

## **My Manor Royal by Ted Hembery**

"I grew up in South West London but, after finishing a stint in the RAF in the 1950s, was advised to look for housing in New Towns rather than wait 25 years for housing in Wandsworth.

Crawley was the nearest New Town so I came down in November 1958 and applied for a position. The first job I got here was at BMB in Charlwood. I stayed there for two years and then went to Pictorial Machinery Ltd in Kelvin Way on the industrial estate.

They produced equipment for lithographic printing and I stayed there for 14 years. It was a fairly small company, with about 200 people working there.

I then moved to Stone Platt, which was at the bottom of Manor Royal. It was a funny firm – they produced four very different pieces of equipment – lighthouse equipment, buoys for shipping lanes, air conditioning units and electrical switches.

After two years I moved to Mallard Equipment Limited (MEL) for 14 years. I really enjoyed my time there. When I was about 58 I had the chance to semi-retire, so I became a Crawley Borough Council community centre warden for about six years.

Manor Royal was quite different from what it is today. Many buildings that went up in the late 1940s and 1950s are gone today. Crompton Way is really the only part that hasn't changed much, with what we used to call the wavy-roofed buildings.

Buildings have changed drastically since the estate opened. Many wavy-roofed buildings, which were usually single storey, were small and on large, expensive plots of land so they are now usually rebuilt with two or more storeys. The company that built the wavy roofs was called Twist Steel.

Most people travelled to the estate by bicycle, although many people who lived in Northgate walked through Magpie Wood to work. There were a few cars, perhaps belonging to managers, but every morning there was a mass of bicycles from all over Crawley, all descending on Manor Royal. It was a traffic jam of hundreds and hundreds of bicycles!

The vast majority of people who worked on Manor Royal lived in Crawley. Most people stayed on the estate for their lunch breaks, many using their on-site cafeterias or bringing in their own sandwiches from home. We had to work about 42-44 hours, which included Saturday mornings, and everyone only had two weeks' holiday every year.

Knocking off time, as we called it, was between five and six, and it was a mass exodus. It got so severe, with six or more bicycles riding across the roads, that the companies on Manor Royal conferred between themselves to arrange a staggered time for staff to leave.

Cars became more popular as people got more affluent – now you rarely see people cycling down Manor Royal.

Manor Royal began life as an engineering hub and some of the road names reflect that, like Fleming Way and Faraday Road.

The bigger firms, including APV and MEL, both had social clubs. APV used a farmhouse with tennis courts on Manor Royal. Crawley was still being built up so on occasion we'd visit Kingston, Croydon or Brighton for shopping.

In the last 20 years Gatwick Airport has taken over so that there is very little engineering on Manor Royal now. Many companies now cater exclusively for Gatwick Airport.

Back in the day there were so many engineering companies that you could get what we called 'homers' done, which fixed any problems we had, particularly with our cars.

The workforce on Manor Royal was very skilled. There were smaller, specialist firms who supplied parts to larger companies. One company, Bourners, supplied the taps, called Supataps, for every new build house in Crawley during the 1960s and 70s.

There was a lot of electrical companies on the estate too, so women have always had jobs on Manor Royal because companies thought they had smaller hands and were more adept at assembling small, electrical products. MEL also employed women to build circuit boards, and many were also in admin roles at many of the firms."