lotus days - I knew the Brymore cap would come in useful

Working with a former agricultural engineer, who sold welding rods. He went out to a bailer playing up. He remembers speaking to the farmer's wife, she said it's out in the field. Next thing he is in hospital. The farmer's wife said she looked out of the

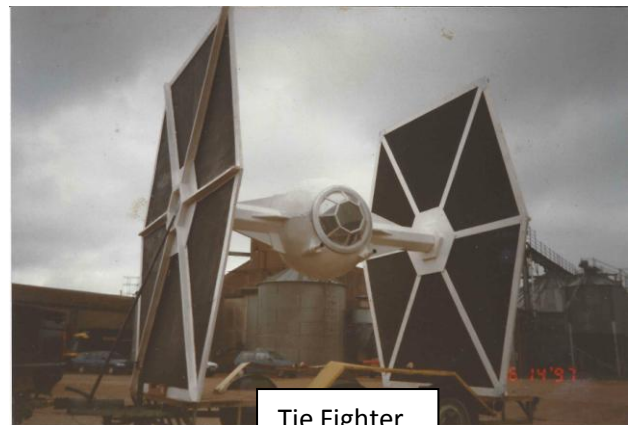
window and he was running around in circles with no clothes on. The bailer had caught him and ripped all his clothes off and he didn't remember a thing.

All those safety films watched at Brymore, 'Some of you will get hurt on farms', he was right. Still thought of Jonathan 'Kipper' Archer and Nigel 'Squirrel' Squires.

I have had accidents; the time I attempted to slow a powered circular saw blade with my finger, and it didn't slow it down at all. Catching my sideburns in a rotating drill, stopped just short before my face. Altering a pair of antique gates, leapt off a bench onto a one-inch solid steel bar, entering my thigh and travelled up inside to my 'giggle point' along with my overalls, trousers and underpants. The surgeon said another ¼ inch and it's 30 seconds. Off a month, came back and the gates were still waiting to be finished. Then there was the time I was crammed in a hopper under a packing machine, when somebody undid some bolts and the framework dropped into the hopper on top of me.

Vacuum cleaners with 4-inch hoses, just about safe. If it got hold of you, you could just break free and I mean 'just'. Cement burns all over your body. The worst on your eyelids. You couldn't do a thing. The cement in the silo went in at 460 degrees. Leave your hand in too long and you came out in blisters. Cement rots your clothes, socks disintegrate, safety boots rot, overalls rot and wife complains the washing machine is blocked! – more cement. Dipping glasses and watches in acid to remove cement, but it was a good life – 'thanks Corporal Jones'.

Ever spilt cement? – imagine wading through it up to your waist. Imagine it is snowing, that's right snowing cement in clumps like snowflakes (I.P. fan tripped and blew raw cement straight out the stack) – covers everybody's cars and the local villages. What to do you do? – plenty of acid. On your windscreen, so you can see to get home.



Tie Fighter

Working with another sub-contractor with an unusual engineering technique, I asked him what he normally did for a job. 'I am a plate painter', I am thinking ¼ inch plates of 8 x 4 – 'What trawlers?', 'No, Wedgewood.'

Burning cheap Russian and Columbian coal, £1/ton, yes £1 per ton arrived by the wagon loads. Coal dust explosions, burning thousands and thousands car tyres. I recall with the onslaught of computers, a computer may tell me which bolt to undo, but at the moment it still needs a human to undo it. The long hours caused a lot of marriages to fail. The local house divorcees were living in what was known as Heart Break Hotel. We had suicide and attempted suicides, some turned to drink, some went off mentally ill and came back but were never 100%. The devil driving relentless production, production, production.



A young man shovelling onto a conveyer belt and the conveyer belt snatched his shovel so fast that he didn't have time to let go and it dragged him in. The

control room noticed the belt was stopped and instead of auto starting from his desk which he normally could do, sent someone to have a look. Chewed his arm up to the bone and lost some fingers.

When the management said the sub-contract job was going in house, I applied and got it. Was it the right thing to do? Steady permanent job, I was married with three kids. I had already been made redundant three times. Once, I was told on a Friday; then phoned on Sunday night to come in on Monday – company still folded later. Thought I would give it a try, another fork in the road of life.

I always liked the idea you turn around and look back over the valley of life. You can see the odd things just peeking through the fog here and there. Oh yes, I remember that, but the further back you look you are not too certain. The things you see become hazy and indistinct, lost in the fog of one's life.

Working with ferrous sulphate to reduce the burns from the cement, but turns your teeth black and dust, dust, dust cursing the dust plant design engineers who made it for a price, but useless to keep the dust down. Face masks useless. Pressure fed face masks and pancake filters crap – watching safety films of two pairs of lungs, one black and withered and one new pink and plump. Obviously, this is what dust does. And you say that good pair of lungs are not doing the owner much good (laughter)!

One of fellow workers, Mad Norm again, was an ex-farm ploughman and his wage was about £14 a week. His first wage at the Cement factory was £93 a week. His wife said there must be a mistake, you will have to take it back.

Women shaking hessian sacks in front of fans to remove the dust. In the old days cement delivered in hessian sacks, then paper, then plastic lined paper and now you can get it in pure plastic bags.

Off loading hundreds of SR cement (sulphate resisting) one-ton bags brought back from the Indus river project.

Shrink wrapping pallets of cement for the Falklands and Ascension Island. Packing cement bags at 5000 plus an hour. Putting bags on filling sprouts by hand (gearbox broke) – production before safety! This is still being done (YouTube), but not me. Shovelling tons and tons of spilt cement. Humping oxygen cylinders on your shoulders, climbing flights of stairs. One guy climbed to the top of the silo with an oxygen cylinder on his shoulder, went to turn it on and it was empty! When I had finished laughing – ‘where is it?’, ‘Still up there’.

After 30 years I have had enough, all that heavy lifting – two bags, one on each shoulder did me no good. Shot knees and clogged lungs. Now safety is the king (along as it does not get in the way of production) – don’t tell anyone about the last bit. I am reminded of a young man who came for an job interview, after being shown around he said, ‘I don’t want to work here, look at all the old workers they are broken men,’ and he was right. My body now lets me know I have abused my body.

I lived 40 miles from work, an 80-mile round trip every day taking an hour each way and two hours if it snowed. Out in the sticks with a 10-acre small holding – nice and quiet.

What have I done since? A little engineering (once the oil gets under your finger nails the strongest Swarfega will never get rid of it). I have ten welders plus gas! Don't ask! I like welding! - ever stick welded aluminium? Armour plate? Or even aluminium armour plate? .Brought my first lathe at 18 years old. Sculpture, jewellery making, painting, palm reading (that should be a book one day, 'Palms I Didn't Want to Read').



Royal Show



The kids said could I make a Wendy House - me how about a Wallace and Gromit rocket

After all of this, my children luckily or unluckily have not inherited the engineering genes. I change the oil in their cars for them and I tell them an oil change is the cheapest engine re-build you will ever do.

P.S. I have left a lot out of my story

*Niall Hutson
April 2020*