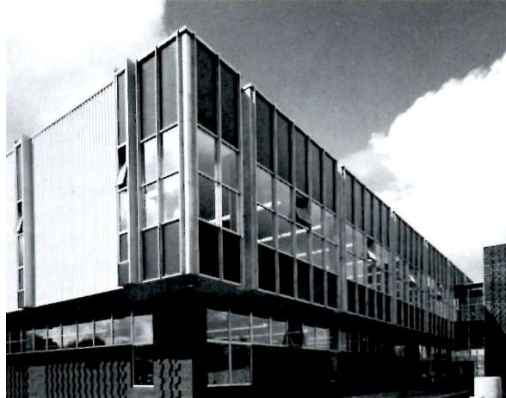


## My HP-Scotland Life Story

### South Queensferry in the 70s.

I joined Hewlett Packard in their South Queensferry location (Scotland) in 1973 as a Production Engineer. The factory was just seven years old and located within sight of the famous Forth Rail Bridge and 20 minutes by train from the center of Edinburgh. Locals called it Hewlett *and* Packard.



HP South Queensferry, Scotland

### The HP Difference

What struck me right from the start was how different the culture and working conditions were from other factories in Scotland at that time. Scotland's economy was in decline. Since the industrial revolution Scotland had been a leader in heavy engineering. Shipbuilding, steam engines, iron and steel manufacturing, now truck and car manufacturing, and of course coal mining. Most industries were dirty, noisy and beset with labor – management problems. As the industries declined, labor disputes were regular with strikes a common occurrence. Shop floor workers often made more money than engineers. I had started my working life in a company that made forgings for the aircraft industry, and for the newly emerging North Sea oil fields. Somewhere along the line I met a couple of young engineers who worked for HP and they described something that sounded like Utopia.

When I graduated with a Diploma in Production Engineering from Napier College of Science and Technology in Edinburgh I immediately applied for a job with HP. A year later I was invited for an interview and was very impressed by the working conditions, by the scope of the job I was offered and by the salary. So, I accepted and joined HP.

### The Work

My first job there was as a production engineer solving problems on the manufacturing lines. After the noise and grime of heavy engineering it was clean, quiet, and I was in a team of other engineers, around the same age as me. Sometimes problems were design errors, sometimes manufacturing errors with parts, and sometimes human error. The camaraderie was great. HP was on the leading edge of computing, calculators and measuring instruments. The instruments designed in South Queensferry focused on telecommunications and the series of microwave link analyzers were the

home-grown heroes. Microwave telecom was becoming big at the time and HP had clients all over the world.

The work was interesting, and I was self-directed, the culture encouraged that. The products designed in South Queensferry were all numbered 37XX. The 3710 Microwave Link Analyzer (MLA) was the star product, and they sold a lot all over the world. All the 3710s were standard except for a removable “plug-in” in the middle that was configured to what each customer wanted. In the HP catalog was a “plug-in extender” that would allow a tech to do troubleshooting on the plug-in while running the unit. Nobody had designed a plug-in extender, however. When orders came in for some, I got the job of designing it. For many years afterward when a new HP catalog came out, I always checked to see if my design was still there. For about 15 years it was...



3710 MLA

After 2 years as a production engineer most of the perennial problems had been solved and I wasn't being stretched. I moved to become a tooling engineer designing press tools and plastic molds for new production parts. I worked with the product designers and suggested design changes that would make new products easier or cheaper to manufacture. There were 3 designers and about 12 skilled toolmakers who would produce the tools. The photo below is of me with some of my workmates at HP. The photo would have been taken in 1976 or 1977. I'm 4th from the right. I've no idea what the trophy was, but it doesn't look very impressive....



The work was challenging and interesting but not what made HP at South Queensferry stand out.

### **The Work Environment and Culture**

At HP a coffee cart came around in the morning with free coffee and buns. The cafeteria was inexpensive and had good food, The cart came around again in the afternoon with cookies and drinks. When monthly production targets were met, they would hold a “beer bust” on a Friday afternoon with steak and free beer and wine. When we were close to meeting the targets, everyone pitched in to help us meet the targets. We all did whatever was needed to make the numbers (which were posted on a wall in the production line for everyone to see).

The company had a social club on site and many people went there for a beer (or two) at lunchtime. Occasionally we’d go down to a pub in historic South Queensferry for lunch and a beer. Pub lunches were very common in Scotland at that time. Less so now.

The social life was very good with company sponsored events, such as the annual dinner dance at a posh place in Edinburgh or dept outings to go bowling. There were many clubs, including an active golf club and an active angling club. As a devotee of both, I loved it. The company had its own private fishing loch in Perthshire (Butterstone Loch) stocked with brown and rainbow trout. The only nesting pair of ospreys in Scotland at that time was in the Loch of the Lowes, right next door to Butterstone, and they’d visit and catch bigger trout than we were catching. It was fly-fishing only and limited to employees and guests. When they started a competition for catching the biggest fish, I won the first year with a 2 lb 12oz rainbow caught on a fly I designed and tied myself. In the winter we’d go sea fishing in the Gareloch on the west coast fishing for cod and pollack. The Gareloch had one of Britain’s nuclear submarine bases and we’d occasionally see the silent submarines heading up the loch. Also, in the winter we went grayling fishing on the River Earn in Perthshire. The Earn was a very good Atlantic salmon river. Salmon, trout and sea trout were out of season, but we’d catch (and return) a lot of brown trout and sea trout in addition to the grayling. This was a private stretch of river, and the cost to the HP angling club was a few bottles of whisky per season... Only in Scotland!

As mentioned earlier, strikes in Scotland were frequent and for a few weeks the electricity workers were on strike. HP was allowed to have power just 3 days / week. Management decided we would all work 12 hours/ day for 3 days each week. A 36-hour week to replace the 40 hours we normally worked. At first every 12-hour day seemed really long, then we got used to it. After the strike was over, we went back to our regular 8-hour days, and they seemed so short. Many people preferred the 3-day week with 4 days off...

The HP photography club got permission to cross the Forth rail bridge to take photos of the bridge and the old monastery on the island of Inch Garvie, right under the bridge. I joined the group out of curiosity. It wasn't very safe. There was no barrier between the trains and the walkway. When a train went past at 60 miles / hour or so we had to hang onto the railing at the side of the bridge. The wind from a passing train moving at speed a few feet away was horrendous and the bridge swayed quite a bit (that was unexpected). We gave up after three or four trains passed, concerned for our safety. What was British Rail thinking, letting us go there?



The Forth Bridge. Built in 1890.

### **In summary...**

I was paid well at HP, the benefits were great, the camaraderie and social life were good, and the work was interesting and fun. Engineers were left to manage their own time and their own projects. Engineers were very respected, and “Bill and Dave” (the founders) visited once a year. The culture was refreshing as central Scotland at that time had a very adversarial management – worker culture. At the time the HP Way really did seem like Utopia, and I've found few organizations in my life that met the high standards set by HP in the 70s at South Queensferry.

David Green

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