

From PW Molloy, formerly of BAC Preston and Samlesbury

I have seen your request for TSR2 information in the BAe newsletter. I worked on tooling from 1958 to 1992 in the Preston toolroom at Strand Road and all three sites. These are just a few incidents that took place.

We were working on the wing jigs in 4 shed Samlesbury and had reached a critical stage of construction. We were going to put the top 'T' of the jig onto the centre section within the next few days. The Superintendent of the Toolroom rang up and asked Ronnie Cobb, the foreman, when this would take place. Now Ronnie was a bit of a romancer and told Haydock the super it had already been done. To his surprise Jack Haydock said well done, I will get the next inter factory brake up and have a look Well all hell was let loose. The section was hoisted up by crane and just sat on top of the jig, no bolts holding, only the crane wire. Haydock walked in just as this was completed. When he left it was lowered down again. He never found out what had gone on.

In 4 shed at Samlesbury the hangar was divided in two. Down one half the Canberra refurbishment was done and the other half TSR2 jigs etc. In the TSR2 half production fitters wer working on small detail items. The foreman was named Markland and he didn't get on very well with the Toolroom lads. Now his office was in the centre of the hangar, open topped. The day shift lads asked night shift to teach him a lesson. One of the lads was hoisted up by crane and dropped into Markland's office (all doors were locked), he then smeared the telephone with thick bedding blue, mouthpiece and earpiece. The following morning first thing, one of the toolroom lads rang Markland and he was smeared mouth and ear in bedding blue! The works police were sent for but no one figured out how the office was entered.

Every morning a labourer came round to collect the cups for our morning brew. He also took money from the lads for the betting. This particular morning he had collected the cups and the betting money and was going to 2 shed. He put his head out of the hangar door but failed to hear the Claxton going off to indicate a tractor was opening the large hangar door. As the main hangar door passed the small door, his head was trapped in the angle iron, he

was completely decapitated, his head stuck between the hangar doors. One of the nurses fainted when she arrived. The fire service swilled everything down. The sad part about this was he was retiring that weekend.

As I said earlier, 4 shed at Samlesbury was divided into two down the middle. We were working on nights in 4 shed, it would have been about 1.30am when we heard an almighty bang. On looking over to where the Canberra was situated, one of the aircraft had its nose high in the hangar roof. What had happened was as they were moving the aircraft along the line, the rear jack had dislodged, dropping the tail section onto the floor: the aircraft pivoted on the wing jacks and was tail heavy. The fitters toolboxes were all smashed and the elevators badly damaged. They worked like mad all night to put new elevators on the aircraft.

On Friday nights some of the Toolroom lads went into the Myerscough pub opposite the main gates at Samlesbury. They took turns for one of them not to go and clock everyone in. This particular night, when they came out of the Myerscough the main gates had been shut, so they had to climb over the fence onto the field. If they had asked for watch house gate to be opened, the times would have been logged. They were seen climbing the fence and reported. On the Monday night the Toolroom superintendent was waiting for them when they arrived and all were suspended.

When the Labour government scrapped the aircraft (a few months earlier, one of them stood on a box in Tweed St., Preston and promised that if Labour got in the aircraft was safe and would not be scrapped), typical Labour lies, they never alter. We worked on the tooling for months after TSR2 was scrapped, tools were checked by inspection, if not right, made right, stamped by the inspector, then scrapped.

I watched as the jigs were ripped out and the aircraft set on fire. Canopies still in crates from new destroyed.

I knew Beamont, he was a good test pilot. He was friend of Stan Jacksons, superintendent at Preston. Stan built his own aircraft (Minicab) which Roly used to borrow, that's another story!. I flew Chipmunks, Cessnas, Austers with Air Navigation at Blackpool BAC

Flying Club. I used to go on visits to other company airfields  
Saturday mornings, de Havilland, Chester etc.

PW Molloy, Toolmaker