

Alarming Stories

Philip Wilkinson

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Foreword:

After completing my schooling in 1975, I decided to pursue a one-year full-time course in electrical and electronic engineering at a technical college. However, in May 1976, without a clear career path in mind, I found myself working for a small alarm company called HK Security, which unfortunately went out of business after just a few weeks. This setback led me to apply for apprenticeships with all four national intruder alarm companies in the UK at that time, hoping to find a new opportunity.

Out of the applications I sent, only one company, Chubb Alarms, responded positively. I was offered an interview and eventually signed a contract of employment with them. From 1976 to 1980, I served as an apprentice at Chubb Alarms, where I gained privileged access to customers' premises. As part of my role, I worked closely with engineers, assisting them in the installation and repair of intruder alarm systems.

Throughout my apprenticeship, I encountered numerous intriguing situations. The stories I'm about to share shed light on the early days of intruder alarm systems, which were surprisingly crude in their operation. They also provide a glimpse into the humorous, sometimes perilous, and occasionally impolite situations that shaped my teenage years.

It's important to note that while most of these anecdotes were witnessed firsthand by myself, a few were recounted to me in great detail by the engineers I worked with during my apprenticeship. To protect the identity of individuals and customers who are still engaged in business, I have taken care to conceal their names. I believe that enough time has passed since these incidents occurred, ensuring that the details I provide about these early alarm systems do not compromise the current security of the customers or the company in present times.

About the author

I am Philip Wilkinson, a proud Yorkshireman born and raised in Headingley, Leeds. My formative years were spent in Leeds, where I attended Abbey Grange School before pursuing further education at Kitson Technical College. In 1976, I was fortunate enough to be offered an apprenticeship with Chubb Alarms, which marked the beginning of my journey in the industry.

After my apprenticeship, I delved into the realm of CCTV systems, working with CamEra from 1982 to 1986. Later, a friend and I ventured into business together, and I assumed the role of technical director in our joint venture, Stocks Security Ltd., a NACOSS company.

Following the sale of the company, I served on the boards of several small UK limited companies between 2001 and 2008, offering a range of services including e-commerce website design and fireworks retail. Presently, I hold the position of Managing Director at Online Security Products Ltd.

Throughout my life, I have remained deeply connected to Yorkshire. During my childhood, I would stay with family friends for extended periods, including time spent at a chapel in Grassington and a farmhouse in Thorner, where we had no heating or running water. For many years, my family enjoyed holidays in the charming East Coast fishing towns of Whitby, Staithes, and Robin Hoods Bay. Exploring the dales and North Yorkshire, driving along winding B roads, and visiting picturesque villages are among my favourite pastimes.

In 1978, the BBC aired a delightful series featuring the works of a renowned Yorkshire vet, who embarked on adventures across the county, visiting remote locations in all conditions. These stories had a profound and lasting impact on me. As I traversed Yorkshire, installing, servicing, and repairing security systems, I found a kindred spirit in that vet, as I often found myself in similar remote locations, braving challenging weather conditions to attend to customer emergencies.

Over the years, I have contemplated the possibility of penning my own collection of fact-based stories, akin to the experiences I've encountered in the intruder alarm industry. With my unique access to customers' premises throughout my career, I

have been privy to countless amusing, dangerous, funny, and even unexpected situations that are not typically encountered by most.

"Tales of an Apprentice Intruder Alarm Engineer" is the inaugural book in my series, which chronicles my journey from 1976 to 1980, encompassing my apprenticeship in the industry.

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Chapter 1 The first two weeks

In the early autumn of 1976, following a successful interview with Chubb, I was offered the position of apprentice intruder alarm engineer and promptly began my new role.

Chubb, a renowned company established in 1818, initially specialized in manufacturing burglar-resistant safes. However, their expertise expanded over the years, and in 1962, they made significant acquisitions, namely Rely-A-Bell and Burgot, which propelled them into the realm of electronic security, solidifying their position as a global leader in the field.

On that Monday morning, I arrived at the Chubb stores located in Park Square, Leeds. While the company boasted an esteemed reputation, the offices and stores themselves were somewhat modest. Inconveniently, there was no reserved parking available. Park Square and the neighbouring streets were lined with parking meters on both sides, creating a scarcity of parking spaces.

Given the sizeable team, comprising several managers, supervisors, around a dozen service engineers, and a similar number of installation engineers, the competition for parking spaces was fierce.

During my first morning, I was introduced to my supervisor and met many of the engineers with whom I would be working closely. As the week's work plans were discussed, the installation and service teams would gather in the office.

I received notification that my college sessions would take place every Thursday, and the upcoming Thursday would be my inaugural day. Chubb had arranged for me to join Kitson Technical College, despite having missed the first three weeks of the course. Through their influence, I was granted permission to start the program later.



Meeting the engineers

Following my initial assignment as an apprentice, I was paired with an experienced engineer to work alongside for the first three days of the week. I was informed that I should attend college on Thursday and return to the office on Friday for further instructions. With that, I hopped into the car of my assigned engineer, Martin, and together, we embarked on our way to the site.

Martin happened to own a Sunbeam Alpine, a vehicle that could be considered either a classic car or a mere shed, depending on your perspective. Curious about his choice of using his own car instead of a company vehicle, I inquired about it. Martin explained that it was customary for installation engineers to rely on public transportation in the past, while company cars were primarily reserved for service engineers. He clarified that the company would deliver all the necessary equipment to the site, and the engineers only needed to bring their own tools.

On the other hand, service engineers were required to transport ladders, steps, spare parts, and consumables, as they were responsible for on-call duties on a rotating basis, round the clock.

However, during that period, over half of the installation engineers had their own means of transportation. Some had cars, while others opted for motorbikes or scooters to carry them to their assigned tasks.



Eye Opener

We arrived at a site in North Yorkshire associated with the water board, and it became apparent to me the stark contrast between my previous work with HK and the scale of this project. While my previous assignments mostly involved smaller, low-risk properties such as residential homes, shops, and pubs, which could be completed in a day or two, the site we were now tackling was a massive complex that had already taken several days of labour and would require at least six more weeks to finish.

Due to the sensitive nature of the site, which dealt with public water supplies, security measures were stringent. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by security personnel who insisted that we read a card outlining the site's regulations. The card stated that we were not allowed to enter buildings marked with restricted access signs unless accompanied by a member of the water board. Furthermore, we needed written permission to utilize soldering irons, blowtorches, or welding equipment, and bringing food or drinks onto the site was strictly prohibited. The card even went so far as to mention toilet facilities and explicitly stated that fishing anywhere on the site was forbidden.

It was both intimidating and exhilarating to face such a challenge, but what made it even more enjoyable was the presence of Martin, my fellow engineer. Martin was an extraordinary character in his late thirties, with a medium build, remarkable fitness, a noticeable suntan, and distinctively large yet well-groomed sideburns. His piercing brown eyes and pursed lips exuded a zest for life, and you could tell he couldn't wait to entertain you with his jokes, stories, and anecdotes. Despite the sorry state of his beloved car, he refused to entertain any negative comments about it.

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On that particular morning, we were working in the battery room, which was a sight to behold. The room was an independent structure, detached from the main buildings, measuring approximately forty meters long, fifteen meters wide, and four meters high. It housed rows of towering shelves holding what appeared to be car batteries with glass sides—hundreds of them. The batteries were interconnected in series and parallel, serving as backup power in the event of an outage. The room was well-ventilated but cold, as ventilation was crucial due to the explosive gases emitted by the batteries during charging.

Our task involved cutting, bending, and threading steel conduit, which would serve as the conduit for the alarm devices. Martin wasted no time in showing off his skills. Placing a 20mm tube into the bending tool, he handed it to me, challenging me to bend the tube to a 90-degree angle. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't make the handle budge. Martin chuckled and effortlessly took over, bending the tube with a single hand, as if it were a simple task. To add to the spectacle, he then proceeded to perform one-handed push-ups on the floor, clapping after each lift, before gracefully lowering himself again. It was evident that it would be an eventful day with Martin around.

As we worked in the battery room, lunchtime arrived. Martin and I hopped into his car and drove to a nearby layby. Martin had brought sandwiches and a flask of tea. He glanced at me and asked where my lunch was, realizing that I hadn't brought one, accustomed to purchasing food daily during my time at HK. Eventually, he took pity on me and kindly offered a sandwich and a cup of tea from his flask.



Shocking Moment

During the afternoon, an alarming incident unfolded in the battery room. An electrician, who was also working in the same area, accidentally dropped a metal

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trunking lid, causing it to land and create a dangerous short circuit across multiple batteries.

In an instant, a chaotic explosion of sparks, scorching hot metal, smoke, and intense heat erupted within the room. Filled with shock and concern, all of us swiftly made our way to the nearest available exit, prioritizing our safety above all else.

Fortunately, by a stroke of luck, the metal lid did not become lodged between the batteries, which could have resulted in further complications. Instead, it bounced off and landed in a safe position, bringing the event to an abrupt end within a matter of seconds.

Once the air had cleared and the immediate danger had subsided, we cautiously re-entered the room to resume our work. I noticed that Martin, recognizing the potential risks, had wisely removed his metal-strapped wristwatch, demonstrating his commitment to personal safety in such an environment.



Distracted driver

The following day, as Martin and I met up for our daily commute to work, the sun bathed the leafy residential street in a warm glow. As we drove down the elegant avenue lined with grand, detached houses in North Leeds, Martin suddenly hit the brakes, causing the car to come to an abrupt stop. Intrigued, I glanced at him, wondering what had caught his attention.

With a mischievous smile on his face, Martin turned to me and asked, "Did you see that?" Perplexed, I scanned the surroundings, trying to figure out what he was referring to. Martin then made a swift U-turn, and we began to drive back slowly along the street, his eyes fixed on something ahead.

Finally, his finger pointed toward a specific house, drawing my attention to an upstairs window. My gaze followed his gesture, and there, to my disbelief, stood a young woman in her mid-twenties, her blonde hair cascading around her shoulders. However, what made this sight rather extraordinary was the fact that she was ironing her clothes completely naked, completely unabashed and on full display to anyone passing by on the street.

Intrigued, we continued to drive up and down the street, making several leisurely passes. I couldn't help but steal occasional glances at the window, caught between

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disbelief and amusement. The woman's actions seemed oblivious to the world outside, as she continued her ironing routine with carefree confidence.

After what felt like an eternity of circling the street, our presence must have caught the woman's attention. Martin, sensing the need for a quick exit, exclaimed, "Quick, duck!" We both instinctively lowered ourselves in the car, as if our lowered position could shield us from her gaze. It was a comical moment, as if we were seeking refuge in the depths of the vehicle.

As our heads dipped down, the woman finally noticed our presence and responded by closing her curtains, effectively ending the impromptu show. With a shared chuckle, Martin resumed driving, and we continued on our way to work, leaving behind that intriguing scene.

The remainder of the week flew by swiftly. Working alongside Martin proved to be an enjoyable experience, filled with his vibrant personality, entertaining stories, and a shared camaraderie. Those two additional days spent in his company seemed to pass in the blink of an eye, as we navigated through our tasks with diligence and a touch of light-heartedness. Our shared adventures and encounters added a touch of excitement and intrigue to the early stages of my apprenticeship as an intruder alarm engineer. Little did I know that this was just the beginning of the captivating tales and valuable experiences that awaited me in the years to come.



First day in college

On that Thursday, my first day at college, I had no idea that it would turn into a marathon twelve-hour affair, spanning from 9:00 in the morning to 9:00 in the evening. The initial two lessons were held in the impressive main building, a towering eleven-story structure that exuded prestige and academic heritage. It was a familiar setting for me, as I had previously studied at Kitson Technical College.

However, after lunch, our classes were relocated to the old Blenheim primary school building. This was a stark contrast to the grandeur of the main building. The old school building was a testament to neglect and decay, shrouded in a cold, damp atmosphere that clung to the air. The plaster on the walls and ceilings was peeling off, exposing the aged infrastructure beneath. Only half of the classrooms were deemed usable, and to accommodate the overflow, some lessons were conducted in portacabins hastily installed in what had once been the school playground.

It was evident that the building was no longer suitable for its original purpose as a primary school and had been condemned. While a minimal refurbishment had been attempted, it only addressed some immediate safety concerns, such as replacing or boarding up broken windows and performing haphazard electrical repairs. As a result, many of the electrical circuits were still out of commission, leaving us with limited access to power.

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Inside the classrooms, mismatched desks and chairs were arranged, bearing the signs of years of use and wear. Some of the classrooms still featured traditional blackboards, remnants from a bygone era. The lecturer, acknowledging the subpar conditions, apologized for the state of the building and assured us that this arrangement was temporary until a more suitable space could be arranged.

Our first lesson in the old building was abruptly cut short when a sizable piece of plaster, measuring around three feet by two feet, came crashing down from the ceiling. Luckily, it narrowly missed two of our fellow students, serving as a startling reminder of the deteriorating environment we found ourselves in.

To my disappointment, we endured the damp, cold, and unsuitable conditions of the old school building for the entirety of my first year at college. It wasn't until the building was eventually demolished that we were provided with modern, heated portacabins on the same site, offering a more comfortable and conducive learning environment. The transition brought a sense of relief, signalling the end of our time spent in the dilapidated remnants of the old school building.

Chapter 2

Getting a foot in the door



A day in the training room

On Friday, my assignment led me to the office, where I was allocated a day in the training room to familiarize myself with the equipment I would soon be working with as an apprentice. As was often the case for apprentices in those days, a significant portion of my responsibilities seemed to involve making countless cups of tea for the team.

Having been accustomed to working with small electronic control panels during my time at HK, I was in awe as I entered the training room. It was filled with the very equipment I would now be handling. One notable piece was the Burgot panel, an exquisite polished wooden box with a lockable front door. Opening it revealed an

array of switches, lights, and a knob that resembled the controls of a gas hob. This knob could be turned from "Day" to "Test" to "On." Attached to the back of the door was a bronze rod that would strike the knob when it was in the "Test" position, preventing the door from closing fully. It was a simple yet effective safety measure.

Adjacent to the Burgot panel, there stood a Burgot frame. This cast metal, wall-mounted structure was approximately five feet tall and two feet wide. It was the system employed in bank vaults, designed to accommodate up to nine metal boxes, such as control panels, battery boxes, signalling equipment, indicator panels, and timer units. The sight of the Burgot frame hinted at the challenges and complexities that lay ahead.

In addition, there was a Rely-A-Bell control panel, a CA3 commercial-grade model, which was the latest version at the time. It stood around twenty inches tall and fourteen inches wide, encased in a sturdy steel box with a hinged lid secured by a key. It boasted seven relays and an impressive ninety-plus cable connections serving various purposes.

Last but certainly not least, there was the CA6 system, specifically designed for bank vaults and high-security sites. This steel enclosure was approximately four feet tall and two feet six inches wide, exuding an air of robustness and formidable security features.

As I stood there, taking in the sight of the advanced equipment before me, I couldn't help but think how impressed the engineers I had worked with at HK would have been. If only they could witness the sophistication and capabilities of these systems, it would undoubtedly leave a lasting impression on them.

My exposure to this cutting-edge equipment instilled in me a sense of excitement and a desire to delve deeper into the intricacies of these sophisticated security systems. It was a pivotal moment, igniting a passion within me to learn and excel in my role as an apprentice intruder alarm engineer.



Entertaining the troops

The following week, Monday morning arrived, and at 8:30 a.m., we gathered outside the stores, eagerly awaiting access. However, it seemed that fate had conspired against us as the storeman, responsible for the key, was running late. Frustration started to creep in among the group. Sensing the need to uplift everyone's spirits, Martin, always the charismatic character, decided to regale us with a story.

He began his tale with a cowboy riding out in the scorching desert of the wild west, fully aware that he was traversing native Indian territory. The cowboy rode with caution, his rifle locked and loaded, prepared for any potential threat. Each day, he endured the relentless sun, his face and hands weathered and toughened from years spent in the saddle. Nights were spent under the expansive canopy of stars, shivering in the cold with little warmth from his meagre campfire.

As dawn broke, the cowboy awoke to find himself damp with dew, a constant companion during his journey. Undeterred, he rekindled the fire and brewed a cup of coffee, so dark and strong that it could be mistaken for tar.

The cowboy knew that surviving the journey would require occasional fishing breaks to sustain himself. Armed with only his wits, he would tickle fish from the

river, lacking the luxury of a fishing line. After ten gruelling days, the landscape shifted from sandy deserts and prickly cacti to rolling plains. Although still cautious, the cowboy found solace in the gentler terrain, with an abundance of small animals for sustenance and ample water sources.

Eventually, the plains gave way to the foothills of the mountains, leading the cowboy back into native Indian lands. With each passing day, he remained alert, ever watchful for signs of danger—be it from native Indian ambushes or encounters with wild bears and mountain lions.

After two more days of traversing the challenging terrain, the cowboy neared his destination, riding through dense trees and woodland. He remained on high alert, ready for any potential threats. Finally, he arrived at a clearing teeming with tepees, signalling his arrival at the native encampment. The scene was lively, with children playing and women diligently attending to their chores of washing clothes and cooking. As the cowboy dismounted his horse and prepared to announce his presence, the Native Indian chief emerged from the largest tepee. Bedecked in an impressive headdress adorned with feathers nearly touching the ground and dressed in meticulously handcrafted leather garments adorned with colourful stitched beads, the chief cast a stern gaze upon the cowboy. In a gruff voice, he uttered the words, "You fix um bell or me take um scalp."

At this point in Martin's tale, a collective groan emanated from the other engineers, as if they already knew the punchline. Just as the groans subsided, the storeman arrived, finally granting us access to the stores with the awaited key. One by one, the engineers filed inside, disappearing into the storeroom.

Martin, looking somewhat bemused, turned to me and remarked, "What a bunch of miserable gits. I entertained them for a good twenty minutes, and they didn't appreciate it one bit." We shared a laugh, grateful for Martin's ability to inject some light-heartedness into the situation, even if it went unappreciated by our fellow engineers.

With the stores now open, we stepped inside, ready to commence our day's work, carrying the memories of Martin's storytelling as a reminder of the joy that can be found in even the most mundane of situations.



Working with Clancy

In my second week on the job, I was assigned to assist another engineer named Richard, who was working on a project in a bank located in Bradford. As I inquired about the best way to get there, I was simply told to catch a bus.

Having never been to Bradford before, I embarked on my journey by walking to Leeds bus station, which happened to be situated diagonally across Leeds City Centre from my starting point. It became apparent that Leeds lacked a cohesive transportation system, with the small bus station and the massive railway station located over a mile apart. Coaches were departing from yet another small bus station, and parking was scattered throughout the city centre.

Upon arriving at the bus station, I sought guidance on reaching the bank at the provided address. I was instructed to catch a bus to the Bradford Interchange and then transfer to another bus to reach the bank situated on the far side of Bradford town centre. The thought of knowing when I had reached the Bradford Interchange crossed my mind, but it turned out to be unnecessary worry. The interchange was an enormous complex, incorporating multi-storey car parking, the railway station, and both bus and coach stations. Recently completed in 1971, it was a marvel compared to the facilities in Leeds.

Eventually, I managed to find the bank, but a significant amount of time had elapsed—around two hours. I knew I would need to retrace my steps and catch a third bus to return home that evening. It became clear to me that using my motorcycle to commute to work would be the sensible choice going forward.

When I arrived at the bank, I discovered that Richard was already hard at work. To say that he was an unusual character would be an understatement. Standing short in stature and in his mid-40s, Richard possessed long, unkempt black hair that receded at the front. His thick black stubble adorned his face, and he sported a pair of thick-framed glasses, held together with sticking plaster across the bridge. He completed his distinctive look with a grubby cap, a t-shirt riddled with holes, shorts, brown sandals, and black socks. Richard's muscular physique, resembling Popeye's brawny arms, made him appear more like a bank robber on a film set than a security engineer.

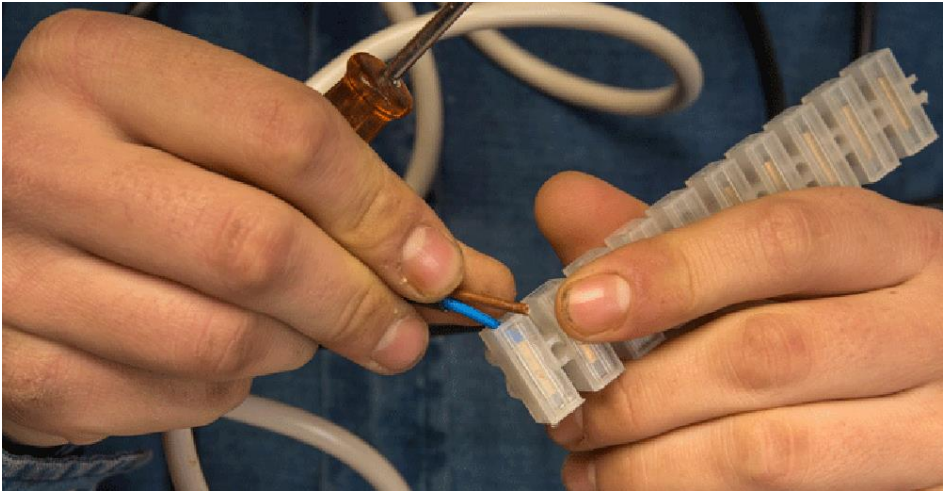
To add to his unconventional appearance, Richard had recently shaved off his eyebrows, claiming it was for charity, though many suspected it had been a drunken escapade. This led to supervisors receiving concerned calls from banks and building societies, questioning whether the company actually employed an engineer who looked like him.

Richard proudly identified himself as a self-proclaimed communist and often went by the nickname Clancy. Our initial encounter while working together didn't go smoothly. Our first task of the day was to install the external sounder on the front of the bank. Clancy, upon casting a stern glance at me, stated in a no-nonsense tone, "Your job is to foot these ladders. If I fall off, you better finish me off, ensuring I am dead before I can get up. Otherwise, I will kill you."

Installing sounders in high-security locations proved to be a laborious and time-consuming task. The delta bell sounders consisted of multiple components—a triangular backplate affixed to the wall, a large round bell, a printed circuit board, a rechargeable battery, an inner triangular cover, and an outer triangular cover, creating a double-skinned unit. Additionally, the cable used was a four-core mineral-insulated type, necessitating special glands and tools for termination. Halfway through the installation, Clancy, noticing my growing boredom, tested me by asking me to hand him a tool while he was on the ladder. I instinctively went to fetch the item, but was sternly reminded that I was not to foot the ladder, with the consequences firmly reiterated.

Later that day, after lunch, Clancy took a break and struck up a conversation with me as we worked together in the bank vault. It was during this time that I began to realize that he was truly a character. Over the next few years, we would work together on numerous occasions, forging a strong friendship. However, it would take me years to uncover the origin of his nickname, Clancy, only learning it from another engineer's account.

My experiences with Clancy were an adventure in themselves, with his eccentricities and unique outlook on life making each interaction intriguing and unforgettable. Our friendship would grow stronger as we continued to navigate the challenges and humorous moments that the world of intruder alarm engineering had in store for us.



Second day in college

My second Thursday at college arrived sooner than expected. A small group of us, who had joined the course later, were instructed to gather at Kitson College by 9:00 a.m. We were introduced to the course and handed our timetables. As I perused the schedule, it became clear that Chubb had enrolled me in the City & Guilds craft level four-year day release program in electrical engineering.

Considering I had just completed the City & Guilds electrical and electronic engineering course at a higher level, equivalent to A-level math, A-level electronics, and A-level engineering drawing, it seemed redundant for me to undertake this particular course. It felt as if I was retreading familiar ground.

The following day, I approached my supervisor, Gordon, to discuss the situation. I explained that I had already completed an advanced course on a full-time basis within one year. I inquired if there was a possibility of being placed on a Higher National Certificate (HNC) course to further enhance my qualifications. However, Gordon's response was less than encouraging. He simply stated, "Like it or lump

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it." It soon became apparent that Gordon was not well-liked by anyone in the company, but I would discover more about his character as time went on. In the meantime, all I could do was accept the situation, repeat the course material, and view the day release as a welcomed break once a week.

Despite the initial disappointment, I resolved to make the most of my time at college. I approached the coursework with diligence, seeking opportunities to further expand my knowledge and skills beyond what was offered in the curriculum. While the content itself may have been familiar, I aimed to push the boundaries and explore deeper aspects of electrical engineering during my designated day at college.

Additionally, I found solace in the fact that the day release allowed me a temporary respite from the rigorous demands of the job. It provided a chance to recharge, reflect, and interact with fellow students who shared a passion for the field. The college environment offered a different perspective, opening doors to new ideas and approaches that could be applied to my work at Chubb.

Little did I know that these seemingly redundant college sessions would soon prove valuable in unexpected ways. The knowledge and experiences gained, coupled with the connections forged, would play a vital role in shaping my future as an intruder alarm engineer.



Kidnapped

As I got to know my fellow classmates on the college course, it became apparent that most of them were aspiring electricians, panel and switchgear makers, and jukebox installers. However, there was one exception—Mark, a tall lad in his mid-30s with scruffy hair, who worked as a washing machine repair engineer and despised his job. He had enrolled in the course to enhance his prospects of pursuing a better career. Despite being the oldest among us, one might assume that Mark was the sensible one, but that assumption would be far from accurate. Mark possessed a wicked sense of humour that could reach levels of mischief most people never even imagined.

During one lunch hour, Mark proposed a mischievous plan. He suggested that he drop me off in the bustling centre of Leeds, drive his car around the block, and then the rest of the guys would "kidnap" me to observe how the public would react. Intrigued by the audacity of the idea, I reluctantly agreed, unsure of what was in store for me.

We found ourselves on a street corner near the market building in the heart of Leeds. The sidewalks were teeming with people going about their daily business. I anxiously waited for Mark's car, and suddenly, with a screech of tires, he arrived. Three lads leaped out of the car, leaving the doors wide open, and quickly snatched me, wrapping me tightly in an old carpet. I couldn't help but let out a panicked scream for help.

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As the commotion unfolded, a few elderly ladies nearby began to point in our direction, while others looked on from a distance, their curiosity piqued. In the midst of the chaos, I was forcibly dragged into the car, which sped off before the doors were even closed. With the windows down, I desperately stuck my head out, continuing to scream for assistance. But to my astonishment, no one reacted or came to my aid. It was as if the bustling city had temporarily turned a blind eye to our antics.

Eventually, we all burst into uncontrollable laughter as we met up for a pint later that lunchtime. We discussed the bewildered expressions on the faces of the elderly ladies and speculated about the tales they would recount to their friends that day. Although our prank had caused a temporary stir, it was all in good fun and provided us with an amusing anecdote to share for years to come.

Mark's mischievous nature and ability to push the boundaries of practical jokes added a vibrant energy to our college experience. Beyond the serious coursework and technical lessons, these light-hearted moments helped forge strong bonds among us. We developed a camaraderie built on shared laughter and a mutual understanding that life was meant to be enjoyed, even amidst the challenges of our chosen professions.

Little did I know at the time that these mischievous adventures and laughter-filled lunch breaks would serve as cherished memories of our time together—a reminder of the unique camaraderie that can emerge when a group of young individuals embark on a journey of learning and personal growth.



Confidence building

On that eventful Friday, I was assigned to work alongside Henry, a rather peculiar and comical character. Our task for the day was to install an alarm system in a residential property. Little did I know that my experience with Henry would prove to be quite memorable.

Henry instructed me to install a detector in the corner of the lounge where a cable had already been run. Armed with the necessary tools and equipment, I set about completing the task diligently. Within ten minutes, I had successfully installed the detector and eagerly sought out Henry to inform him of my progress.

To my surprise, Henry was in an unusually playful mood, though I couldn't quite decipher the reason behind his behaviour. He refused to assign me any further tasks until, as he claimed, he could be absolutely certain that I had completed the initial task to his satisfaction. This struck me as peculiar since I had already gained several months of experience in the industry prior to joining Chubb.

Henry looked at me with a mischievous grin and asked, "Are you sure you have installed the detector correctly?" I responded confidently, "Yes, I believe so." Little did I know that my response would ignite a series of amusing exchanges with Henry.

He seized upon my choice of words and launched into a comedic tirade, exclaiming, "You believe so? I need more than belief! I need certainty! Is it a yes or a no? You don't sound too sure to me." With a theatrical flair, he instructed me to return to

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the installation site and double-check my work. Determined to prove my competence, I dutifully climbed the steps, removed the lid of the detector, meticulously inspected the wiring, and carefully reassembled everything before returning to Henry.

To my bewilderment, Henry repeated his line of questioning, probing, "Are you sure the job has been done right? Are you absolutely 100% sure? If I were to check, would I agree that you have done the job right?" With each repetition, he skilfully managed to sow seeds of doubt within me, causing me to question my own abilities and scrutinize my work yet again.

By the end of the day, I realised that I had only managed to install that single detector. The entire day seemed consumed by Henry's antics, leaving me feeling mentally exhausted. As the clock struck the end of the workday, a wave of relief washed over me, knowing that I could finally return home.

Fortunately, Henry's time at Chubb was short-lived, as he soon departed to establish his own company. I breathed a sigh of relief, grateful that I would not have to endure any further encounters with his peculiar ways. While Henry's antics may have tested my patience and confidence, they ultimately taught me the importance of self-assurance and the ability to trust in my own skills.

Chapter 3

The fun continues



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Crude systems

It became apparent that the historical intruder alarm systems were extremely crude, considering the level of risk of the sites they protected, Banks, Jewellers, Building Societies, Museums, and Art Galleries to name but a few.

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The two original companies had quite different solutions to the problem. Rely-A-Bell as the name suggests was an overt solution, obvious to any would be intruder with external sounders (bells) and large obvious metal control panels by the main entrance from which the system was set/unset, they made a lot of noise attracting attention to a break in and their deterrent relied upon intruders wanting discretion.

Burgot on the other hand were covert installations, a discreet polished wooden box housed the control equipment and had a polished wooden front door locked with a key, looking for all the world like a small wall mounted drinks cabinet.

The system used signalling to call the police and for many years intruders thought they were just unlucky when they had been caught in the act. Right up until the turn of the century it was not uncommon for the police to communicate “there’s a Burgot reporting from such and such premises, address etc.”.

Rely-A-Bell systems were incredibly crude in their design, the panel had a six volt dry cell battery inside the case, there were three dry flag cells providing four and a half volts located in a box at the other end of the property, these cells had a two core cable leading from them through every part of the premises to be protected.

Typically thin tubes fitted at four inch intervals across all the windows looking like security bars but in fact had wiring through them (known in the industry as frames), contacts in the doors, small switches that broke the circuit when the door opened, and wiring behind hardboard sheeting on vulnerable panels such as wooden doors (known as CC Wire).

When setting the system, a switch would be rotated to ‘test’ and a meter would show a green ‘ok’ condition, in test mode the batteries at the end of the line were connected in series with the battery in the panel, this provided enough electrical energy to pull in a relay (an electromagnetic switch), then the switch was rotated to ‘set’ position, this disconnected the internal battery and left just the end of line flag cells to hold the relay energised.

Should the circuit be broken by an intruder i.e. opening a door, the relay de-energised and the sounders rang, should the intruder close the door re connecting the batteries, the system continued to sound as the end of line cells could not re-energise the relay by themselves.

By modern day standards, these were crude indeed.

As Rely-A Bell systems reached the end of their expected life it was inevitable that they needed a lot of work to keep them operational and really needed replacing with a modern system.

The skill with which they had been installed originally was apparent, as every system would be wired in the same way, so the 2 core cable would always start at top left of a window frame and finish at bottom right, the joints at bottom right were accessible for testing with a meter. Simple checks to locate the circuit break would comprise of testing to see if

the 4.5 volts from the batteries was present at the halfway point in the circuit, if yes then the break was nearer to the panel, if no then it was nearer to the end of line batteries.

If the engineer did not have a meter to hand it was common practice to use two tailors pins, holding them in contact with the joints bottom right and licking the pins, if you had a fizzing sensation there was voltage at this frame.

However when a customer did not want to pay for necessary remedial work, it was not uncommon for the resistance of the circuit to increase to a point where the end of line batteries could no longer hold the relay in 'set' mode.

A quick solution was to increase the number of batteries to overcome the failing systems resistance. Some sites had 30 or 40 batteries in place of the original 3.

A kind engineer, having deployed this solution may leave a note in the panel saying, "no tongue testing". However, they were not always kind!

The Burgot systems utilised (believe it or not) a gramophone record player, in a locked box, hidden from sight in the premises.

These had a hot burned record which had been recorded with a message "Police Police Police, this is a Burgot automated intruder alarm reporting from the premises of (Joe Bloggs & Co, High Street Leeds)" and were connected to the companies telephone line.

When activated they dialled 999 and played the recording which repeated for a few minutes. The original versions were housed in polished lockable wooden boxes, used 10" Bakelite disks and were powered by dry batteries, when I arrived these were being changed for newer smaller metal box versions with 7" vinyl covered aluminium discs.

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For high security systems, 'direct line' signalling was utilised, this comprised of renting a pair (a telephone line without connection to an exchange) from the GPO (now British Telecom) between the premises to be protected and the local ARC (alarm receiving centre), a secure manned room where alarm systems were monitored and the authorities notified should the need arise.

The direct line systems started out utilising a simple 24V connection between the customer and the ARC, when present, the system was not in alarm, when absent the premises were in line fault (possibly the line had been cut as a prelude to a break in) and when the voltage reversed the system was in alarm.

The system had its flaws, intruders who had been to college (prison) were learning electronics and had a greater appreciation of how systems worked.

They started opening the GPO boxes closest to the target premises and with a simple voltmeter that could identify which lines were phones (50VDC) and which were intruder alarms (24VAC), once identified, they would connect up a 24V truck battery which effectively disabled the signalling system.



Handy woodwork O Level

In the village of Pool near Otley, and just down the road from the original, and oldest garden centre in the UK there is a very attractive stone house, set in extensive gardens and grounds with outbuildings, paddock and stables.

The house is some four hundred meters back from the road and has its own private drive for access. I was sent to help James installing a new alarm system in the house, it was a nice drive into the Yorkshire countryside to reach the property and when I arrived it was a glorious spring day, daffodils lined the roads nearby and the private driveway, the garden was well kept and featured many different types of spring flowering bulbs, the snowdrops were almost done but the daffodils were spectacular, and in tubs, crocus and tulips were just getting started.

Inside the property the décor was what you would expect from a well-appointed stone property, with oak panelled hallway, oak staircase, and solid oak doors throughout. Parquet flooring in all the ground floor rooms and hallway set the tone and each room was decorated with great care and skill. The lounge had an Adams style fireplace, white plaster niches, dado rail and picture rail, featuring egg and dart cornices and the walls were powder blue.

The kitchen was traditional, with handmade oak rustic cabinets, Belfast sink, Aga cooker and large oak country style table.

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The first day we installed all necessary cables for the system and then started the second fix, James told me to install one of the door contacts and showed me the type to be used, known as G contacts they were flush fitted in the hinge side of the door, comprising an oblong brass plate with a half inch hole towards one end, behind which was a microswitch, the second half was a round brass plate with a spring loaded plunger designed to press the microswitch when the door was closed.

The solid oak door and frame were not easy to flush the contact in to, it took me the rest of the day to complete, I was glad now that I had studied O level woodwork, and the skills I had learned with a drill and chisel came in to play.

When completed, the contact with its brass plates looked good and clicked nicely when the door was closed.

I only spent one day on the premises before being reassigned, however several days later I heard that the customer had complained, a supervisor had been asked to visit to see and hear the complaint.

It would seem that James had not studied woodwork, his attempts at installing the rest of the G contacts required had not been so successful and some were not straight, some had suffered from slipping chisel marks and one had split the door frame.

In an unusual turn of events, the supervisors spoke to me about the complaint, they realised I had only been responsible for one of the contacts, it would seem that the customer had pointed to the one I installed saying, why could they not have all been installed like that, so I was praised for my work, but at the same time it was made clear that the complaint may not have arisen, had my work matched that of the engineer.

My work it would seem was too good and had shown up the remainder of the installation.



Almost killed a traffic warden

It was one of the roles of an apprentice to spend time assisting in the stores, all the installation engineers were expected to use public transport or their own transport to get to and from site, hence all the parts required to install the systems had to be selected from stores and delivered to site prior to the installation start date.

In building up the package of parts, a kit build sheet was prepared and provided to the storeman, this kit list contained everything required right down to the screws, rawlplugs, staples and cable clips.

An experienced storeman could often spot an error and simply correct it, one common error was the quantities of small yellow, medium red and large brown rawlplugs (screw fixings), if the installation was for a bank, and only yellow plugs and one inch screws had been specified, it was obvious that larger fixings would be needed, the storeman would simply add some to the build, however after a stock check, this practice was ended, only what is on the build sheet was the mantra.

I mention banks, but equally all high security sites utilised high security external sounders, these are large and heavy, and I can attest to this because I have handled them in the stores.

They included, triangular steel heavy gauge backplate, electronics with lead acid battery, 10” round fire alarm style bell, triangular steel primary cover and a triangular steel secondary cover making them double skinned (high security). When installing

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these, the total weight was not always apparent, as they would be installed in parts, backplate, bell, electronics, battery, inner cover then outer cover.

The installation engineers often had to scratch around for different fixings in their toolboxes as there would often not be the correct size, or quantity supplied with the kit. Some resented this and were militant about it, as they were expected to carry their own tools to site, they did not expect to have to carry other items that should be delivered. This tendency for errors on the build sheet and engineer militancy eventually caught up and the inevitable happened.

One day, a traffic warden was walking down a street in Thirsk Yorkshire looking at cars, when a huge item fell from a building with a resounding “ding”, it fell with such force that it remained upright, balanced on one corner of the triangle embedded into the tarmac.

The warden claimed it had missed her by just inches and was understandably shaken. The item that fell was painted plain grey and had no external company markings so immediate identification was not possible. The police and the local council got involved and determined it was a Chubb high security delta bell that had fallen.

This was all long before the elf n safety we now all know and love, so there were no bodies available to investigate, however the police asked for the circumstances to be investigated and the resulting outcome was that incorrect fixings had been used, yellow one inch plugs and screws had been used which had simply not been up to the task.

After the police investigation, Chubb were forced to go to every premises in the UK and ensure that their sounders were fixed properly, this involved an engineer visit to install a steel rawlbolt at every site to ensure this incident could

never occur again, we all earned a lot of overtime pay over the period.



Boney M

During my time at college, I often engaged in discussions about various aspects of our respective apprenticeships. On one occasion, I found myself conversing with a group of colleagues who were apprentices at MHG (Music Hire Group), working on jukeboxes. They expressed their intrigue when I mentioned that intruder alarms utilized seven-inch 45rpm singles. They simply couldn't believe that this was a factual detail. Determined to prove them wrong, I took a disc with me to college a few weeks later.

The records used in intruder alarms had a distinct appearance that differed from typical vinyl pressings. They were made from aluminium coated in a black polymer and were individually "hot cut." The process involved inserting a blank disc into a lathe, starting the process, and having an operator read a pre-determined script into a microphone. The script typically included a repeated message along the lines of "Police, Police, Police. This is an automated alarm reporting from the premises of XXXXX." The recording would continue for five minutes until the lathe stopped.

Unfortunately, we had no means of playing the disc at college. So, during our lunch break, we decided to visit both HMV and Virgin record stores, hoping they would play the disc for us to listen to. At that time, these stores had booths where

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customers could request to listen to vinyl records before making a purchase. However, despite our pleas, we were unable to convince either shop to play the disc for us.

Undeterred, we decided to try our luck at an antique shop that had a vintage "His Master's Voice" clockwork hand-wound horn player on display, dating back to circa 1910. The owner of the shop greeted our request with scepticism and promptly showed us the door.

Our attempts to listen to the record during our lunch hour had all been in vain. Frustrated but not ready to give up, I handed one of the MHG guys the disc, urging him to take it home and play it at his leisure.

Several weeks later, I inquired if they had indeed listened to the disc. To my surprise, they all agreed that the disc was genuine and indeed contained a message intended for emergency operators reporting a break-in. Curious to retrieve the disc, I asked for it back. However, their expressions turned sheepish as they admitted that they had not realized I would need it back.

They went on to explain that they had installed the disc into a jukebox in a bustling pub in Otley, cleverly substituting it under the title "Boney M, Rivers of Babylon." As I personally despised Boney M's music, I couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction that this particular track had been chosen. I imagined the stir it must have caused countless times when unsuspecting pub-goers selected the record, unaware of the secret message it contained.



Fox cub saved by the bell

One day, I was sent to help Martin at a car sales premises in Helmsley, I had never been to the village before and was surprised by how quintessentially English the town was.

As I arrived, I crossed the bridge and was immediately on the main street, the whole village centre is built out of stone with terracotta pan tile roofs, a main square with shops surrounding it has been used to provide parking and a gothic stone war memorial sits in the centre.

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The town is dominated by the ruins of a spectacular ruined castle and a stunning church set upon a slight hill built in the late nineteenth century.

Running parallel to the main street is a small road, to one side there is a deep sided stream with small bridges over it, one side has shops, the other has gardens behind the main street buildings, each has a stone store/building with pan tiled roofs, looking up the road, the church is visible at the far end and the castle to the left, in my opinion, this view is one of the best of any town in Yorkshire.

I arrived at the garage and car showroom, it was not a large premises and the buildings were old, the alarm system had been installed many years previously, we were removing the old and installing a new system. Martin took the control panel off the wall and connected the cable to the external bell to a battery to stop it ringing.

As we worked, the bell tinkled occasionally, we did not think anything of this and just assumed the battery was either low or the temporary twisted wire connection was not good.

As we worked, the new system gradually became nearer completion, the new bell was installed, the new panel connected and power restored, however the new bell tinkled occasionally, and we thought it odd. Dismantling the bell and testing the cable proved that the fault was the cable itself, it had an intermittent short circuit, and we would need to find and repair the damaged section.

Tracing the cable, we could see it disappear into a small hole drilled through an old stone wall at one point, the cable came out of a brick wall when viewed from the other side, it turned out the brick building was not attached to the stone building and there was a few inches gap between, pulling the cable resulted in several feet of cable coming out of the hole, as we pulled we could see teeth marks which were the most obvious reason for the cables failure.

I clambered round to the back of the building, pushing weeds aside I could see into the void between the buildings, to my surprise, a fox cub was stuck some ten feet from the ground between the walls.

I told the garage owner, who said that a vixen with cubs was seen hanging around that day, between us we decided to try and rescue the cub.

The proprietor knew the owner of the fishing tackle shop in town, and with the help of a ladder, some string and a keep net, we rescued the stuck cub pulling it up towards the gap in the roof from where it must have fallen. Letting the cub go, it

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ran away into the grounds of the castle, the proprietor said, that's where the mother is, they have been seen regularly in the area.

It felt great having helped, and this was one time when the old cliché could be used as the fox cub was 'saved by the bell'.



A house similar to Mr & Mrs Rivers

Mr and Mrs River Oils residence

One eventful day, I was assigned to assist two engineers, Peter and John, at a grand estate in Ilkley, Yorkshire. This sprawling property served as the family residence for Mr. and Mrs. River, who were associated with the River Oils family business. While the house had once exuded opulence in the 1920s, it had since fallen into disrepair and was in need of some refurbishment.

Our task was to install a new intruder alarm system, which began with meticulously tracing the existing cables to determine what could be reused and what required replacement. The work was painstaking, as we had to exercise great care with our step ladders to avoid marking the polished wood doors or accidentally knocking over precious paintings and ornaments. It was a time-consuming process that required the efforts of all three of us to accomplish what would normally be the work of a single person.

Right from the outset, it was abundantly clear that Mr. and Mrs. River did not want our presence in their home. Their actions spoke louder than words. They never acknowledged our presence and would promptly vacate any room we entered. Their aloofness created an uncomfortable atmosphere throughout our workdays.

The house was adorned with a dozen or more antique clocks, none of which were in working order. Each clock displayed a different time, further adding to the sense

of disarray within the residence. Time seemed to slip away unnoticed, and on the first day, we suddenly realized it was nearly five o'clock and we had not taken a break for lunch. The lack of hospitality was evident as we were never offered a drink throughout the day.

The second day mirrored the first, and we resorted to eating our sandwiches in the car at midday. However, John, who happened to be a scout leader, had a plan brewing in his mind. He declared, "That's enough! We will have hot drinks tomorrow, mark my words." Peter and I were curious about how he intended to accomplish this, but we knew that John always had a trick up his sleeve.

Wednesday arrived, and at precisely ten o'clock, a remarkable turn of events unfolded. Mrs. River unexpectedly entered the room where we were working and directed her gaze out the window towards the immaculate back lawn. In a refined tone, she inquired about John's activities, asking, "What is your colleague doing?" Peter and I followed her gaze and saw John in the middle of the lawn with a camping stove, kettle, water, and cups. Peter, quick to seize the moment, replied, "It appears that he is making himself a cup of tea." Almost immediately, Mrs. River responded, "Oh, tell him to stop! I will ask the cook to make tea for you."

As Mrs. River left the room, Peter leaned in and whispered to me, "She's only concerned about what the neighbours might think." We had to suppress our laughter, not wanting to be overheard.

True to her word, tea was served, accompanied by biscuits, and even on one occasion, we were treated to cake. Three times a day, a silver tray arrived with our beverages, courtesy of "cook." It was a stark contrast to the previous days, and we savoured each cup, relishing the unexpected luxury amidst our work.

From that day forward, Mrs. River's concern for appearances ensured that we were provided with regular tea breaks, transforming our working experience at the grand estate.



Airline up the derriere

Working in mill buildings in Yorkshire was always daunting, the staff, mostly women, were fearful, they thought nothing of behaving in ways that would simply not be tolerated now.

It was fairly common practice for a group of these women to capture a young lad, pull off his clothing and hold a milk bottle over his privates, then expose themselves to him until he became erect, finally abandoning him naked and with a milk bottle stuck to him.

If you think builders wolf whistling after women on the street was offensive, you cannot start to imagine what it was like for men under 30 walking through or working in the mills, the cat calling was both embarrassing and intimidating, it was nothing for them to expose themselves to make the point and no part of their bodies were off limits to such exposure.

It was always very hot working in these mills however the last thing you would do would be to remove your shirt as this provoked the sort of interest normally witnessed at a football match when a goal is scored.

On one occasion, Clancy, James and Martin were working in the offices of one such mill and I was on site to assist, the parts for the installation had been delivered to a locked room at one end of the mill, and the work was taking place in the offices at the other end.

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As the apprentice it was my job to ferry all the parts needed back and forth, I was asked for two rolls of cable and set off to walk around the outside of the building to get them and it was raining.

On my return to avoid the rain, I naively took a shortcut through the mill, with much whistling, cat calling and to resounding singing “get em off, get em off” etc. I ignored the mill women and arrived at the offices.

Two hours later, the mill management had called Chubb management team, who had then driven to site to tell me that I was not under any circumstances to walk through the mill. I resigned to the long walk back and forth outside in the rain.

The next day, I was in college for my day release course and was oblivious to what had happened, arriving the following day having travelled to the mill on my motorbike, I was immediately sent back to the Chubb office.

I thought I must be in trouble for my shortcut and resigned myself to a meeting with my favourite supervisor Gordon, (see more on Gordon elsewhere in my book). Upon arriving cold and wet at HQ I was told to help in the stores and no explanation was given.

Later, I was working with Clancy again and he told me that on the day I was at college, several plumbers had arrived to work in the mill, they also had an apprentice with them, and he too had walked through the mill, this time bare chested.

This had been a red rag to a herd of bulls and the mill women grabbed him, stripped him naked and during the half hour of having their idea of fun with him, they stuck an airline up his bum. This assault resulted in the apprentice dying and being taken off site by private ambulance, and of course a police enquiry.

This was quite something to take in, it could have so easily been myself in that situation. In future when you complain about elf n safety and the modern PC working environment, just take heed how far things have come in so short a time.

Chapter 4

What else can go wrong?



Kojak

On one occasion I was assisting Peter installing a system in a famous bed manufacturing mill in Dewsbury, Yorkshire. The mill had been repurposed and was now full to the roof on the ground level with beds and mattresses whilst the upper floors were where the products were manufactured.

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It was amusing seeing a lorry arrive, reverse up to the loading door and open the back, a team of people descended on the dispatch department and each picked up either a bed or a mattress and carried it onto the lorry, then in a circular walk, returned for another item until the lorry was full, it was like watching leaf cutter ants in a zoo.

That first day it was raining so we decided to eat in the company canteen, we wanted to avoid the mill workers break so decided to go at eleven, assuming they would break at twelve, however this was incorrect and at eleven fifteen the hordes descended.

The company canteen comprised long benches either side of long tables, once you were in the middle, you could not get out until everyone left. Not an issue for the factory workers usually, but suddenly Peter and I found ourselves squeezed into the middle facing each other with half a dozen female factory workers to either side of us.

Peter was of an age where he had been around the block a bit, so he was largely ignored by the all-female workforce, lucky for him as he could just sit back and enjoy what was to come.

The initial round was OK, the women wanted to know if we were using their tea/coffee/sugar etc.as they all clubbed together to pay for these items, once assured we had not, even though we had, the fun and games started. Initially they wanted my age, harmless enough, but then they wanted me to expose myself so that they could take measurements, suddenly I was concerned.

I noticed that one of the women on our table was much younger than the rest, I estimate she was a girl of eighteen, the focus finally moved on to her. “We call er Kojak” said one pointing to the girl, “yesh Kojak” said another who had no teeth. “Do you know why we call er Kojak” started a third who was covered in tattoos. I declined to answer as I could not and did not want to try to think of an appropriate response.

The first then said, “She’s Kojak cos’ she’s shaved, y’now down there”, I must have started to blush because the whole table went wild, with the exception of Kojak, who was looking decidedly uncomfortable.

Suddenly about three of her co-workers asked, “Do you want to see”, and gestured to the girl to stand up, Peter was drinking this in but I did not know what to say or do, suddenly the women had dragged Kojak onto the table, spilling tea and coffee

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everywhere, they turned her onto her back and spun her around so that her legs were towards me, without further ado, they took her knickers off and “showed” me why they called her Kojak.

I reflected later that no matter how hard my lot as an apprentice alarm engineer seemed, it was nothing by comparison to working as a young trainee bed manufacturer.

Relating this story to Clancy a few days later, he claimed that his worst nightmare was to be the only bloke on the women’s mill workers Blackpool outing coach.



Communications, an essential part of an alarm

As communication technology improved and emergency services became more stretched, it was desirable to remove the gram units which relied upon making a 999 call.

Upgrading to new digital communicators (Digicom) was the way forward, these units called a secure alarm receiving centre (ARC) and sent a digital signal to a computer which identified the premises, the information was then called through to the police by operators in the ARC.

Whilst all looked good in the planning phase, and many hundreds of grams had been pulled out and upgraded, there were issues that had not been given full consideration.

Firstly, many clubs, pubs, factories etc. provided a payphone for public use and to save money connected the gram to the same telephone line, this is OK when dialling 999 as this is a free telephone number, however as soon as a Digicom was installed, it dialled the local ARC, the payphone telephone line blocked the call on connection until money was inserted, which of course the Digicom could not do.

Further issues arose within a few months of the roll out, many telephone areas were subject to dialling code changes, hence a customer with premises in one telephone std code area dialling an ARC in another would suddenly have an issue.

The Digicom looked to be working, dialling correctly, playing the digital code over the line, and closing down reporting signalling success, however the ARC reported no signals?

It later transcribed that when dialling to old STD code, the telecoms provider blocked the line and played a message i.e. “dialling codes have changed, please redial using 01924 Beep”, unfortunately the beep was the same frequency that the ARC communicator transmitted to the Digicom for a successful transmission.

In addition to these issues, intruders started to understand that telephone lines were being used to make a phone call to an ARC, this gave them ideas, starting with breaking in and taking the phone off the hook to engage the line, to calling the companies phone number before breaking in or simply cutting all the telephone lines to the premises.

It would take another 20 years to resolve this issue with a new type of secure signalling that could send data to the ARC over a telephone line even if it was in use at the time, and monitor the line giving a fault condition at the ARC should the line fail.

In the background, direct line signalling systems (a rented pair of wires from the premises to the ARC) were being upgraded, the cost of such rented lines was so prohibitive that only very high risk clients used them, in excess of £1,000 per year providing the premises were in the same telephone STD code area as the ARC, this meant that companies had to own ARCs in every major town and city to provide this service.

The upgrades started with MV signalling, this utilised a tone over the line rather than 24VDC which had been relatively easy to defeat, however this quickly became just as insecure as the 24VDC systems as intruders could listen to the tone on the line and tune a small electronic circuit to the same frequency, then connect their own “MV” and disconnect the alarm.

MF was the next iteration, this used two tones sent continuously which generated a harmonic tone, the ARC receivers were tuned to listen to the harmonic and react if its frequency changed, even very slightly.

The final iteration of direct line systems allowed up to fifteen customers premises to arrive at the local exchange, then share a single line to the ARC, suddenly the local ARCs could be amalgamated into a few regional units, reducing running and staff costs dramatically.

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It always fascinated me when connecting new systems onto the combined connections, using an earpiece across the line you could hear the tones, a background continuous tone, “wow, wow, wow, wow” then a call tone from the ARC computer, “Peep” followed by replies from each customer’s premises “pip, pip, pip, pip etc.”, and after connecting the new transmitter, the number of replies increased by one pip, you knew it was working before talking to the ARC.

A few interesting tales came out of this signalling solution; -

One customer living in a beautiful house in North Leeds, after numerous “line fault” call outs at all times of the day and night, asked me what could be done to stop the nuisance, I discussed how that these “phantom” line failures were down to the telecommunications provider from whom he rented the necessary pair (of wires to the ARC) and that they may drop out due to bad connections, testing or a host of other reasons.

I advised that it was not possible to eliminate these issues, however the customer resolved the matter himself, he ordered another pair, paid for a second signalling board and simply advised the ARC, “don’t call me unless they both go into line fault”, this resolved the issue, but doubled the rental cost to in excess of £2000 per year just for the line rental, considering that was more than I was earning per year, it seems this customer valued his wasted time highly.

Another premises, a large warehouse storing valuable fur coats etc. utilised direct line signalling and had vibration sensors on the walls to detect intruders. The system was so secure, yet the goods were so valuable that a new strategy was developed, the intruders hammered on the wall three to five times every night causing the alarm to activate and the police to be called.

After a few weeks, the police stopped coming, so that night they knocked down the wall and took several lorries loads of goods worth an estimated 1 million pounds.

Customers such as banks with cash on the premises would pay for an extra level of security, open/close monitoring, in a nutshell, customers could set up time windows when they would open and close the premises, should they be late closing or the premises send an open signal at the wrong time, the police would be called to investigate, this helped to defeat intruders who held up keyholders and forced them to open their premises.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

All the direct line systems reported the times of opening and closing, however, unless open close monitoring service was set up and paid for, the ARC took no action other than to record the times.

This service was designed to prevent high risk sites being opened or closed at times outside normal agreed working hours, which could indicate a robbery being committed, either by a corrupt keyholder or coercion of keyholders by criminals.

On more than one occasion, this little-known recording has caught out business owners committing arson for insurance fraud.

Under suspicious circumstances, the police would be provided with the times the premises were opened or closed, they were then able to discuss the matter with the owner.

They were shocked to receive a visit from the Police asking, so we have established you're the only person with keys, the fire started at 2:00AM yet we can see that the alarm was opened at 1:30AM and closed again at 2:03AM, just how do you explain this?



Disaster strikes twice

Occasionally things went wrong as accidents occur. One Monday morning I was sent to meet Clancy at a premises in Bradford where I would be helping him all week, when I arrived, it was obvious Clancy was not his usual self, he was concerned that he may be called in to the office and given his P45.

At first, he would not discuss the issue, but it weighed on him heavily, after a day or two, when no call had come, he finally told me what had happened.

The previous week he was working in a very large house in Skipton, Yorkshire, whilst the husband was away on business leaving his wife alone, all had gone well until he drilled through a pipe on the landing, this resulted in the worst water leak he had ever seen inside a property.

Within 10 minutes, the grand house double staircase looked like Niagara falls, with water flowing down both staircases, the carpets on the landing, stairs and hallway were ruined, stained with brown water from the central heating system and torn, where Clancy had tried to pull them up to access the damaged pipes and stem the flow of water. But worse was to come.

The customer's wife had called an emergency plumber who could not stop the water flow as it was from the heating system which did not have a stop tap.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

Before she knew what was happening, the plumber had started to pull out the brand new marble fireplace in the main lounge in order to access the pipes, the customers wife, when she saw this, fainted and had to be taken away in an ambulance.

It would seem they had only just had the fireplace installed, it was an antique that had been imported from Italy and fully restored at great expense, and the plumber had broken one side with his crowbar in his desperate attempts to gain access.

I could hardly take in the description of the incident as Clancy related it. The final claim would be for the fireplace and all the carpets in the house along with re decorating in parts.

I asked, what did the supervisor say when you called him?

Clancy said that was the really strange part, the supervisor listened for a minute or two to what had occurred, asked if there was news from the hospital, then said “so the plumber is fixing it” to which Clancy had said yes, and he put the phone down without another word.

I asked, when did this happen, last Wednesday was the reply, mid-morning.



I then realised why the supervisor had been so quiet and related to Clancy that I had been in the stores that day, the same supervisor, just a few minutes earlier, had received a call from Leeds Art Gallery to advise him that an engineer had just broken a priceless Ming dynasty Chinese vase, he was just preparing to drive to site for a dressing down and was still in shock, when Clancy had called.



A typical department store

Lewis's department store

Lewis's department store in Leeds was a large independent department store built on a 600 square metre plot, with two subterranean floors and five above ground, 10,000 square yards of marble were used just for the floors and with 157 departments it was one of the largest in the north of England.

I have fond memories as a youngster being taken to town by my grandparents to see the fantastic window displays and visit the café for a knickerbocker glory, followed by a visit to the toy department on the top floor close to Christmas. Somehow the toy you liked the most seemed to be included in Santa's sack each year.

Imagine my surprise when I was told to report to the store to assist James working on alterations to the alarm systems. I arrived to find that the work entailed climbing out of a window onto the three feet wide parapet which ran all the way around the building.

We were to clip a cable around the outside of the building to form an antenna loop for new handheld alarm systems to be deployed to work throughout the store. It took three days to install, and we had lunch sitting on the parapet with our legs dangling off watching the people, mostly unaware that we were there, going by.

We did not go completely unnoticed however, at one point three elderly ladies suddenly noticed us and thinking we were a suicide pact, shouted encouragement to us and advised us not to jump.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

On the second day, we were sitting for a break with our feet hanging off the parapet, when suddenly two police officers climbed out of the open window and came up to us to enquire what we were doing, James showed his security pass, but they forced us to come back inside, by which point the Lewis's management had been summoned who explained.

On another occasion, whilst working in the store to install new detectors within the stairwells, I needed to check a connection which I suspected was in the roof void near to the escalators, rather handily, there was a tall set of stepladders set up in the spot I needed access to.

Climbing the ladders, I was surprised to find two plumbers laid on top of the air conditioning duct just below ceiling level, they were watching ladies getting changed in one of the departments. I joined them briefly for a look but the lady they were watching had dressed and was just leaving.

Later it transcribed that one of the department's female staff was tipping off the plumbers, when she suspected that an attractive shopper was likely to be of interest to them allowing them to scuttle off up the stepladder for a ring side seat.

After the detectors were installed, they gave several false alarms over the next two weeks, much head scratching and even a supervisor visit to the site could not resolve the issue which seemed to go away on its own. It transcribed that this was always the case, the alarm system would give several false alarms after being altered to cover a different area of the store. The service engineers spoke of rumours of ghosts in the store, which was a bit silly really.

In the late 1970's additions were made to the system and once again false alarms were prevalent. However new

technology was available to help resolve repeated false alarm events, a camera loaded with film could now be connected to the circuit and installed to view the same area covered by the detector giving the issues. That night the system activated, and the camera film was developed showing a man on the stairwell who had activated the detector.

The man was not found in the building and it was assumed he was a member of the public who may have fallen asleep in the store and been locked in, and that he had hidden until the store opened the next day, then left.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

However, a year or so later, during a major refurbishment of one of the oldest departments in the store, a false wall was removed by the shopfitters, behind this they discovered that someone was living in the store.

They had set up a kettle, bed, TV, stove etc. and made themselves very comfortable, and had helped themselves to the deli counter every night, evidence of this was found in the fridge and the bread box and of course lots of wrappers in the bin, gleaned from the household department of the store.

All the items in the living area had been lifted from the departments in the store, bedding, food, heater, fridge freezer, food, drink, pillows and even clothes. They never caught the individual; however, it was determined that he had been living in the store for more than five years at the time of discovery.

He must have been gutted when he was evicted, fancy having everything on tap for free, no rent, no rates, free food, free heat. The only inconvenience would be having to be in before five and not able to leave until eight the following day and locked in on Sundays.



How long can you hold your breath

One Monday I arrived at the stores and was sent out to Bradford to meet Clancy who was working on a small branch of a bank. The building itself was all that remained of a row of shops long demolished so was now surrounded by grass and cut off from the other properties by road improvements/enlargements on three sides.

Upon arrival Clancy identified me and I was allowed into the back of the bank to help with the new system to be installed alongside the old, it was standard practice to keep the old system fully functional whilst installing a new upgraded alarm in banks.

Today was switchover day, a sub contract drilling team had been on site from Friday evening drilling a 1¼” hole through the vault wall using a diamond core drill and had finished early on Monday morning, it would now be necessary to install the control panel, complete the conduit installation and have the new alarm system operational that evening to protect the hole through the vault wall, so a long day lay ahead.

Just before 12:00 Clancy said let’s get some lunch, there is a good sandwich shop nearby, it’s my treat today. I was covered in cement dust from drilling fixing holes in the vault ceiling and walls so went to the toilet to clean up a bit before lunch. The bank was so small that they only had a single communal toilet for staff, it was kept very nice with fresh towels, posh hand soap, soft toilet roll, a cabinet with the bank managers shaving kit etc. and the entrance door opened directly into the secure staff side of the counter area.

I opened the door and walked in, immediately I was overwhelmed by the pungent smell, I turned around and walked back out to catch my breath, I thought this must be Clancy, why had he not opened the window.

Taking several deep breaths, I went back in, the smell was pervasive and made me feel sick but I was desperate for a pee so braved it and left as soon as possible foregoing the hand wash I had originally planned.

I let Clancy buy the sandwiches from the store and as we sat outdoors eating, I broached the subject of the rancid, pungent stink in the toilets.

Clancy admitted it was he who had been to the toilets mid-morning, I pointed out that the toilets were communal for all the bank staff and the manager, male and female and said, “why did you not open a window”, Clancy said he had tried, but they were all painted closed and the toilet was not ventilated, he went on to say that he thought about propping the door open, however he had realised that in doing so he would have stunk out the bank.

We laughed together, thinking about the bank staff using the toilets and I asked Clancy what he had eaten to produce a smell like that.

He then laid bare the events of the previous Sunday night, he and a friend had been drinking (Clancy could down 20 pints in 4 hours back then), they had then called into a curry house, for which Bradford is famed, he had ordered a vindaloo with two bottles of lager.

He then went on to say that, as he walked home to Clayton, approximately seven miles away, he had started to feel hungry again, passing another curry house he had gone in for more. He ordered another vindaloo but this time he

advised the staff that he had just eaten a vindaloo in another curry house which had not been hot enough for him, and could they make sure this meal was really hot.

Clancy went on to describe the meal when it arrived as having a layer of blue flame on the top, it was that hot.

Altogether I was not now so surprised by the level of stench left in the toilets and made a mental note not to use them again that day.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

The following day I was working with a different engineer, and the next I was at college, however on Thursday I was sent to help Clancy again, at lunchtime I decided to go to the restroom first and walked into the toilet, I could not believe that it smelled just as bad as it had on Monday, so I walked out and peed on a wall outside.

Speaking to Clancy over lunch I asked what the heck were you eating last night, he knew immediately what I meant and said that it was the same smell from Monday which had not cleared, I think he was embarrassed by this but you could never really tell with Clancy, my thoughts were with the staff of the bank having no other facilities to use and being forced to hold their breath every time they needed the toilet.

Clancy later said that he thought he had got away with this, as he had heard the manager telling one of the staff to call a plumber to come and look at the bank's drains.



Shpeak to me

Working with Martin was always interesting, on one occasion, working in a large empty mill building he had brought his trumpet with him, and during lunch he decided to play it, the acoustics in the empty mill were incredible and his playing reverberated throughout the whole mill.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

During lunch Martin started to tell some of his tales, he had been a trumpet player in a band, and he claimed this was why he had pursed lips.

He went on to tell tales from the era and recalled vividly an encounter with an attractive female bugle player, he had told her that playing the bugle had not affected her lips in his opinion, and even persuaded her to let him kiss her to test her lips.

He also related a time when the band decided to dismiss one of the members who was a guitar player, but not up to their standard. One day they all drove around to his house in the minibus, most of the band remained in the vehicle, but he and one other member rang the doorbell.

Upon answering, the poor guy (who had a lisp), was surprised by the visit. He looked at all the band members and, bemused by the fact that none of the band spoke, he repeatedly said shpeak to me lads, shpeak to me.

At which point they all departed leaving him alone. From that day forward he was known to the rest of the group as 'shpeak to me', he never played with the group again.

Martin recalled a year or so later, one of the band members just before going on stage saying, hey lads, guess who I saw yesterday playing at the local pub, shpeak to me.

Some years later shpeak to me suddenly found fame, in 1969 he became one half of the two singers in the newly reconfigured duo act Black Lace, achieved fame with several cheesy pop songs such as Agadoo, appeared on Top of the Pops several times and even went on to represent the UK in the Eurovision song contest in 1979.

Like anything, fame is short lived, shpeak to me was later prosecuted for a benefit fraud and jailed for six months



Provident Management

In a small town called Mixenden near Halifax there used to be a data storage and processing centre with a large mainframe computer programmed by punched cards.

This centre was a high security site as the data being processed was credit checks for banks, building societies and other lenders offering mortgages, and credit facilities, the security system was top notch for the site and it was an interesting place to work whilst installing updates. Watching the skilled programmers punching the cards to program the computer for a task was fascinating.

The main offices for the company were in an eleven-storey building in the centre of Bradford. The company employed Chubb to install the latest state of the art intruder alarm, fire alarm and access control system.

I turned up one Monday morning to meet with Peter and Martin to install the intruder alarm, half way through the morning, supervisors from Chubb Fire (a separate entity to Chubb Alarms) arrived and asked if they could borrow an office in the building. It transpired that Chubb Fire had advertised for fire engineers to come to the building for an interview with the prospect of work starting immediately with the installation in the same building.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

As prospective employees for Chubb Fire started to arrive and request where they should go for the job interview at the company's reception, it became apparent to management what was happening, they walked into the office mid interview and threw the supervisors out of the building. Chubb Fire lost the contract for the fire alarm that same day.

The building was very well furnished and the type of employee it attracted was the city yuppies, they arrived in flashy cars, dressed in power suits or designer outfits with expensive haircuts, bags etc. It did not take long to realise that as lowly electrical engineers, we were not very welcome. On the second day we were barred from the company canteen and had to eat our lunch in the basement.

On the fifth day we were barred from using the company lifts so had to use the staircase to access each floor as required.

By the end of the second week, we were told we could not work anywhere in the offices during working hours meaning we had to work evenings and weekends to install the last few parts of the system, with one exception, we could continue to work in the basement.

On that day, we all retired to the basement as there were a number of jobs to do there, whilst all three of us were standing on stepladders working, Martin kept farting very loudly, this was funny at first but after a while the funny side wore off and after a particularly long loud and smelly fart, Peter said to Martin “why don't you give it a rest it's not funny anymore”.

Following the rebuke, every 20 minutes or so, Martin climbed down the stepladder, walked over to the lift we were no longer allowed to use and pressed the call button, when it arrived Martin stepped inside, farted and then stepped out, the doors closed and the lift returned to the office levels, no doubt called by one of the yuppies who worked above. We all rolled around on the floor in fits of laughter, and surprisingly the funny side of Martin's farting returned in abundance and this time did not wear off.

Towards the end of the second week, sub-contractors employed by Chubb arrived to install the access control system which was to control doors from the lift/stair well to each floor. The solid oak doors required large electric locks to be cut into them and the building management team were concerned that the skill set of the access control engineers who were sub-contractors, were not up to the mark.

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The building management team stopped the work as it was obvious to all that they had never installed locks before and were likely to cause damage to the doors.

Martin had been a joiner prior to becoming an alarm engineer, he and Clancy offered to work over the weekend to cut the locks into the twenty two doors as required, both had lock installation skills as all Chubb Alarm systems were set using a contacted five lever deadlock, hence every site had such a lock installed.

The sub-contractors reported this back and management cleared the work, Martin and Clancy were asked to work the weekend and were shown which doors required locks installing and provided with a lock for templating.

The following Monday it became apparent that the locks had been cut into the wrong doors, each set had an inner and outer pair of double doors, the inner pair should have been fitted with locks, however the supervisor had indicated the outer pairs to Martin and Clancy.

The building management team were to say the least not impressed with Chubb now and demanded that the correct doors be fitted with the locks and the doors cut in error would require professional restoration.

Once again Martin and Clancy came to the rescue, this time they would start the work at 18:00 on Friday and work throughout the weekend to cut the locks into the correct doors, and restore the doors cut in error.

Martin was responsible for restoration, on Monday the following week the transformation needed to be seen to be believed, Martin had let in solid oak to fill and cover the lock cut outs and had re polished the door edges, you had to look very closely indeed to tell that this had been done.

At the time, the secrecy and security surrounding the work in the building was top level, their decisions on people and companies credit worthiness was a secret. The service they provided was not known by the people and companies who were being credit checked for loans, mortgages etc.

Ironically, things have come full circle with companies who provide credit checking services, now advertising on television and the internet to take control of your credit by knowing your credit score, these companies now act as credit brokers, providing information on the likelihood of a person being accepted for a credit card, loan or mortgage etc. which always seems to me to be a conflict of interests.

Chapter 5

Another collection of funny stories



The Monkey Hangers

I joined a motorcycle club, the Aire Valley MC in 1978 and as the club's members were all keen to attend motorcycle rallies, I tagged along on weekends.

In Hartlepool, the largest motorcycle club was the Hartlepool and district MCC, a bit of a mouthful. This year however, special permission was given to the second club in the region to run the rally, the Monkey Hangers MCC.

The rally was well established after many years, however this year looked to be a bit different, so eight members of the Aire Valley club attended. Right from the off, it was obvious this would not be a boring affair.

On Friday evening some six hundred motorcyclists arrived and registered with the Monkey Hangers club rally registration tent. Registration and payment of a small fee

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(typically £2.00) got you an enamel rally badge, a hot dog from Melvin's snack van, late night licenced bar on the Friday and Saturday, a pitch for your tent and live music or a heavy metal disco.

Arriving on Friday, I parked by bike by the registration tent, and when I returned, someone had stolen my tankard. I set up my tent and joined everyone in the pub which had agreed to host the event. Much ale drinking and singing then ensued along with some mooning at the Pudsey MCC members, one of which had made a poor job of his personal hygiene, this resulted in a round of loud singing to the tune of on Ilkley moor bah tat with a verse changed to "we know how to wipe our arses over here" etc.

The following morning, at least half the rally had a hangover, there was not much available for breakfast so I bought a burger from Melvin's snack van, not very hygienic in those days, Melvin had a van with a trailer for the food, you would see him go to the trailer to get bread etc. then stroke the dog on the way back and start preparing the food. It was predicted that at least one percent of all rally goers would succumb to food poisoning at the hands of Melvin.



My badge from the Monkey Hanger rally

Mid-morning, a few hell's angels turned up, they were not very welcome as they always caused trouble, suddenly there was a port a loo rolling competition happening, half a dozen monkey hangers and half a dozen angels are rolling a pair of port a loo's round the camp site.

Later they opened them to see what sort of mess was inside, unfortunately, the loo the angels had pushed around the field had a member of the monkey hangers club inside, he must have been using the loo when it was tipped and rolled. An ambulance

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had to be called for him as he had ingested the contents, not a pleasant end to his camping weekend.

By twelve o'clock, there was a queue of over five hundred motorcyclists waiting to get into the pub for the lunch time drinking session. The staff were overwhelmed and could not serve fast enough. The queue at the bar was impossible, and I was trapped at the very front. At that moment, the excesses of the last evening caught up with me and I let go an SBD, the smell was so sickening that the bar staff left delaying further the service and choking everyone in the room.

The lunch session turned into an evening session, the pub had bought in cheap substandard pint glasses to cope with the volume, however some had sharp edges and caused minor cuts. The pub ran completely dry by half past six and four hundred of us held a beer glass throwing competition in the car park, that got rid of the faulty glasses but did not help with the beer shortage.

The monkey hangers brought forward their next plan, coaches started to arrive and ferry us to another location, a rugby club with a large bar and dance floor.

On the stage was set up a heavy metal DJ called “the end of the world disco and laser show”, unfortunately the lasers were not working but it did not matter much, we drank the bar dry by midnight and I recall one of my club members buying a pint of slops from the bar, also several semi-conscious novice rally attendees being dragged back and forth in the spilled beer which covered the dance floor.

The following morning, the angels were causing more trouble and a fight broke out, the larger members of the monkey hangers picked up some scaffolding poles and taught them a lesson which would require a hospital visit to recover from.

The final few minutes of the rally were photographed by the club for posterity, standing by the registration tent, about a hundred from a dozen or more clubs gathered and joined the monkey hangers, complete with toy hanging monkeys, for a photo call.



A Yamaha XS250 bike, like the one I owned at this time



The Humber Bridge

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In the mid to late 1970's the troubles in Ireland had resulted in the IRA carrying out a sustained bombing campaign in England, many large bombs were detonated causing serious damage to property and loss of life. Coded warnings were often given to provide time to evacuate the area, not always with enough time.

Alongside actual bombs, virtual bombing campaigns were causing major disruption, a coded warning could result in huge evacuations and result in many hours or even days of disruption whilst the army bomb squads checked to ensure the area was safe.

The Humber Bridge was a potential target for either a real bomb scare, or a virtual warning.

Calculations had been made as to the length of time it could take to check the entire structure for a device, should a coded warning be received.

It was determined that so long as it could be proven that all openings accessing the bridge inner structure were closed, and that any access granted had been vetted and checked, only an external examination would be necessary which would save hundreds of hours of searching, should a threat arise.

To permit this it would be necessary to monitor electronically every single door or access hatch in the structure.

Tenders for the work were invited from all four national intruder alarm companies at that time, no one wanted the job, so vastly inflated prices were submitted, however Chubb drew the short straw and won the tender.

The work entailed installing a contact on more than ninety access points, these were located at sea level, lower bridge level, road level etc. also installing personal attack alarms for each toll booth, as cash would be collected in considerable sums during the normal every day operation of the bridge.

Chubb used the electrical contractors to install Mineral Insulated (MI) cables from the control room to every point on the bridge, as the bridge measures one mile between the towers, and access hatches at both ends into the main cable anchors were greater than a mile from the tower bases, most cable runs were in excess of one and a half miles in length and some exceeded three miles.

I worked on the system on several occasions, initially the bridge roadway was still incomplete so it was necessary to know which end of the bridge required work on the day, as it was a 65 mile round trip if you were at the wrong end.

The concrete was so hard that a special miniature pneumatic drill was purchased to drill fixing holes to fix contacts to the concrete with magnets attached by drilled and tapped holes in the steel doors/hatches.

On one occasion, I arrived at the Hesse end of the bridge to be advised that the contacts to be fitted were located at either side to the two main towers at the height of the main support cable intersection, some five hundred feet above sea level, the concrete towers at this time were hollow structures which would eventually have steel staircases installed some five hundred feet high.

The towers had fourteen doorways each and there are four towers. From the entrances at sea level, to the under bridge entrances for access to the maintenance cradles which would run under the bridge, to the road level access doors, then one door for each horizontal bracing concrete point and finally at the top.

On the day I installed the contacts at the top of the two towers at the Hesse end, the staircases had not been started, the towers were essentially five hundred feet concrete tubes. There was a steel railway line up the outer section of one of the concrete towers with an access cage attached. A steel cable ran to the top of the tower, over a pulley and back to a winding motor attached to the road surface with a single bolt.

Climbing into the cage, and giving the thumbs up, an operator pushed and held a lever and the cage started to rise until I reached the access door at the top of the tower, at which point I waved to the operator who stopped the winch. There was no room for vertigo working here, I thought.

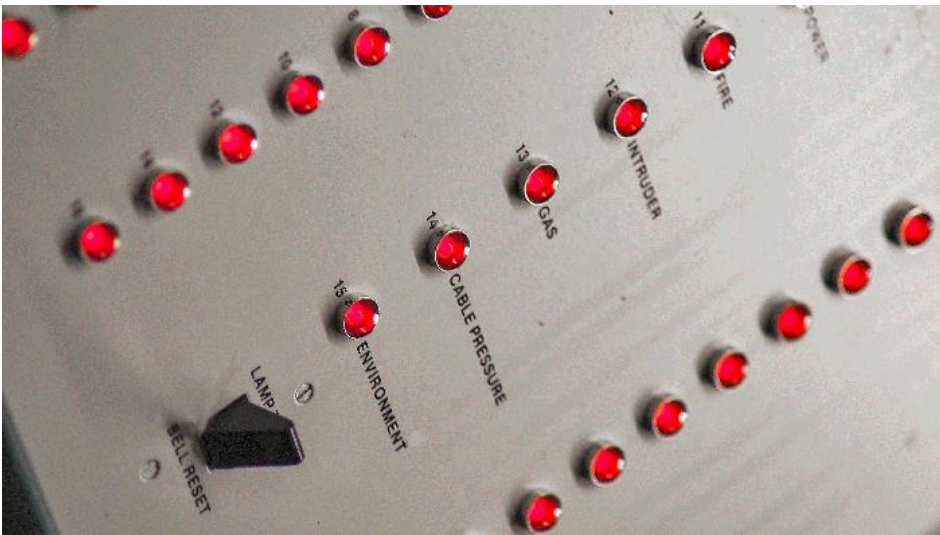
After installing contacts onto the inner and outer doors at the top of one of the two towers, I took a little time to enjoy the view from the top of the bridge, later it was published that a person had fallen from the top and that the body had never been found, it had been calculated that his body hit the water very hard, then continued and hit the bed of the river Humber, before being washed out to sea.

During my time on the bridge, I had privileged access to parts most people would never see, from standing on the top of the towers, to riding in the maintenance cradle under the bridge, and witnessing the incredible anchor points where thousands of individual steel wires that make up the support cable come to ground.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

One view was quite spectacular, the view from inside the road surface sections, each connecting section had an oval hatch like a submarine door, with these open you could see the curvature of the earth in the rise and fall of the doors throughout the 2½ miles of the bridge road structure.

All the alarm points came back to a custom-built panel within the control and operations tower where individual lights would indicate if an access point were open or closed, or if a toll booth alarm had been activated. I was not deemed worthy to connect the system to the indicator panel, hence supervisors completed this task to commission the system.



I later learned that the stunning, custom made panel had been built with a serious flaw in its design, all the circuits in intruder alarms are closed, going open in alarm, the panel had been built for open, going closed in alarm, the reverse of what was required. It had been necessary to jury rig the panel with an additional 100+ relays to reverse the operation of every circuit. What a painful alteration, taking a custom-made panel costing a lot of money and bodging it to work.

Working some sixty to a hundred miles away from the stores, depending upon which end of the bridge I needed to access, raised other questions. The engineers traditionally travelled by public transport to sites, carrying their hand tools. All parts, ladders, steps, drills, pipe benders etc. would be shipped to and collected from site by James in the company van. At one point, the company agreed that engineers who

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owned cars and were prepared to carry some parts, electric drill and extension lead etc. would be able to claim a mileage allowance.

I was using my motorcycle rather than public transport, but could not carry any parts, so was paid bus fares only. At the time, busses were heavily subsidised, to the extent that you could travel to Hull from Leeds return for just £3.70. I complained that my petrol costs were far greater for a one-hundred-and-twenty-mile round trip and was simply told by my favourite supervisor Gordon, “use the bus then” and if you don’t like it, we can always make you redundant.



Batman

One morning I arrived at the stores and was bundled into a car with three engineers, Andrew, Martin, and Grant to install an alarm system in a large house in Harrogate. The system had to be installed in a day as the owners were going abroad for a period.

On arrival, we were shown around the property by the lady of the house, she also showed us where the kettle, tea and coffee, cups and biscuits were and then left us to get on with the work, saying, I should be back around 2:30.

We quickly discovered that an alarm had been installed previously, many of the cables were intact and after testing could be reused, we split the job into four parts and each tackled a part, by around 1:00 we had completed the work, so made tea and coffee, collected our sandwiches and sat down in the lounge.

Martin put the television on, but in those days, there were only four channels and nothing of interest was being broadcast. He noticed the customer had a video recorder, a real rarity in the late 70's Martin looked through the tape library, picking

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out one and saying, this is a good movie, he put the tape into the machine and pressed play.

Ten minutes into the film, something odd happened, the film stopped, and we could see a bedroom.

A few seconds later, Andrew said, that's the bedroom upstairs, we all looked at him and he went on to say, yes it is, I had to pull the bed out to fit the personal attack alarm and I'm telling you that's, when suddenly a man dressed as batman jumped in front of the camera, he had on a batman mask and cape, gloves, boots and batman breastplate with the batman logo, however he did not have any trousers or pants on.

At this point, we are all spluttering with mouthfuls of sandwiches as the scene unfolded, Batman started to masturbate. Andrew had spilt his drink; Martin could not look.

Andrew quickly rose, switched off the recorder, rewound the tape to the beginning and put it away, he also switched off the TV ensuring it was left on the channel it had been set to before we used it. Not a word was said, we cleaned up and the lady of the house arrived back.

Martin explained that we had completed the work and were ready to instruct her on how to use the alarm, at which point she said, can you wait twenty minutes as I need to call my husband from work, he will want to see how to use the system. Approximately fifteen minutes later, her husband arrives, and he is immediately recognised as Batman, we kept nudging each other and whispering, you show them, no you show them.

Andrew had already escaped to the car leaving myself, Martin and Grant who drew the short straw, the control system was installed behind the door from the kitchen to the cellar, Batman and his wife had their backs to myself and Martin but Grant could see us as he gave the demonstration.

He had a pronounced stutter which was always much worse when under stress, his stutter was so bad that the system demonstration was cut very short, this was due to Martin and I quietly dancing about the kitchen pretending to be Batman in the video.

After the training, when we were back in the car Grant said, y,y,y,ou fer,fer,ferking, b,b,b,bas,bas,bas,Basterds and we all nearly died laughing.



Ides of March

My pride and joy was my motorcycle, a Suzuki GS750 from 1978, now a classic Japanese bike, which I used to travel to and from work and at weekends to travel for camping and motorcycle rallies. I owned the bike for five years and put 60,000 miles on the clock during that period.

Several of my friends were mechanical engineer apprentices and together we became the Aire Valley motorcycles club and travelled to bike rallies around the UK mainly in winter. Among the apprentice engineers, one's mother opened an account with Grattan, the catalogue club based in Bradford which provided everything in the catalogue on weekly payment plans.

Of course, the catalogue ended up being shown around at work, and the apprentices decided what they really needed for camping was a plastic Wendy house, complete with painted on curtains and a painted owl on the chimney. Duly ordered for the princely sum of 50p per week for 12 weeks, the Wendy house made its first (and last) appearance at the Ides of March rally.

The Salford Centurions MCC record on their website the following: -



The Ides of March rally badge

“One year (1979?) at The Moorcock Inn there was a row of bikes in the pub car park that disappeared under a snow drift. The unlucky ones were under more than ten feet of snow! I went there across the M62 because the moor road was impassable. After I squeezed past an accident blocking the motorway westbound near Outlane, I rode on virgin snow and didn't see anyone else until I got to the Lancashire border. All the cars were stuck going up the long hill eastbound and a team of police were trying to clear the way for the gritters to get through. After watching the police range rovers pushing and pulling fully laden articulated wagons up the hill in the snow, I made a mental note never to buy an ex police vehicle!”. The experience of getting to the rally was one I shall never forget, the apprentice engineers were camped in the Wendy house, which was last seen atop a motorcycle and rider driving across the field.

Some six weeks or so later, I (as an experienced apprentice now trusted to do smaller works without supervision) arrived in Leeds at a small bank to alter the system.

The manager caught me eating in the vault and sent me to the staff canteen, we did not like using staff canteens because you were always sat in someone else's seat, or accused of using their tea/coffee/sugar/milk etc. which they had to pay for.



A photo of the Ides of March rally 1978 before ten feet of snow fell

However, on this occasion only one staff member was using the canteen, so I sat down. The other chap was reading a copy of a motorcycle enthusiasts' magazine and when he reached the centre spread it had a photo taken at the Ides of March rally.

He turned the magazine around saying, you're a motorcyclist like myself, have you seen these idiots, pointing to the Wendy house with boots sticking out from underneath partly buried in the snow, I replied that I knew the occupants and that I was one of the "idiots" in the Wendy house at the rally, his first instinct was not to believe me, until I pointed out my motorcycle parked next to the Wendy house, with my registration plate of my bike, the GS750 was clearly visible.



A Suzuki GS750 of the era, same colour as mine

Considered a modern classic, this was the first time Suzuki had made a four stroke engine, and they got it right first time, with four cylinders, four twin choke carburetors , double overhead camshaft and four pipe exhaust, it was a dream to drive.

The engineers who had ordered the Wendy house, now owed the Grattan catalogue owner for the item, despite the bill being just 50p a week, and there being eight of them, the poor lad whose mothers account had been used never got a penny of the money.



Montague Burton's

The UK's largest tailoring company, Montague Burton's (now Burton's and part of Arcadia) was based in a mill building in Leeds, in the late 70's they were moving away from manufacturing and over to importing finished goods and required storage. They selected the whole top floor of the mill for storage of leather and fur goods which were high risk stock items.

Chubb already had several systems on the site and now started a major new work to create a high security area. The specification was to say the least over the top.

Because the mill had a northern lights glass roof, the alarm required infrared interruption beams at 18-inch intervals for the full 150-yard-long floor of the mill, so 300 units just for the roof. At 50-yard intervals, banks of three infrared interruption beams were to be installed at low, medium, and high level around the perimeter of the whole area and across the width at the 50-yard intervals points, another 36 units.

Every window required a tube and batten wired frame simulating security bars, but with wires through the tubes.

Every door required wiring on the bottom section, a frame covering the glass section and a door contact to detect the door being opened. In addition, ultrasonic movement detectors were to be installed in every office approx. 35 units in all.

It took over nine months to install the system even with on occasions as many as twelve engineers on site. During this period, several memorable events occurred; -

The construction of the tube and batten frames was one area, we estimated it took a man a day to build and fit just one, and there were dozens of windows down both sides of the mill top floor.

To alleviate the boredom, we held tube cutting championships, fastest to cut all the tubes needed for a frame won, of course this descended into farce, when people tried to cut whole bundles of tubes with a hacksaw at once, a lot of tubes were not the correct length after so some degree of waste was introduced.

However a few of the waste tubes found a new life, as pea shooters, using putty or small round plastic cable connectors, we chased each other around the mostly empty building until one engineer ran into another who stopped suddenly, the result was the engineer lost a 12mm diameter circle out of his top and bottom lips, a war wound which he had to bear for ever afterwards much to the amusement of all involved.

On the lower floor of the building vans and lorries were loaded with racks of clothes, the clothes were hung from ‘jets’ which were long enough to hold approximately 50 hangers with clothes and hung from a tubular rail system installed throughout the loading area, by lifting a section and dropping it onto another rail, similar to changing points on a railway, the clothes could be loaded quickly onto matching rails inside the vehicles.

Martin started first, taking hold of a spare jet, then running and hanging from it by raising his legs, he could speed along the rail network at some tilt, the loading area that day had a single row of clothes awaiting the vehicle and the whole of the rest of the system was empty, several of us started to

hold races on parallel tracks and a lot of laughing, pushing and shoving ensued.

One of the engineers then realised he could move the points after someone had started their run, causing sudden diversions onto other tracks and around corners.

Unknown to us because our view of the entranceway was obscured by waiting jets of clothes, security had walked into the loading area, I had just started to run and hang when an engineer changed the points ahead, I flew around the corner and knocked one of the security guards off his feet. They were not impressed.

One of the tasks included cutting hardboard sheets to size to cover wiring stapled to the surface of a door. I had been shown a quick technique for this and decided to demonstrate this to the watching engineers, I laid one sheet on top of another at

the cut line location, kneeled upon the sheet and started to run a Stanley knife down the sheet using the top piece as the guide, the first sheet was scored neatly, and with a little pressure broke neatly along the line.

Everyone was most impressed, however for the second cut the knife dug in to the side of the top sheet and ran up and over the edge, cutting my thumb of my left hand quite badly, after a round of applause, two of the engineers grabbed a stretcher from its box nearby, laid me on it and walked me round to the onsite surgery, we all looked pretty daft arriving with a stretcher for a cut thumb, but the nurse saw the funny side as she stitched up the cut.

One of the engineers, once he realised that there was a surgery and dentist on site, booked an appointment with the dentist and had several fillings completed for free. Just another perk, he claimed.

In the intruder alarm industry, we had been taught not to discuss security with anyone asking questions on site, this was a throwback from the days of Burgot, when systems were top secret and intruders thought it was bad luck when the police caught them in the act.

However, while working in the offices, Peter fielded a question from one of the ladies in the office, “what exactly are you doing”, to which he glibly replied, were installing CCTV cameras so that management can keep an eye on everyone.

Half an hour later, we went for lunch and upon our return there were hundreds of people standing in the street outside the building, we joined in at the back presuming a bomb scare or similar had caused an evacuation. The lady Peter joked with earlier then pointed him out and said “it was him who said it”, it transpired that Peter’s glib comment had caused a full walk out backed by the union representative and was on the verge of a full strike.

Whilst working at the site, I was asked to park my motorbike in the car park which formed the ground floor of a 1950’s building opposite the mill, there were parking bays marked out for motorcycles so all was well, however I returned one day to find that a clumsily parked scooter had fallen over onto my bike and had damaged the seat, I lifted the scooter as best I could and found it did not have a stand, so I laid it on the floor.

I then had a silly moment and thought I would teach the owner a lesson, I removed both side panels from the scooter and standing on the seat of my bike, I placed

them on top of a series of insulated overhead pipes, I left with a smug grin and every day when I arrived, I looked to see and they were still there.

On another occasion, there was a push to complete and a dozen engineers were on site, Our favourite supervisor Gordon decided he needed to hand out a warning to one of the other apprentices, his favourite part of his job, so he drove to site to conduct this.

On arrival no one could find the apprentice, a search of the building located him in the locked storeroom we were using for our tools and equipment, trussed up like a chicken, Gordon did not free him, just handed him the envelope with the written warning inside and left.

Installing the control equipment was daunting, with over a hundred 50 core cables from the roof alone to be connected to relay panel expanders with 16 relays per panel, each panel was a steel box approximately 14 inches by 18 inches by 4 inches deep, and there were 14 of these along with the control panel, the signalling panel and the ultrasonic detectors all on one wall in a side room.

I was given the task and it took me a full week to install all the control panels, I asked the electrical contractor if I could use some of the 4 X 4 galvanised steel trunking he had on site and set about creating a grid of trunking to surround every panel, with brass bushes drilled through from the trunking for myriad cable access.

When completed, supervisors were tasked with connecting and commissioning the whole system, this took weeks but was eventually signed off.

Meanwhile our favourite supervisor Gordon called me into his office for a warning, it would seem the electrical contractor had invoiced Chubb for the trunking I had asked for and believed had been freely given. As I was the apprentice on site, this would be 100% my fault, so just another written warning then.

The whole high security system installed was a bit of a joke, the system reported to a small HO (home office) indicator panel in the tiny ground floor corner security office, the security office door was open most of the time and overnight was manned by a single past retirement age guard.

Disabling the guard, or even the system would have taken seconds even during the day, anyone could have walked into the office from the street and as it was not occupied some of the time, just taking the light bulb out of the panel would have effectively disabled the whole system.

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Just three weeks after completion, Chubb received a call from Burton's, they had decided to knock down the office in which the control equipment had been located and required the whole control system re locating, one of the supervisors simply retorted, I will make sure I am off sick when the order for that comes in.

Many years later my friend and neighbour, who was the IT director for Arcadia, invited me to his office where the entire global operation was controlled, this was in a modern building on site at the old Montague Burton's mill in Leeds.

I had purchased a new PC processor and he offered to help me to get the speed settings on the board correct whilst showing me around the facility.

I parked in the same car park for the visit, afterwards I had a look, and sure enough the scooter panels were still there.



Gordon, our favourite supervisor

One of the installation team supervisors, Gordon, had been inherited by Chubb when they bought Rely-A-Bell and Burgot to form the company Chubb Alarms.

Gordon was not a liked person, no one knew him socially, he never went for a drink with anyone from work, he managed to always be absent if anyone ever needed help, yet he would make a special effort and go out of his way should a warning or disciplinary action be deemed necessary.

Gordon, it could be said, was always just a step away from being dismissed, however on dozens of occasions, just when the management believed they had him cornered and this time they would be rid of him, he would wriggle out of the issue, he was

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the ultimate Teflon employee, disliked by all yet still in post after 25+ years, nothing could be made to stick to him.

We have already seen the story of an apprentice, tied up in the equipment store on site at Burton's being given a written warning by Gordon, once again this act had simply added to the hatred we all felt for him.

As part of an apprentices training, it was required that approximately 3 days a month were spent in the stores assisting with building the orders and packing the van for delivery to site.

Of course, we were always asked to make tea several times a day, and because Gordon lived in his office, it was incumbent that I made him a cup as well. I used to go out of my way to visit joke shops, I always purchased laxative tea bags especially for those days when I made Gordon tea.

He did once comment that he liked the way I made tea as it tasted different to when anyone (not himself as he never made tea in case he had to make it for others as well) else made it. I just chuckled as I knew why.

On one occasion, myself, Martin, and Clancy worked for several weeks including weekends to install the alarm systems for the Grattan catalogue storage and distribution centres at three locations in Bradford. These sites were massive and took a lot of hard work to install including working weekends.

On one Sunday, Martin, myself and Clancy were sat on the grass outside on a glorious day having a lunch break whilst eating our sandwiches and drinking a bottle of beer, we were only there for half an hour, and had not noticed Gordon drive past in his company car.

When we received our pay packet the following Thursday, all hours at double time on Sunday had been deducted from our pay. Clancy and Martin immediately requested a meeting with Gordon, who simply advised them they were lucky to still be in their jobs after he had witnessed them sunning themselves, drinking beer then claiming double time, no consideration for the fact we were entitled to a lunch break was given.

Once again Gordon had endeared himself to the engineers he supervised, but it did not end there, when all three sites were complete, the supervisors all turned up with some beer to celebrate the completion of a long and arduous project, it was six

o'clock in the evening when they arrived but we did not mind staying back in our own time to accept the gratitude for a job well done.

Gordon did not stop for beer. He disappeared for 20 minutes, then came back and asked me to look at something with him, we went together to a section of a dozen small van loading bay shutter doors, these were approximately seven feet tall and all twelve had been fitted with heavy duty contacts.

Gordon asked if I had worked on any of these doors and I replied yes I had completed four of the twelve, Gordon had a page out of the Chubb installation handbook which he showed me, it detailed how the conduit should be installed on roller shutter doors and the drawing in the book showed three saddles on the conduit, he pointed out that the installation I had worked on only had two saddles and was not therefore up to company standards.

Gordon gave me a written warning he had brought with him for failure to install to standards. He did not mention this to the other engineers who had installed the other eight in an identical fashion, he cut me no slack for being an apprentice copying the work of my peers, he ruined the celebration for me that evening.

The following week, I was working with Clancy again and he asked me why I had left the celebration without speaking to anyone, when he discovered Gordon's actions, he was visibly enraged, he opened his own copy of the Chubb installation manual and pointed to the drawing that Gordon had used showing three saddles on the conduit, he said, typically these doors are ten to fifteen feet tall and will require three or even more saddles, however the doors in question were only seven feet tall so in his opinion only required two.

Later that week Clancy and Martin went to see Gordon, but he could not be persuaded either to cancel my warning or to issue warnings to them for the same issue, maybe he knew that the union would be involved immediately if he did that.

Chubb Alarms, as well as sending apprentices to college to study City & Guilds on day release, also had internal examinations for grade 4, grade 3, grade 2 and grade 1 engineers. Once passed an engineer's pay would increase accordingly. As I spent some time in the stores and training room (I was expected to attend every training session at any engineering level) I sat the grade 4 exam attaining 98% and the grade 3 exam attaining 95% but was classed as an apprentice so no salary increase was applied.

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Eventually I was forced to write to Gordon to advise him that I had passed City & Guilds plus the grade 4 and grade 3 internal exams and that my 21st birthday was in six weeks.

He reluctantly put me onto grade 4 pay but not until I was 21, and I received written notice that my apprenticeship would end, and that I would move to grade 4 pay, on 01 April at 09:00 just another rub from Gordon, April fool's day.

Ironic really as I had been sent to work with two new engineers for approximately sixteen months previously to train them how to install systems, one of which had been a bus driver prior to starting work with the company.

Around this time, Gordon (and another supervisor at a different branch) was promoted, he would now be a senior supervisor over the installation supervisor and the service supervisor, and a new supervisor was appointed to fill his old post.

As befitting a senior position Gordon would get a new car, this duly arrived two weeks later and was a MK3 1.3L Cortina in beige with brown interior. Having pulled it into the stores, Gordon spent the whole day fawning over his new car when he discovered a used condom tucked down the

back seat. Gordon being Gordon could not accept this, so his written complaint resulted in the delivery driver losing his job. I related the story to Clancy on our next installation together, he thought that at least someone had made good use of the car, unlike Gordon.

Just four months later, I arrived at the stores and Gordon's car was being taken away on a trailer, Gordon was not about so I asked the obvious questions. It turns out that senior management had created the supervising supervisor role deliberately to get rid of Gordon (and another I never met from another region), they had promoted him into a role they could make redundant after six months.

In the industry, you could not work your notice, so Gordon had left the same day and his car collected a few days later. I was to help Clancy that day and could hardly wait to tell him this news. We went to the pub and got quite drunk; it was one of the best days of our lives.

The story of Gordon did not quite end there, some six years later I started my own company with Peter, as we were both ex Chubb engineers, we knew each other well and it seemed like a logical step.

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Peter and I had bumped into Gordon at the trade counter of the local supplier in Leeds several times. On one such occasion, I was working away from home on a major project and Peter needed engineers to help install the work he was selling. He asked Gordon if he would like some subcontract work, and Gordon accepted.

Peter had thought that I could have a last laugh and make Gordon's life difficult when I returned. At the time Gordon did not know I was part of the company.

However, Peter had cause to help Gordon complete an installation, he found that Gordon's work was so shoddy that he had to fire him on the spot, he had installed the external sounder with a single six inch nail, cracking the polycarbonate case, damaging the render on the building and not even getting the unit straight on the wall. Ironic for someone who could quote the Chubb installation manual word for word and expect every engineer to stick to the letter.

See also, Christmas party pooper.



Creamery emergency

I had been working with Clancy in Grassington, Yorkshire, when a phone call came in, it was mid-afternoon, and my supervisor wanted a word with me. It would seem that an emergency repair to an alarm in Kettlewell had not been completed as the service engineer's car had broken down.

It was not by any means normal for an apprentice to be sent to an emergency repair, however all other engineers were busy, Clancy did not have a car so was on public transport, and as I had a motorcycle I was the only person within thirty miles who had transport and could attend.

Suddenly the gloves were off, I could claim overtime and car mileage if I was prepared to attend the emergency, I agreed without hesitation.

Leaving Clancy, I drove to the premises in Kettlewell, the property was a small creamery attached to a farm, access was via a track for the final two miles and it was winter, snowing and getting dark.

When I arrived, I knocked on the door of the farmhouse and after an age, a middle aged, ruddy faced farmers wife opened the door, she had old wellies on her feet which had been cut down making them shorter, wrinkly tights which reminded me of Norah Batty in the TV series Last of the summer wine, next was the old apron, with years of fingerprints wiped down the right hand side and topped off with an old cardigan which was full of holes, some darned, some not.

She took one look at me and spoke, “Ai lad, tha’l be ere fur t fix t larm then”, I nodded, and she went back inside for a coat and hat. I followed her around from the four hundred year old farm house, passed several similar aged farm buildings of various sizes and uses, until we turned a corner, the creamery building could not have been a more stark contrast to the rest of the farm, brand new and standing detached on a new concrete slab, the building was state of the art in its day.

The farmer’s wife unlocked and opened the door, putting on the lights she ushered me inside out of the wind and the snow, tis parky oot there, she muttered. Stepping inside I was struck by the machinery and the walls, there were huge glistening stainless steel vats and storage cylinders for cheese making, row upon row of stainless steel shelves with large cheese wheels obviously aging and pipes connecting everything. The interior was clad entirely in shiny plastic food grade cladding.

The building made the farmer’s wife look completely out of place, however she started to take white wellingtons, overalls, gloves and hairnets from shelving in the entrance, we ave t put this clobber on in ere, she said, so I copied her in getting dressed for work in a food grade room. She was unrecognisable in the whites, with only here ruddy face visible.

It transcribed that alterations to the shelving meant that part of the alarm had been disconnected, a door contact on one of the loading bay doors which had been increased in size during the alterations requiring just a few minutes work to re fit. She left me to the work and said, put t clobber int black lorndry bin when yu’s done lad, I’ll see yu back at t farmhouse, and left.

I completed the work, taking my time as I was on overtime rates now, and when done I, returned to the farmhouse, standing in the cobbled yard waiting for the farmer’s wife to answer the door whilst snow was falling was a scene almost from a Christmas Carol, The large door knocker I had used to attract attention could have been Marley.

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The door opened, and once again the ruddy faced farmer's wife character appeared, recognisable again without the whites, she said, come in lad what does that need, I replied that I needed a signature for the work and followed her into the kitchen.

The scene reminded me of childhood holidays staying in a chapel in Grassington, immediately the smell of cooking hit and overwhelmed the senses, roast beef I thought. A wood fired Aga was centre stage, a stone sink in the window, a huge pine table which looked like it had been a feature of the kitchen for over a hundred years stood in the middle and church pews were either side.

She said, ang on a minit love, I gotta just do this tha knows. And with that she opened the oven and pulled out a roast beef joint, putting it on the table she put trays of Yorkshire puddings into the oven and covered the joint to stand.

I had paperwork, but did not have a pen, so she went in search of one. Fully ten minutes later she returned and had only found a pencil, this I ave t do, she said, signing the document.

She must have noticed the way I looked at the beef when it came out of the oven and she said, yu fancy a bit eh lad? What could I say, nodding my head I was suddenly transported back in time to Reg Umpleby's farm.

She picked up a knife and a loaf of freshly baked bread, cutting two thick uneven slices from the loaf, she then uncovered the beef, the look and smell were now making my mouth water, cutting a generous slice, she placed it in between the bread and handed it to me. It was absolutely delicious.

The long drive home in the snow and dark seemed to take no time at all, with the taste of the beef still with me when I arrived.

The following day however, my favourite supervisor Gordon wanted a word. He withdrew the offer made to pay overtime and car mileage on the spot, claiming that the signature on the worksheet was timed at five o'clock so no overtime had been worked.

Clancy later, when I told him the story, advised that so long as you always expect him to let you down, you will never be disappointed.



The Gaiety

The Gaiety in Leeds was a large public house with live music, dance hall and during the lunch hour, strippers performing in the round, it opened in 1972 it became notorious for prostitution, drugs and all manner of seedy activity, and gained the accolade of being the most notorious pub in the country, The Yorkshire ripper picked up two of his victims at the pub which was eventually demolished to reduce crime and prostitution in the area in the 1990's, its reputation was really that bad.

The pub's location on the junction of Gathome Terrace and Roundhay Road was in the red lights district, directly opposite the Rendezvous Café, a favourite haunt for prostitutes plying their trade in the area.

Chubb had the contract for the intruder alarm, which was 'serviced' very regularly, especially at lunchtime, most systems at this time which utilised dry cell batteries, were serviced four times per annum, however the Gaiety seemed to receive a lot more visits than other similar contracts.

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On one occasion, I was out on the road with a service engineer John for the day, at lunchtime he drove to and parked at the back of the Gaiety, he used his security pass for access to the strip show.

When we arrived, there were already two more service engineers' cars in the car park, Mike, and Andy, we all met at the bar. I was handed a pint, and the four of us stood in the front row of the performance area waiting for the show to begin.

Shortly the show started, a young stripper I estimated to be 18 – 19 years of age performed first, the striptease performances were in the round, so with just a small area kept clear for the performers to enter and exit the stage, the audience surrounded the performance area.

The young stripper performed to rapturous applause, she was then followed by her mother, approximately 38 years of age and a lot raunchier in her performance.

At one point she took a half-consumed pint off Andy, who we had the impression she knew, probably due to the amount of times he had 'serviced' the alarm that year.

Holding the glass against her breast, she performed a few manoeuvres and gyrations dowsing her breast in his beer, she then gave Andy the glass back.

A few minutes later she (and the audience) saw Andy take a drink from the glass. The audience all cheered, so she took it from him again, this time she managed to dowse her pussy in the glass by holding it in the required position and performing a slow back flip, then returned the pint to its owner.

Once again, Andy drank from the glass downing the contents in one, the stripper laughed, the audience went wild, and many of the front row offered her their glasses, but the moment was over and she declined, having completed her performance.



Irish bank raid

One Monday morning whilst I was working in the stores, a telephone call came in for the supervisors, Peter and Gordon were to drop everything, go to the airport and fly to Ireland that day.

There had been a bank robbery over the weekend, the bank had been seriously attacked and a large sum of money removed from the vault. However, the alarm system had not activated so the robbery was not discovered until the bank opened on Monday morning.

It was standard company practice that alarm failures were investigated by supervisors from another region, this helped protect the company and its clients from any hint of internal cover up etc.

When they arrived at the bank, it was one hell of a mess, a thermic lance had been used to cut a way in to the vault and explosives to open the hole, a considerable amount of cash was missing and the Garda were present in some considerable numbers.

Upon opening the control panel, it was immediately apparent why the alarm had not activated, every circuit on the system had been disabled with wire links across the terminals inside the panel.

A review of the service history revealed that a service engineer had visited the premises the week before the raid to service the system, he had not turned in to work that Monday morning.

The Garda called at his house and arrested him, he gave up his colleagues and the robbery team were all arrested with 48 hours.

It struck me that, the vault could not have contained more than its rated cash storage limit and likely contained much less over a weekend as the peak at the time would be Thursday when firms collected cash for payrolls, the limit for this size vault was much the same as most regional banks at the time £40,000.00.

Assuming 50% was left in the vault on Friday This sum shared five ways would be £4,000.00 each. To sacrifice your career and spend several years in prison for at the very most had the vault been at maximum capacity £8,000 was just out of the question in my opinion.

At about the same time, a considerably more successful robbery had taken place at a bank in the centre of Leeds, a bullion van was parked outside the entrance on Park Row, cash boxes were being moved from the bank into the security van when a person ran at the guard, knocked him off his feet and disappeared into the crown with one of the boxes.

Later it was reported that there was £12,000 in the box, which was never recovered, perhaps because the description of the thief was given as a stockily built man aged 25 – 45 wearing blue jeans and a brown cagoule.

To put this in context, a year later I took out a mortgage for £11,400 to buy a house, at 15.75% over 25 years.



Robin Mills canteen

Robert Glew wool, based in Robin Mills, Idle, Bradford was one of Chubb's customers. I worked at the mills altering and extending the alarm system several times.

The mill was highly visible from the main Leeds Road through Idle, the original 1860's mill was built entirely out of York stone the buildings comprised a single-story northern light roofed factory area the full width of the site, a four storey traditional mill building with an unusual featureless square tower at least another

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two stories high with a pyramid shaped roof was set at ninety degrees to the first building. Another two-storey northern light building was adjacent to the four-storey building and connected with a bridge at first storey level.

A 1930's brick-built office building had been added in front of the single storey building which partially hid the stone mill when viewed from the road, in addition, another brick built warehouse dating from the 1960's had been built at ninety degrees to the other two stone buildings, this along with the office building opposite formed a large rectangular car park and loading bay area surrounded by the five principle buildings.

Behind the stone mill buildings, a large modern building had been added, this building's footprint was equal to all the other buildings on the site doubling the size of the premises.

On one occasion, the office building and the warehouse building required a cable to be installed to link them, this meant that James and I had to use ladders to laboriously clip a cable on the outside of the buildings between the two, it took three days to complete.

The most surprising feature of the mill, in my opinion, was the staff canteen, dating from the 1960's era it was bright an airy and set up for self-service, there was a menu change depending upon the time of day, in a morning breakfast was the main offering, with three different types of sausage, scrambled, fried, boiled or poached eggs, smoked and unsmoked bacon and all the trimmings such as mushrooms, beans, black pudding, toast, tomatoes, fruit juice and hot drinks.

Later came lunch, typically meat pie, battered fish, lasagne and stew would be a typical choice with vegetables, fresh fruit, fresh squeezed juices, tea, and coffee and of course a choice of several puddings, spotted dick, jam roly poly, treacle sponge, bread and butter etc. all with cream, custard or ice cream.

Later still, and evening menu for those working shifts was to be had, this was just as good a selection but now included cakes, chocolate, walnut, lemon drizzle, Victoria sponge etc.

The canteen was heavily subsidised, and prices were around thirty percent of those charged in typical working class café's so less than a pound for breakfast all you can eat, about the same for an evening meal including cakes, and one pound fifty for lunch with pudding, hot drinks were free as often as required, the quality for the food was such that eating there was akin to eating at a good restaurant in the day.

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Needless to say, work on the mill would always run over time by at least a day or so, we tended to arrive an hour early, have breakfast and then later lunch and even stay after time for tea. Trying to put in a full day's work when fed well was always a bit of a challenge, I recall on one occasion, after gorging on all you can eat breakfast, then partaking in lunch, the engineer and I had an hours snooze in his car to recover.

Incredibly, I would estimate that seventy percent of the mill workers chose to bring a packed lunch and eat sandwiches and drink from flasks whilst sitting at their machines, I could not understand this when they had access to what I still consider to this day, the best works canteen in the north of England.

One engineer Peter only lived half a mile up the road from the mill, yet he would decline home meals when working on the alarm and pushed it a bit calling in for an early breakfast occasionally before work, even when there was no work required on the alarm in the premises.

Chapter 6

The rude stories



York Minster

One day, while working at a site, I received an unexpected phone call. I was instructed to leave the engineer I was assisting and travel to York Minster to assist another engineer working there. It was a surprise, but I was eager to take on the new task.

Upon my arrival, I was fortunate enough to secure a parking spot for my motorcycle in a small courtyard next to the minster. I even managed to obtain permission to park there for as long as I needed. However, when the other engineer met me on site, he couldn't believe it. He had been forced to park his car two miles away and pay exorbitant fees for parking each day.

Our work at York Minster primarily focused on the vaults and crypt area. We had been assigned to take over and complete the installation, as it had already been started by others. Prior to beginning our work, the engineer received an odd, yet understandable instruction from the supervisor: we were not to swear while working in the minster.

Around three hours into the job, we suddenly found ourselves in complete darkness. Luckily, the engineer had a cigarette lighter on him, which provided a dim light. Using it as a guide, he made his way to the staircase and ascended to the entrance, where he discovered that the master light switch had been turned off. With a flick of the switch, we regained illumination and resumed our work. However, just 20 minutes later, the lights abruptly went out once again.

This time, the engineer decided to investigate further and spoke to some of the Minster staff. To our surprise, they casually informed us that if they found any lights left on, they were instructed to turn them off as they passed by. It seemed our efforts were being sabotaged unintentionally.

Fed up with the repeated incidents, the engineer took matters into his own hands. He disabled the master switch by connecting the wires together, ensuring that we wouldn't encounter any more issues. With the lights now under our control, we completed the installation as planned before restoring the switch function to normal.

A few weeks later, I found myself assisting Martin on another installation when York Minster became the topic of conversation. As it turned out, Martin and another engineer had initially begun the work at the minster. Neither of them smoked, so when the lights unexpectedly went out, Martin had struggled in the darkness, stumbling around for what felt like an eternity until he finally reached the top of the stairs and restored the lights.

On the fourth occurrence of sudden darkness at the start of the second day on site, Martin had finally reached his breaking point. Frustrated, he shouted, "Oi, turn those fucking lights back on!" It didn't take long for a supervisor to arrive, instructing Martin and Grant to leave the installation immediately.

Later, we discovered that the individual responsible for investigating the vaults and inadvertently switching off the lights on that particular occasion was none other than the Archbishop of York himself. It was a surprising revelation, adding an unexpected twist to our experiences at York Minster.



Wakefield Prison

Working on the exterior wall alarm system at Wakefield Prison was a daunting task, to say the least. Chubb had been contracted to install large steel bracket plates along the secure side of the outer stone wall at regular intervals. These brackets, with their angled arms, formed a perimeter around the entire prison. The purpose was to attach strain wires to these brackets, creating a system that would detect any attempt to climb over the wall.

The installation of these brackets had been aided by the inmates, carefully selected for their reliability. However, it was important to note that even among the inmates helping with the installation, there were murderers and other serious offenders. The tensioned copper wires, strategically placed and connected to pot insulators on the bracket arms, encircled the prison. Each wire had a weak point in the centre designed to break if a force of thirty pounds was applied.

Climbing over the wall without breaking these wires was believed to be impossible. The wall was divided into approximately ninety circuits, each monitored and displayed on a large free-standing panel in the prison's CCTV control room. This control room housed racks of monitors, with operators assigned to watch the cameras outside the wall, inside the wall, and at strategic locations. A supervisor oversaw the operation, equipped with reel-to-reel videotape recording capabilities.

The work in the control room could be monotonous, so the CCTV operators had their own gymnasium equipment to keep them entertained while still monitoring the screens. They had a rowing machine, spin bikes, and various weightlifting systems at their disposal. Like any group of people, they created their own point-

scoring system for incidents captured on CCTV. They assigned points for different events, such as ten points for a drunk person urinating on the wall or a prisoner being restrained, twenty points for a person wearing a very short skirt (whether it was a member of the public or a visitor), thirty points for dogs mating, and fifty points for a couple engaging in intimate activities in a parked car. The scores were recorded and tallied by month, with the winner receiving a free beer.



A reel to reel video recorder similar to that used

During one of my visits, I noticed that the outside wall team had scored over six hundred points that month. When I inquired, I discovered that they had been awarded five hundred points for capturing an incident on the new pelican crossing near the prison. A car had run over an elderly lady, and despite the speed of the incident, they managed to record it. Fortunately, the old lady was shaken but not injured, and the points were awarded for the successful capture using the technology of the time.

The strain wires, with their gel-filled strain joints, were prone to drying out over time due to temperature fluctuations. This led to wire breakage or increased

resistance, triggering alerts that were immediately investigated using the CCTV system. By 1977, the wall required maintenance three times a week just to keep the system functioning properly.

During one of my visits to the prison as a service engineer, I encountered a unique set of security protocols. First, we had to go through rigorous identification checks and submit to a thorough pat-down. Our tools were inspected, and we were assigned a prison officer who would accompany us throughout our visit. We proceeded to the control room to determine which sections of the wall were most in need of repair. Once identified, our guard escorted us to the stores, where we collected new wires, straining tools, and a set of ladders.

After radio communication and coordination with our guard, we were granted permission to put up the ladder and commence our work. Starting at one point, the engineer climbed the ladder and cut all twelve wires connected to the bracket. He then attached new wires, and we moved on to the next bracket to repeat the process. After about an hour, we had replaced all twelve wires for a stretch between three wall brackets. We then moved on to two more sections, following radio instructions from our guard, and replaced two visibly broken wires. As time constraints loomed, we had to halt our work and return the ladders and equipment to the stores.

Back in the control room, we checked our work and discovered that five of the warning lights indicating faulty wires had gone out. However, three lights remained lit. I was curious about how we could resolve these remaining issues since we were no longer allowed access to the wall area. To my surprise, the engineer opened the massive free-standing panel, revealing neatly loomed cables and connected pairs leading to terminals within the panel. Each terminal had a fuse, so the engineer removed both fuses for a pair showing a fault, effectively disconnecting the circuit loop from the panel. Using a meter, we confirmed that the circuit exhibited high resistance rather than being completely broken.

Now, for the part that should be disregarded by all safety-conscious individuals, what happened next went against modern working standards. The engineer picked up a two-core 0.75mm flex cable found inside the panel. It had bare wires on one end and a thirteen-amp square pin plug on the other. Surprisingly, there was a socket outlet inside the panel, presumably for plugging in a meter, inspection lamp, or even a soldering iron. The engineer plugged in the cable, ensuring that the bare ends were not touching anything. He switched on the socket, electrifying the cable. He then touched the cable across the terminals of the faulty wall circuit, causing a surge of 240 volts to pass through the wires and into the connected external wires surrounding that section of the wall. With each brief touch, the sparks grew

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stronger. The engineer repeated this process for all the circuits displaying high resistance. After unplugging and rolling up the cable, he returned it to the panel and replaced the fuses. The circuit indicators extinguished, indicating that the issues had been resolved for the day.

This technique, which the engineers referred to as "frying a few birds," temporarily welded the problematic connections in the dried-out strain gauges along that section of the wall. It was an unorthodox but effective solution, although only a temporary fix.

Throughout my visits to the prison, I encountered various stories worth mentioning that originated from the maintenance team. On one occasion, a twenty-foot stretch of the wall collapsed while an engineer was working on the ladder. It was later discovered that the wall's foundation had been eroded over time due to an ancient spring situated under one corner of the prison.

Another incident involved Peter, who was halfway up the ladder when a radio call blared from the guards' communication devices, urgently announcing a prisoner being escorted along the line just twenty-five meters from the ladder. The guards, accompanied by a dog handler and a German Shepherd, quickly directed Peter to stop where he was. The prisoner noticed Peter on the ladder and halted as well. The tension grew as the prisoner shouted, "Oi, you!" Both Peter and the guards became increasingly nervous. However, to their surprise, the prisoner called out, "Need a hand?" The guards swiftly ushered him away, rounding another corner out of sight.

In the late 1970s, Wakefield Prison embarked on a major project to completely replace the exterior wall while still operating as usual. This was no small feat. The inner wire fence was reinforced with a wider temporary section, and an additional temporary wall was constructed outside the prison, wider than the section to be replaced. Chubb had the responsibility of disconnecting the wires within the section to be demolished, and upon completion, a new section would be erected.

This process continued until the entire wall around the prison had been replaced. I remember one particular incident when I climbed the ladder to cut away the wires in a specific section. However, after lunch, I realized that I had left my wire cutters on top of the old wall. When I returned to the control room, I could see my cutters on one of the CCTV screens. The guards scolded me for misplacing them within the prison. Unfortunately, those cutters were never seen again as the wall was demolished that very afternoon.

The Home Office took great pride in the work done at Wakefield. The new wall was considered state-of-the-art, featuring a fiberglass top section that was rounded on the outside but sloped downward on the inside, making it seemingly impossible to scale from within the prison. On the day of the wall's unveiling, a significant press presence was accompanied by the local mayor and council members. The Home Office had organized a demonstration to showcase the wall's strength. Two SAS soldiers were equipped with basic items that prisoners could access, including a dozen bed sheets.

The soldiers were challenged to climb over the wall against the clock. Within seconds, they tied the bed sheets together, soaked them in water, and threw them over the wall, creating a wet "rope" of sheets. The weight of the water and the friction against the fiberglass top allowed them to scale the wall and descend to the other side in just over half a minute. It was an embarrassing outcome for a wall that had been claimed to be impregnable.



Have you seen it yet?

I was working with Grant one day and during lunch he related an experience he had with a customer a few days before.

It would seem he was completing some additional works for a rich bored housewife in North Leeds, the work went well and lots of cups of tea were offered. He related that the housewife wore here nighty and thin housecoat all day.

Grant tested the personal attack button in the master bedroom and found that it had a fault, the buttons were a simple design, the button itself had a shaft on the back with a milled ring at one point on its length, a hole on the end permitted a spring to be fitted to retain the button in the non-alarm state until pressed, and then return it once reset, a similar mechanism to a toy dart gun, with the dart being the button and the trigger being the microswitch lever.

The button had a microswitch with a lever arm mounted so as that with the button out in its non-alarm position, the lever arm was in the pressed down position, pressing the button until the milled ring aligned with the microswitch lever allowed the lever to spring into an alarm condition position, the lever arm then held the button in the pressed position until a small key was inserted, the key depressed the microswitch lever to allow the button to spring back out into the non-alarm position once more.

This design had a flaw, the microswitch lever arm may not move far enough for the microswitch to activate, this was the situation with the button on this occasion. Tim took the button to pieces to apply a bit of a bend to the lever arm, a standard fix, when the little spring escaped and shot across the room.

The room had deep pile carpets so Grant kneeled and started to run his fingers through the wool to find the spring when the lady of the house walked in, “what are you doing” she asked, Grant (who has a stutter when under stress) replied, I, I, I’m looking f,f,for a l,little s,s,s,s spring he replied. At that the customer kneeled and copied Grant sweeping her fingers through the carpet pile in curves and moving forward slowly.

After a couple of minutes, Grant looked up and his nose was just an inch or so from the ladies bottom, at that moment she spoke “have you seen it yet” she asked, Grant replied enthusiastically al, al, al, almost, at which she looked round and could see how close he was to her behind, she rolled her eyes, tutted loudly and continued the search.



Just getting my monies worth

One evening I was setting out with Clancy for a beer in the Crown in Bradford, when we arrived Clancy had bumped into an old friend outside the pub where the two were regulars.

By all accounts the pub was not very busy early on weekdays, the landlord and landlady, a husband and wife team had decided to try to improve sales.

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As we walked into the bar, it was immediately apparent that the landlady was topless behind the bar waiting for customers, I was unaware that this was not normal assuming Clancy had brought me to the Crown to see if I would be embarrassed.

Neither Clancy nor his friend said anything about the new sales drive which later transpired was in its first day of operation. Clearly word had not got out yet as we were the only three people in the pub.

Clancy's friend bought the first round, the beers were pulled and standing on the bar, Clancy and I helped ourselves to one each, but something was troubling Clancy's friend, he was looking intently at his change, turning the coins over in his palm with his thumb.

He came to the conclusion that he had been overcharged by 2p per pint. Looking up at the landlady he said "here love, what's all this, beer's gone up by 2p a pint", the landlady held her hands either side of her breasts pushing them closer together and replied "what do you think all this is for".

Without a moment's hesitation Clancy's friend reached over the bar and grabbed hold of both her breasts, the landlady let out a yell and seconds later the landlord dashed into the bar to see his wife with Clancy's mate's hands cupping her.

The landlord picked up a bat and shouted "Oi Gerroff her".

Clancy's friend, cool as a cucumber simply replied, "it's alright, I'm just getting my money's worth".

As far as I am aware, the sales did increase during the weekdays, so you could say that the sales drive had been successful, history does not record how many times the landlord had to pick up the bat for others who wanted their 'money's worth'.



Secret codes

When working on customers' existing systems, either to service them or to complete alterations, you would often see markings inside the control panel.

Chubb utilised keys to lock the control panels so that they could not be opened by a customer making the marks only visible to Chubb engineers.

A tick would denote that this customer often tipped the engineers, A letter U denoted that cups of tea were frequently offered and a letter O that biscuits, cake or even sandwiches were often offered. Seeing these symbols in the panel would greatly influence the engineer's attitude towards the customer, as they gave a heads up of what could be expected.

However, some customers received other symbols, the letter X meant you should watch your step as this customer was not above calling your supervisor if you said or did anything they deemed in their opinion was less than the fawning service from slaves that they thought they were paying for.

Should a customer receive a second X, you could presume that you will be criticised, often in writing, if you do not go above and beyond and treat them like a lord and lady.

On one occasion I recall seeing a panel with three X markings, fortunately the customer was out for the day and I dealt with the housekeeper. However, as expected, my supervisor received a call to go back to the premises, it seems the customer believed I had caused a cigarette burn on his expensive leather sofa.

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This was a common type of complaint and often resulted in a showdown between the supervisor and the customer which in many cases resulted in new furniture being purchased following an insurance claim. On this occasion however, the customer had read things incorrectly, I did not smoke due to a medical condition and my supervisor was able to prove this and get the customer to withdraw the complaint.

It later transpired that this same customer had reported a service engineer for scratching his car with the ladders, all the way down one side looking like a keying, not a bump from ladders, however the claim had gone in favour of the customer, earning the service engineer a written warning.

The three X in his panel I was reliably informed went up to four following the next service visit and engineers seeing this, simply refused to do any work on the premises without either the customer, his wife or housekeeper watching.



Bats in the attic

One day I arrived at work and was told to leave my motorbike in the stores and travel with Martin out to Bedale in North Yorkshire, an emergency alteration of an alarm had come in and we were to complete the work in a day.

Arriving in Bedale, we drove down the main high street which is lined with shops on both sides with parking out front, it was a typical Yorkshire market town complete with pubs, café's, and a nice church.

The job was at a farmhouse on the outskirts of the town, when we arrived there were several vans in the driveway, one was a builder, another was from the council and another was from a local bat protection agency which was a volunteer organisation studying bat populations.

The builder had disturbed a colony of Pipistrelle bats that the property owner was previously unaware existed. A new extension had enclosed the side of the house, blocking access for the bats to the main house roof space where they were living as a small colony.

The owner of the house took this seriously and had asked us to attend to reroute all the alarm cables which had previously run through the loft, and the electrician was already working to achieve the same with the mains cables. Fortunately, the bats had left the roost and then been shut out by the building alteration, so we would not disturb them whilst making the alterations required.

The electrical contractors had installed double walled trunking behind the visible beams in the bedrooms to conceal the cables to be moved from the loft. It was clear

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that the owner, under guidance from the voluntary bat researchers, was intending to re-open the roost, but wanted everything removed from the loft space so that they would never need to disturb them again.

Over lunch, Martin and myself talked to the guy from the bat volunteer service, he had a box and microphone with headset and he showed us where the colony was, wearing the headset and pointing the microphone at a nearby tree, you could hear a whole series of chirps and clicks, this was the colony.

It required special equipment to lower the frequencies of their chatter to that audible by humans. He assured us that the bats would return to the loft space as soon as they could gain access again.

We completed the work and when Martin presented the paperwork for signing, he could not resist a bit of cheek, he said “you must have bats in the belfry to pay for these alterations”. The customer grinned and groaned as his comment sunk in.

The work had taken an hour or so longer than expected, hence when we returned to the stores it was all locked up with my motorbike inside, I had to catch the bus home and the bus to work the next morning.

I did raise this inconvenience with my favourite supervisor, Gordon, who had told me to leave the motorbike in the stores, but the issue fell on deaf ears, I wondered if I had borrowed the volunteer bat conservationists’ headset and microphone and given it to Gordon before the conversation if he may have understood me better.



Private Shop

One Monday morning I was given an address where I would be working for the next three days installing an alarm in a retail shop called private shop in Chapeltown, one of the poorest areas of Leeds.

I arrived at the shop address but it did not open until ten thirty so I was forced to wait outside, as I did so, there were thirty or so women also outside the shop protesting and holding women's lib type banners and placards.

I kept out of their way, but when the shop opened, I had to enter through the front door to complete my work, with much chanting and baying from the protesters. The second I walked in I started to understand why they were there. The shop was selling everything you could possibly need to spice up your love life, hence the name.

There were dildo's, vibrators, costumes, blow up adult dolls, make up, condoms, VHS films and much more. As a nineteen-year-old lad, I was unperturbed by all this, having been to Soho in London a year or so before and seen much worse.

I was convinced that my favourite supervisor, Gordon had selected me for this particular job as my first installation by myself as I was now considered a senior apprentice.

I ignored the stock and just got on with the job in hand. The girl working behind the till was chatty and polite and we shared a few tea breaks together over the next couple of days. She told me the new alarm was necessary as the store had been set on fire by the protesters nine months before and had only just reopened.

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There were not many customers as the protesters made the environment uncomfortable for customers approaching the store and the shop assistant was concerned for her job.

I was generally OK with the shop selling all the sex products, as I was not a customer it did not affect me whatsoever, although on reflection, I would not have wanted a branch to open in my area.

There was one aspect which I thought was a bit too much however, the shop had a small cinema comprising a TV set and VHS recorder behind curtains at the back, the shop assistant was also uncomfortable when older men paid to view a movie in private whilst she worked alone in the store.

In 1987 there were riots in Chapeltown road and the private shop was destroyed by fire.

Wikipedia notes that “The riots of 1987 began Sunday, 21 June, when a black teenager, 17-year-old Marcus Skellington, was arrested and beaten by police. It is estimated that 70 teenagers participated in smashing shop windows, looting, and attacking police officers 22 and 21 June. On 23 June, shops, cars, and windows were burned, bombed, and stoned, including a sex shop which was completely burnt down. The burning of the sex shop was particularly significant for two reasons. First, it was not widely supported or wanted by the local community and had been protested prior to the riots. Second, it was believed that the police carried out surveillance of the Hayfield Pub car park for marijuana dealing from above the sex shop, despite the sex shop operating illegally at times.”



Nude bronze

One day, I travelled to a large house in Harrogate to meet with Martin , he had a very weird sense of humour and it was always great to work with him, anything could (and usually did) happen.

When I arrived, Martin opened the door to me as the customer had gone out and left us to work. I was immediately struck by the hallway in the house, there was a life size bronze statue of a naked woman in the hallway installed to form the newel post of the staircase, she was posed in a standing position, legs and feet together and her arms raised above her head, her hands met and gripped a lamp which looked somewhat like an ice cream cone, with the ice cream being the crystal lamp.

The statue had been installed some years and had a patina typical of bronze statues, however there were two places where she was polished smooth, and the metal was exposed, her left breast and her backside. These parts of the statue fell in a position where you naturally put your hand to steady yourself, on the way up the stairs the left breast was at a point where it was unavoidable to hold as you passed, and again, her buttocks on the way down.

Mid-morning the gentleman of the house arrived back without warning and caught Martin with his hand on the statue going upstairs, up until that moment, Martin had been licking the statue and behaving badly in some misguided effort to entertain me.

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Things calmed down after his return, and Martin worked hard to complete the system alterations. He could not resist however, just touching the statue every time he passed, often making rude gestures if I happened to see him.

The rest of the day passed without incident and we completed the work, as we were obtaining signatures for the alterations, the lady of the house arrived. Immediately as she walked in it was obvious that the statue in the hall was of her approximately twenty years younger.

Her husband introduced his wife to myself and Martin who could not resist saying, “good afternoon, I almost didn’t recognise you with your clothes on”, he got away with this, as he had a way of being charming whilst being quite decidedly cheeky and his face said it all.



Safe through bedroom wall

On one occasion, supervisors had to investigate a burglary in a large house in Harrogate where the intruder alarm had not activated.

Later the story came out, the intruders had forced a ground floor sash window, reached inside, and slit the carpet until it could be folded back revealing the location of the pressure mat in the bay window area. Avoiding this mat, they continued to slit and fold back every carpet in the house to map out the pressure mats, even on the staircase.

As the intruders had not opened any doors connected to the alarm, and had circumvented the network of pressure pads, they had not activated the alarm.

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However, they did not stop at this, they ransacked the master bedroom and removed jewellery, watches, and other valuables. They cut the sofa and chairs into ribbons. They pulled out every drawer in the house emptying them onto the floor and taking anything of any value. They ransacked the kitchen and made food for themselves to eat and drink during the time they were in the property.

They removed all the paintings from the walls. They peed on the piles of clothes on the floor in the bedrooms. Broke vases and China items. Stole the television set and video recorder and then attacked the large five foot safe in the bedroom.

The safe was too heavy to move far, so they crowbarred the safe until the floor fixings gave way, then bashed it against the wall until the inner and outer brick walls gave way, after this the police believed that they pushed the safe through the hole in the wall and onto the back of a flatbed lorry they had deliberately parked below.

In a final act of wanton vandalism, they threw most of the clothes, paintings and bedding out of the hole in the wall left by the safe and set fire to it.

The only things they took away were the TV, video recorder, some cash and jewellery and the safe. Ironically the safe was almost empty and contained only business contracts and papers.

The most valuable item lost in the robbery was a painting worth at the time £30,000 which was the reason for having an intruder alarm, ironically this was burned in the fire they set in the driveway.

The supervisors could not help but feel sorry for the homeowners, one said, you just cannot imagine coming home to a mess like that.

Chapter 7

The risky section



Christmas party pooper

Once a year, Chubb hosted a Christmas party in the stores, all staff were invited, however not many of the engineers turned up as they did not care much for sharing with supervisors like Gordon and could not drink as they were all driving.

At one of the party's I decided to give it a try and see for myself what they were like. Sure enough, only two installers and three service engineers turned up and did not stay long.

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The food was average, sandwiches, sausage rolls, pork pie, trifle and cake, a typical buffet of the era. There was beer and wine available but of course everyone was driving.

One of the engineers at the do was Martin who kept us amused with his very dry sense of humour and kept the supervisors at bay with his ability to fart loudly on demand.

Gordon could not resist pulling me to one side, putting me on notice that he was looking into the circumstances of a service engineer's complaint about a joint box I had installed when relocating a control panel recently. Trust him to make a special effort to spoil Christmas.

After Martin left, it struck me that the obvious way of making sure I received my share of the drinks on offer, was to take two bottles of wine home with me, so I gathered up a bottle of red and a bottle of white, put them in the box on my bike and left.

In the new year, Gordon, our favourite supervisor, called me into his office. He handed me a written warning claiming that the connections in the 100 way joint box I had completed during relocation of a control panel in a famous high street jewellers shop, were not up to the standards expected of a Chubb engineer. It cut no mustard, the fact that I had been forced to work five hours unpaid overtime to complete the work, which was much more than a day's endeavour but because it was a jeweller, had to be completed in a day and working before I could leave.

The fact that I had been provided with 50 core cables to extend the connections to the new panel location, but not provided with a junction box was also ignored, as was the fact I had told my supervisor the following day that additional work to install a junction box would be needed, which was denied.

He then went on to give me a telling off about taking wine home from the party, the supervisors and managers traditionally took all leftovers, but this was not extended to engineers.

I did not attend any further Christmas party's for obvious reasons.



Mark, the storeman tote

As previously mentioned, apprentices were required to work in the stores two or three days a month to become familiar with the product range and part numbers.

The stores were run by a fifty-five-year-old storeman, Mark. He was a personable chap who was always ready to help where he could, he liked his tea strong with no milk or sugar, his jokes were as rude as they came and he had a wry sense of humour, one of the few members of staff who understood Martin's jokes.

Mark was very knowledgeable and reliable, he often corrected errors on the build list prior to the equipment being taken by van to site, and it was often obvious to the installers when he had been on holiday as they would receive only what was on the build list regardless. The errors in the main were not huge, just annoying i.e. ten sheets of hardboard and CC wire rolls included, but no staples or panel pins.

One such build error had resulted in the incident previously mentioned in which a delta bell had fallen off a building for want of correct fixings.

The worst week to be called into the stores was stocktaking time, go round and count everything, put a piece of paper in the storage bin or shelf with the quantity number written on it and continue until you could not count another item. I recall

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seeing handwritten notes for things like galvanized staples and panel pins simply saying “lots”, “loads” and “even more”.

Mark was in on the laxative tea bags joke I had running with my favourite supervisor Gordon and always asked me how many cups I had made him before the end of the day.

Mark had a hobby, he loved to gamble on horse racing and was something of an expert. He had been working his own system for several years and claimed he had enough tucked away to become a tote; this was his retirement dream which he came to realise sooner than expected.

Despite living out at Mytholmroyd Mark did not have a car and used public transport to and from work each day, if he ever needed a vehicle, he would typically borrow the delivery van over the weekend, as this was only in use weekdays.

However, on one occasion, Mark needed a vehicle and the van driver Roy was on holiday, one of the supervisors was delivering to sites and had already been given permission to keep the van over the weekend, so Mark asked around, and one of the service engineers said if he gave him a lift home, and collected him again on Monday, his car could be used.

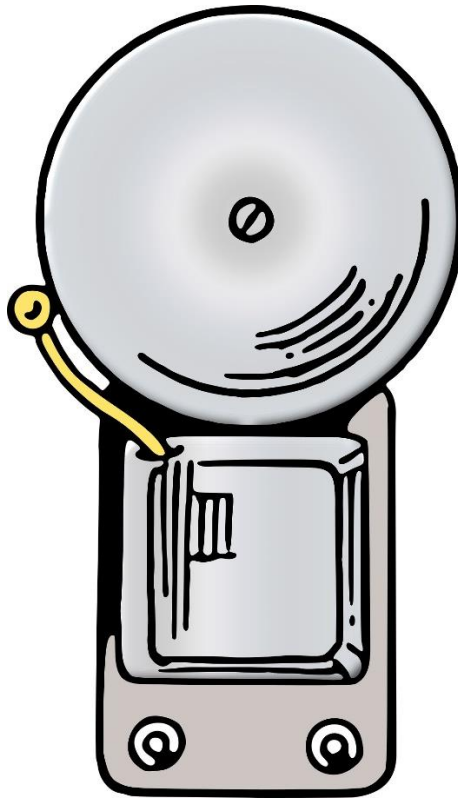
A few weeks later, an inquiry had started by the admin, one of the service engineers had filled his car using the company fuel card over the weekend.

The engineer was called in and could not recall having done so as he knew this was against regulations. He recalled that Mark had borrowed the car but could not recall when. Mark was asked if he had filled the car, which he denied.

That was a mistake, as the company now had to consider if someone had access to a fuel card other than their staff.

Eventually Mark admitted that he had filled the car, he said, the card was just behind the visor and the tank was empty, however he knew the rule and was dismissed for gross misconduct.

Within 6 months, Mark had taken up a tote at York racecourse and I understood he was happy that it had worked out in his favour in the long run.



Do you know the bell is ringing?

While I was working on changing the clock and signalling system in a regional bank located in the centre of Bradford, an incident occurred that left me quite startled. I was stationed in the vault, situated in the basement at the bottom of a flight of stairs. As part of the alteration work, I had informed the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) to disconnect the signalling system.

At the top of the stairs, there were two doors. One led to the street, while the other provided access to the secure counter area of the bank, requiring a code to unlock. If I needed access to telephones or other facilities, I had to attract the attention of one of the tellers to open that particular door.

The control panel in the vault was the newer CPA6 relay design, and the empty slots from the removed Burgot frame for the upgrade were still visible on the other side of the vault door. When the lid of the CPA6 panel was lifted (the panel being

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approximately twenty inches wide and forty inches tall), the external sounder would ring to warn of a tamper event. Engineers, including myself, would often use matchsticks, rolled-up silver foil, and rubber bands to temporarily disable the tamper switches (three in total) while working on the panels.

In the vault, even with the door open, it was difficult to hear the sounder ringing outside the bank. At some point during my work, one of the makeshift tamper defeats must have slipped, causing the bell to ring continuously outside the bank.

As I ascended the stairs to go for lunch, a police officer opened the side door and entered. Being the first person he encountered, he immediately asked, "Do you know the bell is ringing?" Realizing what he meant, I replied, "Yes, I can hear it now. Just a minute." I hurried back down to the vault, tightened the rubber band, and the ringing ceased. Once I returned upstairs, I noticed that the police officer had already left.

It was only afterward that it dawned on me how concerning the situation had been. The police officer didn't ask for my identification, nor did he communicate with any of the bank staff. He had simply walked in through a back door that should have been locked, as it directly led to the open vault in the basement.

When I shared the story with Clancy later that week, he revealed that he had worked at the same bank and that the door had been unlocked during his time there as well. Both of us were struck by the realization that the police officer could have inadvertently walked into the midst of an armed robbery and had shown a significant lapse in security protocols. It was a stark reminder of the potential dangers and vulnerabilities that existed even within seemingly secure environments.



The delivery van – always perfect

The company delivery van, a Ford Transit, held a special place in the heart of its driver, Roy. It was his pride and joy, meticulously cared for and maintained to a level that surpassed typical expectations for a work van. When not out on the road, the van resided in the company stores, receiving regular cleaning and attention akin to that given to a classic car.

Roy enjoyed a great job, responsible for delivering all the necessary parts and equipment to various sites prior to the arrival of installation engineers. His workload was relatively light, with the van being utilised for an average of only ten hours per

week. As a conscientious driver, Roy always adhered to speed limits, never exceeding forty miles an hour on motorways and dual carriageways.

When the lease for the van came to an end around 1978, a brand new van was delivered to replace it. Roy, being meticulous as ever, spent two weeks preparing the new van for its intended use. He began by fully lining the interior with plywood, ensuring durability and protection for the van's contents. To enhance organisation, Roy built and installed a custom shelving rack equipped with plastic storage boxes for smaller orders.

Taking care of the finer details, Roy fitted additional lighting in the back of the van, enabling easier visibility during loading and unloading. He also installed fog lights on the front for improved visibility in adverse weather conditions. To preserve the van's interior, seat covers and carpet mats were added, shielding against wear and tear. Roy even adorned the steering wheel with a cover and included a cup holder to enhance comfort during his journeys.

Proudly displaying the Chubb brand, Roy meticulously applied Chubb decals to the sides and back doors of the van, ensuring their precise alignment. He also had film coating applied to the glass in the back doors, preventing prying eyes from peering inside. As a final touch, Roy had a large, custom-made galvanised roof rack fitted to the van, perfectly designed to accommodate the secure transportation of ladders and steps.

The old van, with its exceptional condition and desirability, became a coveted item among the engineers. Seven of them expressed interest in purchasing it, and one engineer successfully acquired the van from the finance company, allowing it to continue its journey with a new owner.

Among the intriguing anecdotes surrounding Roy and his van was the peculiar observation that during his holidays, the van seemed to consume nearly twice as much diesel fuel. It remained a mystery to Roy, and the inexplicable phenomenon added a touch of curiosity and amusement to the van's story.



Caught by the dog

Peter, a new engineer at Chubb, was assigned to work alongside me on a project at a large house. From the very first day, we were greeted with a flurry of activity as the customer locked their dog in a room located in the cellar. This routine repeated itself each day when we arrived on site.

Despite the presence of the dog, Peter, being a dog owner himself, didn't seem particularly concerned. In fact, he even engaged in behaviour that further provoked the dog's reaction. He would purposely scratch the door with his fingernails as we passed by, encouraging the dog's agitation. I cautioned Peter about the potential consequences, warning him that the dog could be a threat if it managed to get out. However, Peter shrugged off my concerns and carried on with his antics.

On one particular Thursday, I was absent as I had classes at college. Little did I know that it would be an eventful day for Peter. Unaware of my absence, he followed his usual routine, waiting for the dog to be locked away before proceeding downstairs. As he began connecting wires while precariously perched on a buffet in the basement, an unsettling sensation made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. A sudden warmth on his back sent a shiver down his spine.

Turning around, Peter lost his footing and slipped off the buffet, only to come face to face with the unleashed dog. The dog barked ferociously, its slavering jaws inches

from Peter's face, effectively pinning him against the wall. The intimidating standoff continued until the owner, alerted to the situation, rushed in to retrieve the dog.

Apologies were offered by the owner, who explained that their son had unknowingly let the dog out without realizing Peter was in the cellar. It was a moment of validation for me as I reminded Peter of my earlier warning. He begrudgingly admitted that I had been right all along.

Needless to say, Peter learned a valuable lesson from this encounter. He wisely chose not to engage in any further attempts at riling up dogs in the future, understanding the potential risks and ensuring that he approached his work with greater caution and respect for the animals involved.



Jewellers shop invisible raid

In Armley town street there was an independent jeweller's shop which had a Chubb alarm system installed. It was popular with locals and sold a wide variety of items from clocks and watches to jewellery and engagement rings.

The shop had invested in a hardened glass frontage with electric mesh shutters which could be closed on an evening, the shutters were light enough to see through, yet in combination with the hardened glass, were tough enough to deter a frontal assault, these factors had two big benefits, the time taken to empty the window display and refill it every day was saved and potential customers could window shop after hours.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

One morning, the proprietors arrived as normal, opened the shop, raised the inner display shutter, prepared the till, and had a morning hot drink whilst waiting for their first customer of the day. A customer did arrive but unfortunately, they were not wanting to buy jewellery, rather to inform the staff that the window display was not as good as usual, in fact rather depleted.

The proprietors stepped outside to see what the customer meant, and to their horror they realised the window had been robbed.

They called the police and without opening the window display started to perform a stock count through the glass windows, it struck them that the items missing were an eclectic mix, wristwatches but not clocks, necklaces but not earrings, all the stands and prices were as they had been set up, just the items were missing.

When the police arrived, they were somewhat baffled by the raid, the shop had not been broken into, the alarm had not activated, yet it was undeniable that a lot of items had gone missing from the window.

The police opened the window display from inside the shop, dusted for fingerprints, and the shop staff could then clear the window for a proper stock take.

With the window empty, the opportunity for a clean seemed a good idea, the proprietors had noticed some dust on the bottom of the display area at the side opposite the door, adjacent to the premises next door.

There was a curtain covering the wall in this part of the window display and when it was moved for vacuuming, it was suddenly obvious how the robbery had been executed, there was a brick missing in the wall between the jewellers shop and the next unit.

The police returned to the scene, the premises next door had been vacant for some time and they checked around the back, a forced window was discovered through which an officer climbed into the building.

Behind the glass windows at the front of the shop which had been whitewashed whilst the unit was empty. On the floor was an electric drill, a chisel and hammer and a lot of plaster and brick dust which had been left behind.

It would seem that persons unknown had forced entry into the adjacent shop, used the drill and chisel to remove the brick, then using a barbeque fork, they had pushed the curtain to one side and lifted everything they could easily reach with the long

fork through the hole. This explained why earrings and clocks had not been taken, watches and necklaces were easy pickings with the fork, also care needed to be taken as the intruders could not be sure that a passer-by may notice if the window display was badly disturbed.



Female sexism

In the late 1970s, societal norms and workplace dynamics were undergoing changes, with attempts to address issues of gender inequality and inappropriate behaviour. However, the reality was different from the intended progress. Instead of fostering a more respectful and equal environment, certain behaviours persisted, and new dynamics emerged.

Men, rather than adapting their actions to promote equality, reacted by refraining from holding doors open for anyone and discreetly stashing nude calendars in desk drawers. In response to the changing atmosphere, staff often congregated in single-sex groups, where they continued to share and laugh at rude jokes. Surprisingly, the jokes told by women could sometimes be even more explicit than those shared by men. After work, groups would gather for drinks, providing an outlet for their uncouth behaviour that surpassed anything witnessed during official lunch outings.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

This was a time when the "yuppie" culture, with its emphasis on materialism and self-interest, was gaining momentum.

In one particular office building where I worked alongside Peter, we found ourselves struggling to pass cables over a false ceiling while perched on ladders. Unlike most ceilings, this one had interlocking tiles, making it challenging to remove them. Determined to find a solution, I came up with an idea: using a bow and arrows. We tied a string to an arrow and entered the ceiling void through any removable tile, then shot the arrow to the location of the next loose tile. It proved to be a successful method.



Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

However, during one attempt to shoot an arrow through a hole above fire doors in a corridor, Peter noticed something unexpected. From his vantage point on the other side of the fire break in the main typing pool office, he observed a female staff member playfully mimicking a gesture towards his groin, much to the amusement of the typing pool ladies. Peter remained still, silently watching the performance unfold. The woman continued her charade for a considerable time before returning to her desk, unaware that Peter had caught her in the act.

Later, during lunch, Peter shared the incident with me and laughed about it. However, he acknowledged that if the roles were reversed, and he had engaged in such behaviour towards a female colleague, the consequences would likely have been severe, potentially resulting in his dismissal.

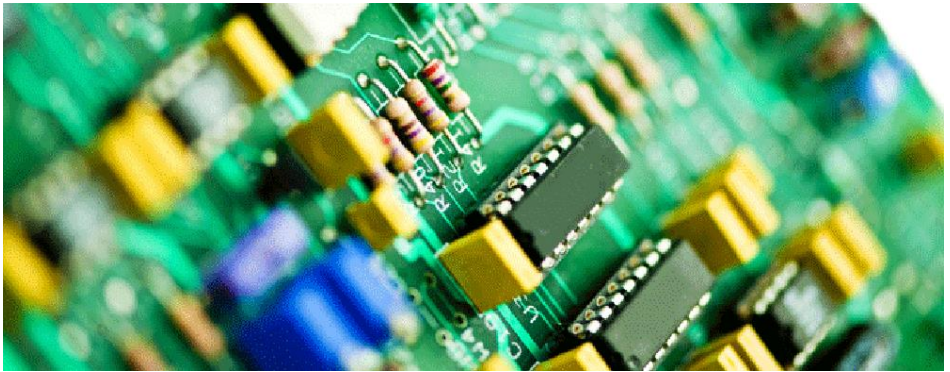
Remarkably, the following day, in the same building, I found myself working in an area without a false ceiling, approximately four meters off the floor level. Using a fourteen-ounce claw hammer with a black rubber handle, I secured clips for the cable. To manage the cable, I held the hammer between my legs by the head with the shaft pointing upwards, allowing for easy one-handed access when required.

On this occasion, a large black lady approached Peter and requested him to relay a message to me, saying, "Please tell your mate to stop holding the hammer between his legs; it reminds me of my husband in the morning."

These incidents serve as examples of the complexities and contradictions that existed during a time when efforts were being made to address gender inequality in the workplace. While some progress was being made, inappropriate behaviours and double standards still prevailed, highlighting the challenges faced in achieving true equality and respect for all individuals.

Chapter 8

Electronics saves the day



Microprocessor panels

All intruder alarm panels at this time were based on ancient mechanical switches, relays, timers for exit and entry periods were set with variable resistors, the “keypad” control was just that, a pad with a few lights and a key.

There was just one advantage of multiple relay panels, just by looking at the board, you could tell the status of every circuit and that included the alarm circuits, just by the position of the relays, i.e. energised or de-energised.

The microprocessor was invented and available for commercial use in 1973, Chubb were determined to move from mechanical relay switches in their control panels over to computerised control systems, they launched the world’s first solid state microprocessor intruder alarm control panel in 1978, the model CA45.

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You would think this technological marvel would be a gamechanger, electronic keypads, digital displays, alarm event memories, programming by keypad commands confirmed on a display, but the panel had none of that.

What we received looked not much different to the predecessors, the “keypad” was still a mechanical key switch, however now it had several positions, not just on or off. There were a few lights with much the same functions as the previous panel. The main differences were, when you opened the panel, the board did not have any relays, oh and the panel was now painted black instead of battleship grey as had been almost all control equipment for the last thirty years.

An intruder alarm panel has several minimum requirements, a timer for exit period, a timer for entry period, a timer for bell delay to permit police to arrive before intruders are aware they have activated the system, a cut off timer to stop the sounder after a period, an ability to measure an input from each alarm circuit and determine open or closed status.

This technological marvel had all these abilities, the main connections for detection, sounders and signalling were the same as before, approximately ninety connections along the edge of the board.

Previously these had been screw terminals, but this time they were rows of square pins, the connectors were now Molex plugs and in the bits bag, there was thirty or so two, four and six pin plastic plugs and hundreds of little Molex crimps to be attached to the cables to make up plugs to fit to the panel, engineers now had to crimp the Molex pins to the cables, then insert these into the plugs prior to plugging them into the board.

We joked that at least this would make changing the circuit boards easy should the need arise.

The functions of the panel, which zones were part set, and which were full, timers etc, were all set by a matrix of pins soldered into the board, these were numbered from one to ten across, and A to J down, the manual would provide the programming information, connect pin B-4 to pin C-1 for this setting with this delay, in the bits bag for each panel, approximately twenty short black wires with small plugs on each end were provided for programming.

The technology was rolled out with a domestic version, the CA35 and a high security bank style unit, the CA100 which was massive.

Unfortunately, no one had thought of the obvious, a communicator pin interface on the board should have been added and communicators developed to plug on to the interface.

When fitting signalling communicators previously, they had been connected to the older panels with short wires, tested and then placed back inside their plastic bags and balanced inside the control panel.

This practice was to continue it seems, and the latest communicators, now with microprocessors on board were rolled out. After a year or so, it came to light that the new communicators were supplied inside black plastic bags, these were anti-static, conductive plastic and caused many issues when they placed short circuits all over the boards that had been wrapped in them for protection, ironically to prevent short circuits.

Many companies followed Chubb and improvements were made with each step, keypads became PIN pads, keys were replaced with codes, text displays started to be normal and some even had real English text two-line eighty-character displays. Programming was by keypad and communicators became plug on.

However along the way, designers forgot some of the fundamentals of intruder design, crude systems like Rely-A Bell incorporated a fail in alarm state design, the relay was energised all the time, de energising in alarm, or a total power failure, this was replicated in the relay panels which were still in regular use until at least 1984.

In the early eighties, one company designed an incredibly popular control panel, it seemed to have it all, real English programmable text display, time and date event log, end of line resistor zones connected to expansion modules which in turn were networked back to the panel, plug on communication interface etc. etc. etc.

The main processor, was located on a secondary printed circuit board attached by multiple pin interface to the primary circuit board, this was the panels Achilles heel, an intruder in the know, would force the front entrance door starting the entrance timer, then hit the front of the panel with the palm of their hand as hard as they could, the jolt loosened the pin connections between the processor board and the main board, just a nanosecond power down and a second to reboot, but when it recovered, it was in the day mode, i.e. switched off with no alarm condition.

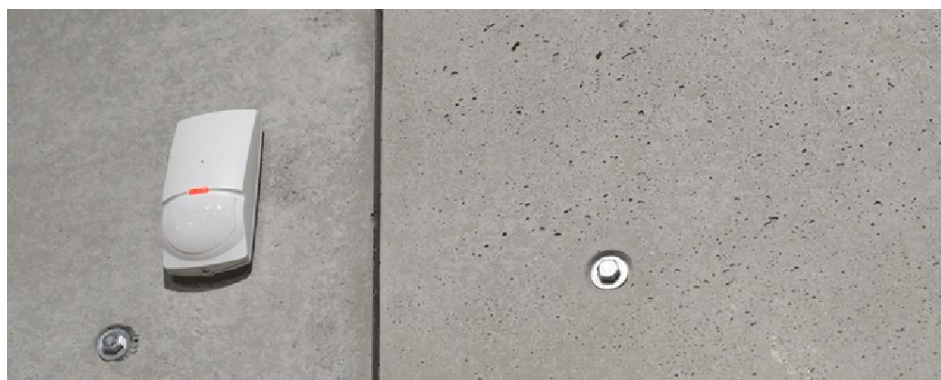
We were assured that should this knowledge get out, surely intruders would not be aware what control panel was installed prior to breaking in.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

The design even took care of that issue. The setting tone was unique to the panel, starting at a low frequency medium duration pulse on/off tone over a loudspeaker, the tone pulses reduced in length and increased in pitch every two or three pulses until by the time it set.

The noise was intense, loud and very insistent high frequency pulses.

This could be heard up to fifty meters away, especially whilst the entry door was open, the sound was so unique, it could only be the panel described.



Movement detectors

Whilst working at HK security for a few weeks prior to Chubb, I had installed several passive infrared detectors, (PIR's).

These consisted of an infrared sensor located behind a Fresnel lens, the lens focussed patches of the floor and walls opposite the detector onto the sensor. The sensor would read the room temperature which may fluctuate slowly, when a person walked into the room, their movement would block one or more of the patches being measured causing a rise of the sensor to body temperature, and then back to room, this could be measured and trigger an alarm.

When I arrived at Chubb, they did not use PIR's, at this time the jury was out for the insurance companies as to whether PIR detectors were suitable devices to detect intruders in favour of active devices such as microwave and ultrasonic detectors.

These emitted a signal, either microwave radiation or ultrasonic audio which was reflected from the environment to the detector and received by either a microwave antenna or an ultrasonic microphone. If the frequency returning to the detector was unchanged from that being emitted, the detector would be in an all clear status, when a person entered the area, as they walked the reflected signal would shift in frequency, this was an established scientific principle called Doppler Shift, such a change would trigger an alarm event.

Like most things, there were issues. Ultrasonic detectors used more power the higher the frequency chosen for the design, and more power to attain a greater range hence most were set to around 16.5 kilohertz and just 8 metres range, dogs could definitely hear these, and some humans could just about detect their transmission, so they were not liked by teenagers who had the most sensitive hearing at high frequencies. I had always been able to hear the line output transformers whistle from colour TVs which was 15.6 Kilohertz so I was susceptible to the issue and would not have wanted one in my home.

Ultrasonic detectors did have one benefit over microwaves, they remained enclosed in the room in which they were installed.

Microwaves however could travel straight through glass, plasterboard, wood, and plastic. Great care had to be taken when installing these units to avoid false alarm hazards such as people in a room within the main building with glass, wood, or plasterboard walls. Water moving in plastic pipes. Detection of larger targets such as lorries and vans on a road outside visible through windows etc.

The MESL microwave unit would be installed to cover large areas, typically 100 X 70 metres within mills and factories. It could take half a day to install a detector, and a week to resolve the environment issues, chicken wire was the answer to ensuring the detector did not see targets through walls/glass. It was necessary to install the wire over windows, water pipes, plasterboard walls etc. to keep the signal within the area of the building required.

Eventually PIR detectors stole the crown and were authorised for use by insurance risk underwriters, it was the development of the dual detector which gave these their overall win. Instead of a single detector which would see a series of increases and decreases in temperature as a person walked in the room, the dual element detectors would see a rise on one element, then a rise in the other

element at the same time the first went back to room temperature, then the second element would return to room temperature. Typically, two of these signature changes within a time frame were required for an alarm.



Swimming home from Heaven and Hell

It was Friday, I was working with Clancy, Duncan and Andrew in Leeds and we decided we would go to the pub after work. We duly arrived in the Town Hall Taps, a Tetley's pub directly opposite the Leeds Town Hall. I bought the first round of beers, sat down to enjoy mine and the other three had finished their pints and were ordering more.

I signalled I was ok, having only taken a sip and they bought three. Less than five minutes later they had consumed these and ordered again, I still had two thirds of a pint, so declined another. Before I had reached half a pint, they had drunk the third and it was my round again. I did buy myself one at the same time but could see that I was out of my league here.

I dropped out of the rounds, having bought eight pints in twenty minutes, and gave up trying to consume beer at the level Clancy and the others were capable of. I estimated that after five pubs and three hours, they had consumed sixteen pints each.

At this point, my girlfriend had arrived to join us, we were supposed to be having a few drinks together that evening after having a pint with the engineers. This never

happened, I believe I had managed eight pints and was in no fit state to go on drinking, so we caught the bus home for an early night.

The next week, Clancy told me that the engineers had continued together, and by this time had been joined by three more, the group worked their way around several more pubs including the notorious Market Tavern, which had a window in the bar overlooking the enclosed dirt floor yard covered with a tin roof, one wall had been whitewashed and this was the gent's toilet, nervous people need not worry about going to the toilet alone, as their mates could watch from where they sat.

At ten thirty the pubs closed. It was then off to a nightclub, they arrived at the Heaven and Hell in Leeds, two were not admitted as they were worse for wear, however Clancy, Duncan and Andrew were allowed in.

Within an hour, Andrew had set off to the bar, walking directly he failed to notice he was on the upstairs mezzanine and had fallen off the balcony landing on a table full of drinks, flattening it and spilling the drinks. To give him his dues, he was still holding his pint glass and heading for the bar when the bouncers steered him out of the club.

Clancy and Duncan recalled dancing with a beer in one hand on the crowded dance floor, when a stray arm knocked off Clancy's glasses, he got onto his hands and knees and collected them, but one lens had detached and got kicked across the floor, all he could recall was the sight of the lens vanishing under stomping feet.

Whilst they were in the club, it had rained heavily, as they set off home together they encountered a very large puddle of water in the road outside the Merrion Centre, they both lay down in this to cool off, and being so drunk, started to swim home.

Clancy then realised that he was alone, it was extremely late and busses etc. had stopped running, so he set off the walk home.

Unfortunately, home was at Clayton in Bradford, approximately fourteen miles away. He never made it, reaching his mother's house at five AM, he banged on the door and fell in when it opened, he had collapsed and slept on the floor of the hall and had embarrassed himself by peeing on the coats in the hall closet and on his mother shoes.

Around eleven and after some greasy breakfast, he started to recover, only for his mother to say, "I don't mind you coming home son, just not in that state".



Locked out on the eleventh floor

Technical college one day a week did have its entertainment value, in our group there was one lad who was particularly annoying, he loved to beat us to the lift and as we were always late back from lunch, he would leave us stranded on the ground floor meaning we had to climb the stairs, usually to the eleventh floor.

He dipped one of the other student's calculators into saltwater ruining it. He stabbed my can of pop with a small screwdriver whilst I was drinking from it, meaning it now leaked everywhere. He would also, as part of a non-smoking campaign steal student's cigarettes and destroy them.

One day, we had left our bags in the classroom on the eleventh floor during lunch, as we would be back in the room for a lesson next. The annoying lad arrived first, and opened the metal windows, hung peoples bags out and closed the window on the strap.

Fortunately, the straps had an inch or so visible, so we were able to hold the last bit, open the window and recover the bags. This was a step too far for some, and they

grabbed his bag, opened the window, and trapped it by the strap, closing the window and cutting off the last inch of the strap.

He was now left with a dilemma, open the window and his bag would fall ten stories onto a flat roof below or take other steps to recover his bag. He decided to open the next window, climb out onto the ledge and shuffle along to his bag, someone closed the window behind him so he could not get back in, then opened the window holding the bag a crack so he now had his bag back, after several minutes, he realised we were not going to let him back in, so he shuffled across to the window of the next classroom where a lesson had started. The lecturer gave him an almighty rollocking for being out on the window ledge and he calmed down somewhat after that.



Bullion centre – with gas grenades!

Towards the end of the seventies, banks started to operate differently, with the onset of new business models such as TSB and the Post Office, some high profile robberies involving firearms and kidnapping the managers families etc. decisions were taken to dramatically reduce branch cash holding.

Cash would now be stored centrally and distributed to and from branches in security vans designed for the purpose.

New screens were installed at tellers' windows which when triggered would rise up from the counter to the ceiling in a fraction of a second, separating the staff from the public area with bullet proof metal screens

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High resolution recording equipment was introduced comprising 35mm film cameras loaded with hundreds of frames of film which would record a few frames per second for up to twenty minutes and could be analysed by the police later, they were vastly superior to CCTV using VHS tape to store frames at the time. This changed the risk significantly.

I was sent to help Clancy install a new alarm system in a new cash storage facility in Leeds, the building was anonymous and disguised, constructed partially underground. It was designed to provide storage for coins and notes to support the regional branches of the bank remotely.

This was an unusual installation to be involved in, the building housed two massive vaults, one for coins and one for notes, each vault required an alarm system, to ensure there could never be a situation where the alarm could not be set, two companies were selected to install alarms in both vaults. In normal operation, the Chubb system would be set on even numbered weeks, with the other company set on odd numbered weeks.

Should one system not set, the other could be used instead until the first was repaired.

It was unusual working with Clancy in both vaults on the Chubb system, whilst another company was also installing a system in the same area, one control panel either side of the vault doors.

In the control room, there was sloping glass like that of an airport tower or a ship's bridge, this was of course bullet proof. Along the sloping windowsill was what at first glance looked like CCTV monitors.

However, they were solid glass designed to reflect the light in a similar way to the prism in a 35mm SLR camera, these covered the vehicle loading bays and gave a real image of what was occurring in them. Far superior to CCTV and much harder to disable.

Each vehicle arriving at the premises would wait at a roller shutter door, this would be opened to permit the vehicle into the individual loading area and would close behind the vehicle once entered, the operators could now see and talk to the guards with the vehicle, should anything untoward start to happen, gas grenades could be dropped from the ceiling into the loading bay to rapidly gain control.

In addition, a sprinkler or Halon system could be triggered to control fires.



The world's slowest engineer

James was old school, had worked in the industry for many years and was adopted during the takeover from Rely-A Bell and Burgot when Chubb was formed. He was mid-fifties, smart, casual and travelled everywhere by public transport.

He never put a foot wrong, customers loved him, his installations were top notch, however every installation he completed went significantly over time.

No one dared to say anything to him, as the quality of his work was second to none, working with him as an apprentice, I found frustrating as he seemed to go out of his way to take his time.

On one occasion, I helped for an afternoon at a domestic installation in North Leeds, to finish the system, all that was left to do was install the outside bell box, when I arrived we set up the drill and extension lead, taking great care to fully unwind the lead and spread it out onto the driveway in a series of s bends to ensure it did not overheat.

Ray then selected all the tools he would need, drill bits, fixings, screws, large screwdriver, small screwdriver, box spanner, terminal screwdriver, spirit level etc. etc.

We then unlocked the ladders and carried these one section at a time to the front of the house where he checked them carefully and re assembled them into a triple extension ladder, the location of the sounder meant that the ladder required to be

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on uneven ground, so Ray set off back to his toolbox where he had some wedges to ensure the ladder was perfectly level.

Next, he took the packaging of the bell box, taking great care to open the outer cardboard carton, then split the adhesive tape and remove the plastic bag. Opening the unit and inspecting every last bit to ensure no damage to the plastic coating could be seen, ensuring me that the box may rust if the coating was damaged.

It was painful watching him climb the ladder with the back plate and spirit level, mark the hole locations, climb down, climb up with the spirit level and check a second time, climb down, climb up with the drill and make four pilot holes, climb down change the bit, climb back up and re drill, climb down.

It was like watching paint dry and after what seemed an eternity it was five o'clock and time to go home. It had taken over four hours to install the box meaning he had to return to the site the following day to tidy up and show the customer how to use the system.

The very next day I was working with Clancy, between us we installed a bell box on the outside of a commercial building in under thirty minutes, and it was perfectly central, straight and level, fixed properly and with no damage to the plastic coating.



Risky testing

On one occasion, I was sent to assist Grant, a service engineer, there was a problem on the alarm installed in one of the retail premises in Leeds city centre, a major electrical retailer which occupied a large store in the pedestrian area of the city, the store was approximately one hundred years old, it did not look this old due to money spent on the frontage and fit out, however, when you climbed into the loft space, it was a very old building behind the glossy facelift.

In the roof space to detect intruders removing tiles to gain access, closed circuit wire (CC wire), a single stranded conductor with PVC sheath, designed to break with a strain of thirty pounds, had been installed by stapling hundreds of yards in a criss-cross pattern to the underside of the roof joists to form a lattice of wire at four inch intervals.

This wiring had been inherited from a much older, probably Burgot system and re utilised as part of a newer system, however it was now unreliable, giving false alarms and sometimes preventing the system from setting.

The wire comprised two circuits, installed intertwined, so the first circuit was installed at eight-inch intervals, followed by a second circuit at eight-inch intervals, the result being four inches spacing.

Grant said, the issue was with the galvanised staples, when they had been hot dipped, the metal deposited on the staple could run as they were drawn out and cause knife edge sharp areas, if these were on the inner arch of the staple, as they

were hammered home over the CC wire, it could nick the PVC sheath exposing the bare metal copper conductor.

Over time and with an electrical current running through the wire, eventually a chemical reaction took place between the staple and the wire as they were dissimilar metals, this could eventually result in the wire separating or becoming high resistance, but still looking intact. I started to wonder how we could possibly find the bad joints in such a large quantity of wire.

Grant rigged up a light, and a soldering iron, then disconnecting the wiring from the alarm, we took a spare bayonet light bulb and soldered the wires to the terminals on the bulb.

He then connected a plug top to the wiring and plugged this in, he flicked the switch on the socket on and off briefly, the lamp flickered and about thirty wires split apart at the staple point swinging down making it obvious which needed repairs.

We soldered new sections in place of all that had severed, then switched the plug on again, this time the bulb lit and there were no more broken wires.

I was intrigued by the ingenuity of the engineer to consider such a simple way of finding the faults, it certainly worked, but may not be acceptable now under modern health and safety considerations.

Chapter 9

Penguin Alarms



Penguin Alarms

Back working with Martin, I joined him at a customer's house where we had to alter the alarm system, including re-locating the control panel.

The customer had recently moved into the house and had adopted the alarm system but required changes to suit them and training on its use.

Martin was on fine form, with his unusual sense of humour from the off, I was up a pair of steps taking down a detector when Martin walked in to the room, farted loudly and walked out again, I thought OK so that's how today is going to go then.

The customer had encountered Martin in the master bedroom moving the bedside cabinet to access the personal attack button, when Martin said, just looking for your stash of porn, with a grin on his face.

Later I went in to the kitchen, Martin was marking the cables and disconnecting the control panel located at the cellar stairs entranceway, the customer walked in and Martin said, It's very dry work this, altering alarm systems, the customer got the broad hint and made us tea with biscuits, not just rich tea, but posh chocolate Penguin biscuits.

At lunch break, we sat in Martin's Sunbeam Alpine car and ate our sandwiches, the customer brought out more tea and as we ate Martin developed an idea befitting his very unusual sense of humour.

He asked me to pass him a pair of scissors from the glove box, fished out the wrapper from the Penguin biscuit the customer had given us earlier and cut carefully around the penguin leaving just the oval with the penguin and the banner below with the word Penguin on it, because the wrapper had been unfolded, the banner was elongated and plain either side of the brand name, which Martin preserved.

We finished the alterations after another cup of tea and it was time to hand the altered system over to the customer, Martin said I should watch the handover as I would lean how to teach a new customer how to work the system.

Martin called the customer for the training and I watched, however, I could not help but notice that Martin had stuck the Penguin wrapper he had cut down previously to the front of the control panel, covering over the Chubb logo, he had written on the unused part of the band either side of the brand name "Moved by" Penguin "Alarms Ltd".

Martin proceeded to show the customer how to use the alarm and even pointed out the fact that it had been moved by Penguin alarms ltd with his usual cheeky grin, the customer said nothing and signed the completion paperwork.

When we were outside about to leave, I said to Martin, what is this thing with Penguin alarms, he just grinned and drove off.

I often thought afterwards, what did the customer think?



Leeds Liverpool canal investigation

The new Leeds regional stores and offices were close to the Leeds Liverpool canal, the road in and out passed over a small bridge over the canal at one-point half a mile or so away from the stores.

The move to the new building coincided with new paperwork for service engineers, after replacing old signalling equipment such as grams and old Burgot or Rely-A Bell control panels during planned upgrades or service replacements, paperwork detailing where each item had been removed from was required to be completed. As anyone who has dealt with engineers will know, they hate paperwork and avoid it if at all possible.

No one really noticed that far more new parts were being signed out than old parts being signed back in, it was just not something anyone focussed on, however there were consequences which came to bite the company.

Following an incident involving the canal, police divers were called in to search underwater for items discarded by suspects in a criminal investigation.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

It would seem the items they were searching for had been thrown into the canal by the bridge near the office.

The divers were hampered in their search as they found hundreds of metal boxes in the canal during their search.

The police divers spent days recovering every metal box, then opened each one to check if it had anything to do with their investigation.

It is not known if they found what they were looking for, however they had identified that the metal boxes had brand names on them, when checking the brand names they turned out to be parts of Burgot, Rely-A Bell and Chubb intruder alarm systems that had been dumped into the canal.

The management received a visit from the police and as a result the company was subject to an investigation by environmental health, the equipment discarded in the canal included lead acid batteries, dry zinc cells, metal boxes with lead paint finish and many other toxic substances.

In a move which stunned the engineers, rather than simply dropping the requirement to fill out returns paperwork, thereby removing the temptation to dump the old products, they dramatically increased the paperwork and tied all requests for new equipment drawn from the stores by service engineers to the return products.



Cat's assistance

Working with Peter in a lovely house in Bradford we were asked to ensure the pedigree white Persian cat did not go outside, shown the tea and coffee and left to crack on by the customer.

Sure enough, the cat was under our feet all day, and pestering to go outside, Peter said, whatever you do, don't let the cat out as it will be obvious if it is soaking wet and covered in mud.

We took great care every time we opened an outside door to ensure the cat remained in the house. However, as part of our work, we lifted a few floorboards to investigate the possibility of running cables under the house. The cat was under the floor constantly and was covered in soot and cobwebs.

We were about to abandon cabling under the floor as there was not enough room for one of us to get under and pull the cables through, when we had an idea, we lifted just two floorboards, one at the start point for the cable and one at the finish point, we tied a string to the cat's collar and put it down one of the holes, a minute later the cat appeared at the other lifted board and we could now use the string to pull the cables through.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

In the meantime, I had been working in the master bedroom, and it never crossed my mind to close the door. Later Peter went into the bedroom to test the PA button I had installed, he called me upstairs and said “look at this” pointing into the master bedroom.

I walked in and was taken back by the sight, the white carpet, matching bed linen, pillows and towels were just covered in soot and cobwebs, the cat had decided to clean itself by rolling all over everything in the room that could clean its fur, yet the cat looked no better for these efforts.

When the customer arrived back later that day, we had shut the cat in the bedroom, we had no choice but to tell her that the cat had explored under the floor, she shrugged this off and signed for the work and we left.

I often wonder what she thought when she walked into the bedroom to find the cat, the soot, and the cobwebs.



Sherbourne Pouffes

Located in a large mill complex which has been extended multiple times over ninety years, Sherbourne Pouffes, Clayton, Bradford manufacturers of upholstered footstools.

The premises, protected by a Chubb alarm at the time, were constantly in need of alteration and extension, on one occasion I helped James to install a multi core cable in an underground trough between two buildings prior to covering and through the middle of the car park.

The fifty-core cable provided had been underestimated and ran out two thirds of the way between the buildings. It was urgent that the cable be completed quickly as the trough which contained pipes and other cables was to be covered soon.

James called the office to advise the situation, more cable was available at the stores, but all the service engineers, and the company delivery van were out. In addition, a waterproof joint box to connect the cable was now needed, not a stock item. It was agreed that I would go back to the stores on my motorbike to collect the cable, meanwhile James would go to City Electrical Factors nearby and buy a suitable joint box, also, both would work overtime until the cable was installed and connected.

I arrived at the stores to collect the cable, and unfortunately bumped into our favourite supervisor Gordon, he could not resist reminding me that even though I was carrying materials for a job, I could only claim bus fares as expenses.

He went on to say that I would only receive single time pay for overtime worked between Monday and Friday and asked me to advise James of this. He knew how to pick his times.

Arriving back at the mill, James and I completed the cable installation, James connected the cables and the contractors covered over the last few feet of the service trough.

We then had just to complete the connections at either end for the work to be complete. James had a piece of paper in his hand detailing the connections, it was normal when using multi core cables to leave a note for future engineers showing the colour conductors assignments.

However, James was incensed at being asked to work overtime at a moment's notice yet only receive single time pay.

Any engineer seeing a multi core cable used between two buildings would automatically assume it was a single length, or if it exceeded a hundred meters, that the joint box required would retain colour for colour the same through, i.e. red to red, black to black etc. However, James took the decision to change the colours

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

randomly, he kept a note for his own aid and as we left late that evening, he waved it in front of me saying, let's see how good those service engineers are in the future and threw the note in the bin.

In the 1970's you could say that people were unaware of political correctness, the word gay meant you were happy, homosexuals suffered discrimination continuously and the name of the company was seen as fair game.

I had noticed that the mail arriving was somewhat interestingly addressed, the company was generally called Sherbourne, however Pouffes had taken on a whole new life force of its own, with substitutions such as puffs, dirt stabbers, sailor boys, knee tremblers, queers, benders to name just a few.

It is not too surprising to me that the company is now called Sherbourne Upholstery.



Peter, “Martin is embarrassing”

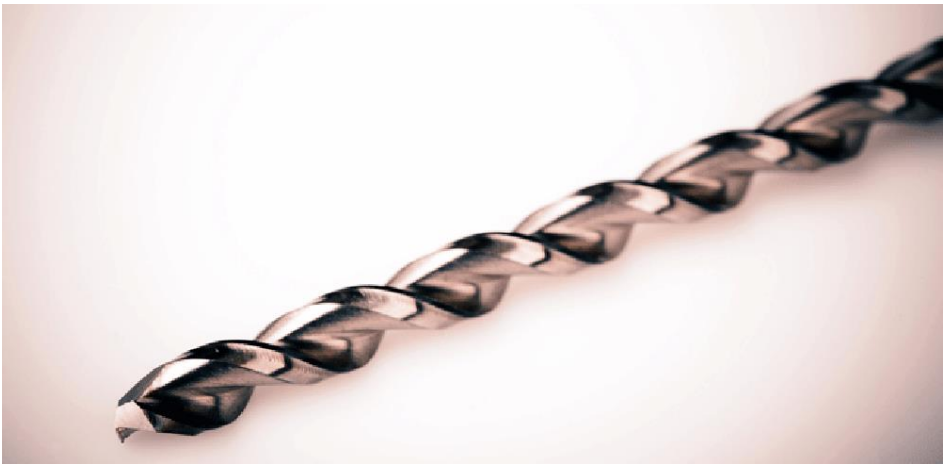
On one of my days in the stores, one of the supervisors Peter walked in and looked a bit stressed, then said, Phil please would you make some tea. He made a few phone calls and then turned to the other supervisors and said, do you know, that Martin is bloody embarrassing.

Peter related that he had just returned from a site meeting with a large company, the new alarm was to be extensive covering the works and the offices in a new build

property, the MD and two senior managers had attended the site meeting and Martin was there to understand the clients requirements.

Peter went on to say, he had been walking with Martin through the factory section with the client when Martin had farted loudly. Everyone seemed to ignore this, but when they arrived in the new open plan office area full of telephonists and typists, Martin had repeated the performance, only this time much louder and in several bursts lasting longer, the client team walked off a few paces leaving Martin and Peter alone.

The other supervisors now we're hanging on every word from Peter's mouth, "what did you say" asked one, Peter replied, what could you say, I nudged Martin and muttered "give it up" and he farted again, then pointed to the people in the office and said, in a voice they could all hear, "what's up, they all do it as well don't they".



I don't want blood on my drill bit

Working on a domestic installation with Clancy, we determined that there was sufficient access under the floor for one of us to crawl underneath and pull the cables in. By one of us I meant me.

Under the floor with a torch, the walls above had been built so that their supporting walls under the floor were the same layout. Brickwork extended from the foundations to support the inner walls of the property, similarly to the external walls, the layout even had gaps where the doors within the house were located.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

I was tapping the floor and Clancy was tapping back so we could locate each other's position to a few inches, Clancy would tap and ask if there were any cables or pipes under that part of the floor.

When we agreed there were not, he would drill a hole and send down the end of the cable, for me to draw it through to the location of the control panel.

This was working well and after about forty minutes we had almost completed the ground floor wiring, next task was the front entrance door, unlike interior doors, this did not have a gap in the supporting wall to indicate its location.

After a lot of tapping and two drilling attempts, I could not see where Clancy was drilling from underneath.

Clancy changed the drill bit for a much longer one and called to me, "make sure you're out of the way as this is a new drill bit and I don't want blood on it".

The hole was successful, the cable installed and we went for lunch, when we arrived back, the supervisor's car was parked outside the house, the supervisor came out of the house to meet us and said that all our tools were by the back door, we were not allowed to go back into the house.

It would seem the customer did not like the idea of drilling apprentices under the floor, or the thought of blood spilled if it went wrong.

Chapter 10

Strikes and Kites



JIB pay – strike

The pay rates for electricians and apprentices in the intruder alarm sector were determined by the Joint Industry Board (JIB). Due to the additional requirements and responsibilities involved in this sector, such as the need for a clean police record and working in high-risk environments, employees received higher remuneration. These environments included bullion storage facilities, prisons, forensic laboratories, police stations, banks, jewellers, art galleries, and other similar premises where trust and security were paramount.

In late 1978, following a period of economic turmoil known as the winter of discontent and high inflation rates, the JIB recommended a pay increase of 28%.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

However, during a management meeting on a Friday afternoon, we were informed that Chubb was facing cash flow difficulties. As a result, wages would no longer be paid at the JIB rates plus a premium. Instead, we were offered a pay rise of 14% immediately, with an additional 7% to be given after eighteen months.

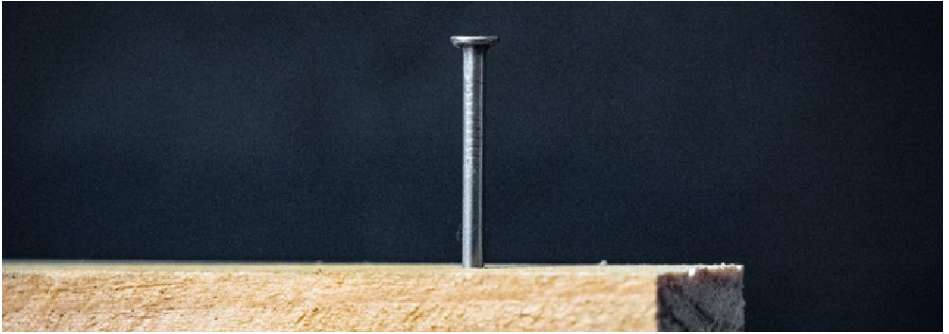
This announcement did not sit well with the engineering team, and a heavy silence fell over the room. Sensing the discontent, I decided to voice what I believed was a reasonable question. I proposed that if the pay rise was being significantly reduced due to cash flow issues, why couldn't the company pay us the initial 14% increase now and commit to reaching the JIB rate with back pay in eighteen months' time?

My suggestion was met with enthusiastic applause and support from my fellow engineers, but it was clear that the management team was not pleased with this response.

After the meeting concluded at five o'clock, we gathered in the car park to discuss the situation. In unanimous agreement, we decided to go on strike starting the following Monday, and the trade union representative was promptly informed of our decision. This news did not go over well at the head office, as they wanted to know what had been discussed during the meeting. The Leeds management team responded that nothing unauthorized had been said, but the head office team retorted, "You must have said something, because they have all gone on strike in Leeds."

As a result of the strike, we never received pay at JIB rates again, which had a significant impact on recruitment. Previously, job advertisements for electrically qualified engineers would generate hundreds of applications. However, in 1978, the same advertisement only yielded three applicants, none of whom were qualified electricians. Nonetheless, two of them were immediately employed.

This turn of events marked a shift in my role as an apprentice. Instead of continuing to learn from experienced and qualified engineers, I was now expected to assist and train the newly hired staff members who lacked any prior knowledge or experience in the field. It was a challenging time for all involved as we navigated the consequences of the strike and adjusted to the changing dynamics within the company.



Nailed it!

When a customer ordered an alarm system from Chubb it was usually due to a requirement of their insurance company which would only provide cover following the installation of a system, the system required had to be designed, installed, commissioned and maintained by the company during the period of insurance cover, so for the foreseeable future.

Companies like Chubb had all the necessary insurance qualifications and external accreditation required. This made the Chubb external sounder a valuable item, and the control equipment with associated signalling equipment was sought by some to try to understand and defeat the systems.

Properties with a Chubb alarm installed were a deterrent to intruders, hence to ensure that the equipment with the Chubb logo were not left in properties where the system was no longer under a maintenance contract, Chubb's contract was clear, the alarm equipment was leased, not owned by the customer.

Service engineers would be sent out to promises where the contract had not been renewed and would remove the controls, detectors, and sounders.

One day, working with Martin , he once again revealed his very warped sense of humour, I went into the car park area of the property we were working on and found him cutting slots in the heads of three large round head nails, then putting them into a bottle with pee in it.

I decided not to ask. Later I could hear a lot of hammering and went to see what was happening, Martin had used the nails to install the control panel onto a concrete block wall, they looked just like screw heads now and I could not resist asking, why? Martin replied, let's see those service engineers reclaim this panel at some point in

the future. I had to ask, so why were they in a bottle of piss, Martin replied, it's an old joiner's trick, it makes the nails rust and become part of the concrete blocks.

I could picture now, in ten or more years, a service engineer struggling like mad to undo those 'screws'.



Town walkers

Chubb had some twelve installation engineers and the same number of service engineers to cover from the Leeds regional branch, the density of installations meant that two of the service engineers worked exclusively in town centres, one in Leeds and one in Bradford.

Known as town walkers, they did not have a company car, as this would be an inconvenience every day as it would likely be parked whilst the engineers walked around the customers premises. Hence these engineers were known as town walkers.

There were of course issues, should a town walker require a ladder, this would have to be dropped off and collected again after the repair was completed.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

On one occasion, I was working with a service engineer when the call came in, the town walker required a ladder right in the middle of town in the pedestrianised precinct. We drove as near as we could get, then unfastened the ladders from the roof of the car, I was told to carry them the last five hundred yards to the location, and they were heavy.

We hung around until the repair was completed, then, as expected I was told to carry the ladders back to the car. On arrival I was exhausted, having now carried the triple extension wood ladder five hundred yards twice in half an hour, and uphill on the way back.

I put the ladders on top of the car and took a breather. Meanwhile the engineer had been sitting in the car on the radio advising this job was complete and he was taking a lunch break.

He jumped out of the car and said, right I'm off to the sandwich shop around the corner, I followed and bought lunch and we sat on a bench in the town centre for twenty minutes for a late lunch.

By now, it was nearly four o'clock, so the engineer told me to call it a day and that I could catch a bus home from the town centre as he was heading home in the opposite direction to me.

We parted company and I caught the bus home, this was not ideal as my motorcycle was parked in the stores, meaning I would need to catch a bus the following day.

When I arrived at work in the morning, my favourite supervisor Gordon wanted a word, in his office was the service engineer I had been working with the day before.

I received an almighty rollocking and a written warning from Gordon. It would seem that the engineer had not checked his ladders after lunch and had driven away with them unsecured.

At the first set of traffic lights, the car stopped but the ladders shot forwards and slid along the road. They narrowly missed pedestrians crossing but were run over by a bus and written off.

Quite how this was my fault I could not comprehend, why the service engineer was in the office when I was given the warning was a mystery too. But I suppose, it was always the apprentice's fault if anything went wrong.



Break in through roof – unable to escape

In the town of Halifax, there stood a long-standing conservative men's club, a bastion of tradition and exclusivity. Its premises, purpose-built during the Victorian era, exuded an air of sophistication. Chesterfield sofas adorned the rooms, complementing the dark-stained wood panelling, the cozy bar, and the soft, subdued lighting. Small side tables hosted ashtrays, a testament to the era when smoking was still commonplace.

As a member-only establishment, the club strictly adhered to its policy of admitting only men. It was a place where individuals seeking solace and camaraderie could gather away from the bustle of the outside world.

One fateful night, however, the tranquillity of the club was shattered. Intruders had managed to gain access through an adjacent building's skylight, clambering onto the roof and eventually forcing open the club's own skylight. Hanging precariously from the frame, they released their grip, tumbling down onto one of the cherished Chesterfield sofas.

Once inside, their nefarious intentions became clear. They immediately targeted the till, hoping for a financial windfall. Alas, to their dismay, it was empty, devoid of any money. Undeterred, they turned their attention to the cigarette machine, swiftly emptying it of both coins and cigarettes.

Embarking on a spree, they proceeded to plunder the club's entertainment offerings. The two one-armed bandits in the games room and the coin boxes of the four billiard tables became their next targets. Unrelenting, they then set their sights on the bar, shattering the locked shutters to gain access to several bottles of spirits. Their audacity even extended to breaking into the humidor, pilfering a selection of fine cigars.

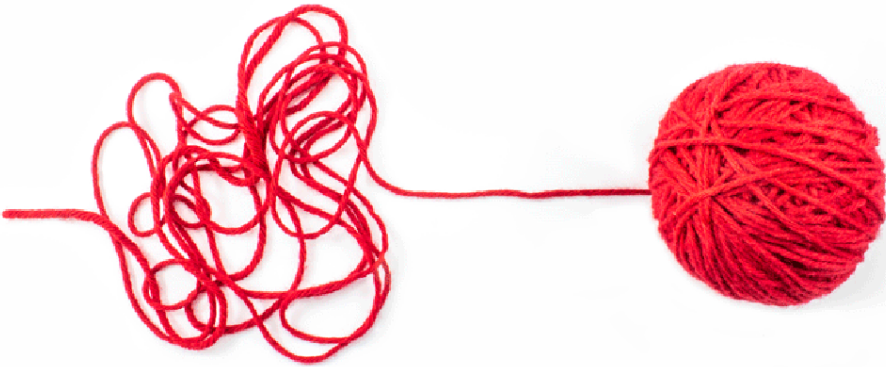
Their efforts were rewarded with a substantial haul—a trio of carrier bags overflowing with cigarettes, cigars, and spirits, accompanied by a large canvas bag filled with stolen coins. Satisfied with their ill-gotten gains, the thieves decided it was time to depart. However, their escape plan hit an unexpected snag.

The club's imposing doors, crafted from solid oak and fortified with robust locks, proved to be an insurmountable obstacle. Similarly, the shuttered, barred, and locked windows offered no means of egress. Realizing they were trapped, the criminals found themselves in a desperate situation.

The following afternoon, when the proprietor arrived to open the club, he was greeted by an unusual sight. Two intoxicated youths, who were clearly not club members, were sprawled amidst a jumble of cigarettes, coins, and empty spirit bottles. Sensing that something was amiss, the proprietor promptly alerted the police. Officers swiftly arrived and took the drunken intruders into custody.

Investigations revealed that the culprits were no strangers to a life of crime. Considered "career criminals," they had rarely tasted freedom, perpetually finding themselves confined behind bars. In a peculiar twist of fate, they had been released from prison just a week prior to their ill-fated break-in. Now, their actions would send them right back to where they had spent a significant portion of their lives.

Though they may have been "career criminals," their prowess in their chosen profession was less than stellar. Their unsuccessful escapade served as a reminder that not all who embark on a life of crime possess the necessary skill and finesse to carry it out successfully.



Ball of wool

In Ilkley, I was assisting Clancy install a system in a very small new jewellers shop, we were to install the alarm prior to the shopfitters and the unit was an empty shell, the unit was over a hundred years old, measured approximately five meters by five meters and had a door that was recessed into the shop space.

At the left side, a wall had been inserted to close off the staircase to the upper floors which were to be let separately. In the back corner behind the counter was a hatchway leading to stairs into the cellar, illuminated by glass lights in the pavement. In the other back corner was a large safe, bolted to the floor.

To say the alarm specified was high security, was to say the least. The ceiling, underside to the staircase to the upper floors and wall to the staircase was to be CC wired at two-inch mesh. (four circuits at eight inches spacing in one direction and four more at eight inches spacing in the other, resulting in two-inch squares attached to battens and then covered with hardboard).

The safe was to have a safe cupboard installed, this was a joiner built wooden cupboard with removable interior panels, all sides and top were wired, again at two inch mesh, the front door was fitted with a triple pole high security contact at top and bottom and a Chubb contacted five lever lock installed which when locked, engaged the wiring and contacts twenty four hours a day.

The safe itself was to be fitted with a Burgafon MK4 which was drilled and tapped to the front of the door, a rotating keyhole flap was built in and the unit would activate if so much as a drill was detected cutting into the safe. The front door had CC wire on the solid lower third, a tube and batten CC wire frame over the glass

top section and a contact, then a Chubb five lever contacted lock fitted to set/unset the system.

Then, as if this were not enough, Burgafon detectors were installed on the cellar walls, these are the same as protecting bank vaults. In addition, frames were to cover the cellar lights and the front display windows were to be foiled. (lead foil tape glued onto the glass with varnish, a skill that has died out).

Clancy and I worked on the installation for nearly three weeks, on the last day, we were making the frames for the cellar lights, this involved cutting battens with pre drilled half inch holes at four inch intervals down one side, with a machined groove running the length which intersected and joined the holes, then cutting half inch aluminium tube to size, inserting the tubes into the battens, building what looked like the side of a babies cot.

Finally, wires were threaded through the tubes and stapled into the pre-cut grooves, the frame would then be fixed over the area required and secured with tamper bolts, (these had a hole through which the wire ran) that would detect if the frame was prised from its location.

The shop was on a hill, and it was a hot sunny day, so we set up a frame building camp in the street outside the front of the shop. The CC wire we used to thread the frames came on two hundred- and fifty-meter coils and was designed to break easily.

Clancy got a bit too hot and took a short toilet break, when he returned to the shop there was an elderly lady, very nicely dressed (this is Ilkley after all) standing near the shop, she asked him “is this yours?”, and handed him what looked like a ball of wool.

It was in fact the roll of wire, it must have rolled down the street, across the road and down the next street, she had noticed it and rolled it up in the way she would have with a ball of wool until she reached the frame where it was attached, and met Clancy.



Training - again

Training sessions were held in the stores from time to time, there was a dedicated classroom with tables and chairs, whiteboard etc. Sometimes it would be just for apprentices and other times engineers such as new equipment releases etc.

To start with the sessions were basic, how a relay works for example. In that session several of us were asked to build a working relay solution on the bench with wires, solder relays and a battery.

Some made a simple switch to turn a light on and off. Some used more than one relay to create more complex circuits such as and/or gates.

My own effort comprised twelve relays, with power applied, relay one closed, this put power on to relay two, which closed putting power on to relay three, and repeated until relay twelve closed. Relay twelve disconnected power to relay one

causing the whole circuit to cycle continuously making a continuous clicking noise as each relay in turn closed then opened in sequence.

The training engineer Terry said, “that’s very good, but what does it do”.

As we progressed, I became more skilful and was often asked to help build parts of the training room for teaching purposes, hence when the first of three microprocessor panels were launched, I was tasked with installing one in the room and building a box full of indicator lights to display all the outputs so that an engineer could see at a glance the status of the panel.

Needless to say, this happened again with the second panel release. Unfortunately I was asked to attend both training sessions for the engineers, having fully understood the panel, and built the indicator box with some thirty five lamps, it was tedious sitting through the first session, without having to do it twice in one day.

On the second round, I was leaning back on my chair with a grin on my face and my eyes shut, when the training officer lost his rag. “Philip, are you listening” he said, I immediately opened my eyes and rolled the chair back on to all four legs, sorry, I said, I was just thinking about last night’s episode of ‘The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy’, well that was it, all the engineers were in tears of laughter and the training officer no longer had control of the room.

It was a bit of a love hate relationship between myself and Terry training officer, he never really gave me credit for building all the new systems in the room or the time I had spent on site training, he always started from the point of view that I had no knowledge of any given piece of equipment unless he had provided training on it.

Terry frequently became frustrated with me when I would interrupt sessions to correct him. On one occasion, he was discussing transistors, at this time, Chubb did not trust to solder these into the circuit boards, they were always installed into sockets to facilitate their easy removal and replacement.

In this session, Terry training officer had used the white board to draw a circuit, part of one of the panels, he went on to explain how the circuit worked saying so as we can see, this is an NPN transistor.

At which point I raised my hand; he did not want to take my question so ignored me and continued. The NPN transistor works by applying a small negative current on the gate which turns the transistor on allowing a large proportional current to flow across the collector and emitter.

My hand was still up, so he reluctantly said, yes Phil, I stated that if the small current on the gate was negative, then the transistor must be a PNP, not an NPN as described, he thought about this for a minute, that went on, yes he said, so this is a PNP transistor.

One of the engineers overheard Terry saying to my favourite supervisor, Gordon. “That Phil, correcting me like that in the training room, makes me look like I do not know what I am doing in front of the other engineers.

It was probably fair to say that my face did not really fit at Chubb.



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<https://offtheleash.net/2016/12/18/10-really-interesting-things-i-saw-in-toronto/samsung-camera-pictures-1070/>

The Featherstone Kite

The Merrion Centre in Leeds, originally an open air shopping centre underwent a multimillion-pound refurbishment in the 1970's and was enclosed with a roof to provide almost a million square feet of retail shopping arcade complete with cinema, supermarket, car parking etc and was the largest mixed use development of its kind in the world when completed.

The centre utilised a Chubb alarm for the council offices and other sections, however as the new roof was completed, a new art installation was to be installed, this comprised of an ornate glass structure to house The Featherstone Kite, the gentleman's flying machine, by Rowland Emmet, a renowned cartoonist.

Originally the kite was activated by a sensor, however it was quickly modified to activate for two minutes every half hour. It consisted of basket work with many other parts that were animated to give an impression of flight, complete with a life-sized gentleman puppet as a pilot. Whilst running, there was a musical soundtrack to complete the experience.

The kite was already completed and installed when a decision to add the protection of the intruder alarm was made, the surveyor called to look over the possibilities, however the kite was installed as a free standing structure in the main entranceway, with solid concrete floors around the location, which were then finished with tiles.

Whilst the kite had power, the cables could no longer be accessed and no thought to installing additional cables had been given. Eventually, much to the disgust of the architect and Mr Emmet, a cable was dropped from the ceiling some seventy feet above the kite's glass display case. This permitted the installation of break glass detectors which were bonded on to each glass pane in the display case.

The cable, leaving the ceiling and dangling down to the case was always visible and soon went black with dust and cobwebs.

Every time I walked through the Merrion centre, which was at least once a week on college day, it always stood out to me as a planning failure.

The Merrion Centre in Leeds, originally an open-air shopping centre, underwent a remarkable transformation in the 1970s. A multimillion-pound refurbishment project turned it into a thriving enclosed retail shopping arcade, covering nearly a million square feet. With the addition of a roof, the centre boasted a cinema, a supermarket, ample parking, and various other amenities. It was an ambitious mixed-use development and held the distinction of being the largest of its kind in the world upon completion.

Chubb's state-of-the-art alarm system was employed to secure different sections of the centre, including the council offices. However, as the refurbishment progressed and the new roof was installed, plans were set in motion to incorporate a captivating art installation into the design. This installation was centred around a magnificent

piece called *The Featherstone Kite*, created by Rowland Emmett—a celebrated cartoonist renowned for his imaginative creations.

Originally, the kite was activated by a sensor, but it was soon modified to engage for two minutes every half hour. The piece was a marvel to behold, featuring intricate basket work and a host of animated components that brought the impression of flight to life. The installation even included a life-sized puppet of a gentleman serving as the kite's pilot. To enhance the experience, a musical soundtrack played alongside the spectacle.

The installation of the *Featherstone Kite* was already complete when a decision was made to augment its security by integrating it into the intruder alarm system. A surveyor was called in to assess the possibilities, but due to the unique nature of the installation, it posed a challenge. The kite stood as a free-standing structure in the main entranceway, surrounded by solid concrete floors that had been finished with tiles. Unfortunately, this layout presented difficulties in accessing the necessary power cables or installing additional ones.

Despite the challenges faced, a solution was eventually implemented. Much to the architect's and Mr. Emmett's disappointment, a cable was dropped from the ceiling, hanging some seventy feet above the glass display case that housed the *Featherstone Kite*. This allowed for the installation of break glass detectors, which were carefully bonded onto each pane of glass in the display case. However, over time, the cable became visibly conspicuous, gathering dust and cobwebs as it dangled down from the ceiling to the case.

As I walked through the Merrion Centre, a place I frequented at least once a week during my college days, the sight of that cable always caught my attention. It served as a stark reminder of a planning oversight—a detail that, in the grand scheme of things, may have seemed insignificant but had a noticeable impact on the overall aesthetics and harmony of the space. Nonetheless, the *Featherstone Kite* continued to captivate visitors with its whimsical allure, showcasing the creativity and imagination that went into its design.



Cable for snow chains

Chubb Alarms had a policy of not lifting floorboards etc. to install cables, instead all cables would be run surface, under carpets, on skirting boards, on plate racks or even picture pelmets.

They had manufactured especially a flat four core cable in cream and brown PVC to match either cream or brown woodwork.

The cable had Chubb especially chosen coloured conductors. Whereas other intruder cables had red, black, yellow, and blue cores, Chubb flat cable was red, black, orange, and white.

The cable comprised of two cores either side of a thinner groove in the top of the PVC sheath, this groove was the point of fixing, whereas round cable was fixed with clips, the flat cable was fixed with panel pins, nicknamed gimps, the cable would blend in to skirting board mouldings etc, so actually worked very well.

Engineers would stretch the cable to remove any curvature or kinks, then press a gimp into the groove, finally hammer home the gimp with a small pin hammer.

Engineers joked that after installing a few hundred metres of cable, we all suffered from an industrial disease, gimpers thumb.

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

I was working one day with Martin when it started to snow heavily, we had been given permission to go home early in such circumstances, and bearing in mind I was riding a motorcycle, we left mid-afternoon to avoid getting stranded.

The snow was really heavy and part way home Martin's Sunbeam Alpine got stuck on a hill, I parked the bike and tried to push, but it was hopeless.

Then Martin had an idea, the wire wheels on his Sunbeam were ideal for us to thread flat cable through and around the tyre, after about fifty threading on each rear wheel, Martin tried again at climbing the snowy hill, this time the car went straight up without hesitation and he made it home safely.

I, on the other hand, still had to ride the motorbike, however as I was used to riding in winter, I too made it home safely.



The cable installation machine

Bradford was on the cusp of becoming one of the pioneering cities in the UK to have its very own waste recycling plant. The main structure had been completed, and some of the essential waste handling machinery had been installed. It was an ambitious project aimed at promoting sustainability and reducing the city's environmental impact.

Given the location of the plant within the city, amidst several vast scrap yards, metal recycling facilities, and landfill sites, it was deemed necessary to have a robust intruder alarm system in place. The area was known for its unsightly appearance, frequented by traveling junk collectors and sellers peddling scrap to various private yards. This made the plant susceptible to theft and damage, particularly given the high value of the sorting machinery.

To aid in the installation of the alarm system, I joined forces with Clancy. This was a unique experience for me, as we were equipped with a scaffold tower—a first in my line of work. The tower boasted ladders and scaffold boards for multiple lifts, along with wheels on the main frame and long outriggers for stability. It was designed to prevent any toppling accidents and ensure our safety while working at heights.

As we climbed up the scaffold tower, clipped sections of cables, descended to adjust and lift the outriggers, moved the scaffold tower, reset the outriggers, and climbed back up again to continue the process, it became evident that this method would be incredibly time-consuming.

However, Clancy's resourceful mind soon came up with a brilliant solution. He suggested that if we set the outriggers just off the ground, he could climb up the scaffold tower, clip a few meters of cable, and I could slowly push the scaffold tower along as he continued clipping. This ingenious approach allowed us to swiftly cable up the entire recycling centre in a matter of a few hours. Satisfied with our accomplishment, we decided to take a well-deserved break and enjoy a celebratory beer during lunch.

As we sat in the pub, Clancy had a revelation. Inadvertently, we had created a makeshift cable installation machine—a process that significantly expedited the installation work. It was as close as Chubb would ever come to having its own specialized cable installation apparatus. We chuckled at the realization, appreciating the efficiency and time-saving solution we had stumbled upon.

Little did we know that our impromptu innovation would leave a lasting impression on us. It reminded us of the ingenuity that can arise from challenging situations and the ability to find practical solutions to streamline our work. It was a testament to the resourcefulness and adaptability of engineers like ourselves, always ready to come up with creative ideas to overcome obstacles and deliver quality results.

Chapter 11

A few very short stories





Tits like coconuts

Working on a system with Ray in Armley Town Street, I was sent out to buy sandwiches and drinks, as I walked back clutching these a very attractive young woman walked past, everyone was looking at her as she was wearing a T shirt which said in large letters on the front “Tits like coconuts”, as she passed, the back of her shirt said, “Sparrows like peanuts”.

I arrived back at the site and my colleague was hanging out of the doorway. Did you see that? he said. Ray had obviously noticed her too.



Great Dane ate my dinner

As I accompanied David, a service engineer, on a work assignment, little did I know that the day would take an unexpected turn during our lunch break. With our stomachs growling, David suggested a delightful plan: grabbing some delicious fish and chips and enjoying them at his nearby house. Eager for a tasty meal, I readily agreed, unaware of the surprise awaiting me.

Upon entering David's house, my senses were immediately struck by the size of his pet great Dane. Towering over me, the magnificent dog stood proudly, its immense paws seemingly capable of enveloping me entirely. Before I could react, the great Dane playfully jumped up, placing one paw on each of my shoulders. The unexpected weight sent me sprawling to the ground, caught off guard by the dog's exuberance.

While I was still processing the sudden turn of events, the great Dane seized the opportunity and swiftly made its exit from the house, triumphantly carrying my cherished fish and chips in its mouth. It was a sight that elicited equal parts astonishment and amusement. I couldn't help but chuckle at the audacity and swiftness of the dog's thieving escapade.

As I picked myself up from the floor, dusting off any remnants of embarrassment, David rushed to retrieve the stolen meal. With a mix of laughter and exasperation, he managed to reclaim the pilfered fish and chips from the canine culprit. Although our lunch plans had been temporarily thwarted, the incident left us both in stitches, turning an otherwise ordinary day into a memorable tale.



Supervisors broken indicator

As the day unfolded in the bustling stores, there was an undeniable sense of unease in the air. Peter, our dependable supervisor, made his entrance, visibly shaken and clutching a peculiar object in his hand—a broken indicator stalk from his car. The perplexing scene immediately piqued everyone's curiosity, and we eagerly gathered around, eager to hear the tale behind this peculiar incident.

With a mixture of disbelief and frustration etched on his face, Peter recounted the events that had transpired. It all began innocently enough as he approached the stores, stopping at the nearby junction, waiting for the traffic lights to change. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, another motorist forcefully pounded on his car window, startling Peter with an unexpected intensity.

Caught off guard by this startling intrusion, Peter instinctively wound down his window, hoping to understand the reason behind this sudden commotion. In a surreal moment, the stranger's hand darted into the car, ruthlessly snapping off the indicator stalk, brandishing it as if it were some symbolic trophy. With an air of audacity, the stranger delivered a biting remark, "If you aren't using your indicators, you don't need this," flinging the broken piece into Peter's lap before disappearing into the urban throng.

Stunned by the audacity and sheer absurdity of the encounter, Peter was left perplexed and bewildered. As he held the severed indicator stalk in his hand, it symbolised more than just a broken car part—it encapsulated the unpredictability of life's moments and the extraordinary behaviour one can encounter in the most mundane of situations.



How Clancy got his nickname

Gordon was a man of mystery when it came to the origin of his peculiar nickname, Clancy. For years, he guarded the secret, refusing to divulge its origins, leaving his friends and colleagues in a perpetual state of curiosity. It wasn't until a fateful and alcohol-fuelled night out that the truth finally emerged, thanks to the loose lips of one of the seasoned service engineers.

The scene was set in a lively pub, where Gordon found himself surrounded by his fellow engineers, their laughter and camaraderie filling the air. As the pints flowed, the merriment reached its peak, and Gordon, still a novice in the art of drinking, found himself succumbing to the intoxicating effects of the alcohol. One too many pints proved to be his downfall, rendering him unconscious and sprawled beneath the table, lost in the haze of the night.

Amidst the revelry, an elderly gentleman, donning a flat cap, pipe in hand, and accompanied by his faithful sheepdog, occupied the neighbouring table. Observing Gordon's sorry state, the old man leaned over to the group of engineers, a knowing smile gracing his weathered face. With a touch of nostalgia, he remarked, "Ay lad, tha reminds me of my old dog Clancy."



Andrew fish n chips

During my time assisting with the signalling changes, there was an incident that unfolded in the alarm receiving centre, which was situated on Park Square in Leeds—a rather run down location that has now become a trendy hub for lawyers and barristers.

On that particular day, a batch of fish and chips had been delivered for everyone's enjoyment. Wrapped in traditional newspaper, the delectable parcels were eagerly passed around to all those present, spreading the mouthwatering aroma through the room. Little did we know that this innocent act of communal feasting would soon take an unexpected turn.

Amidst the excitement and anticipation, Andrew, one of our colleagues, was struck by a sudden urge that couldn't wait. Oblivious to the imminent commotion his actions would cause, he found himself in the restroom, trousers around his ankles, and fish and chips precariously balanced on his lap. To make matters even more unconventional, he had propped the door open.

As the alarm centre staff processed this peculiar scene, a mixture of shock and disbelief settled over the room. It was indeed an odd sight, peering into the restroom to witness Andrew engaged in the most private of activities while simultaneously indulging in the shared feast of fish and chips.

Once Andrew concluded his business and departed from the restroom, a wave of bewilderment and unease lingered in the air. The staff exchanged glances, each

person grappling with their own internal reaction to this unorthodox display. It was clear that what had just unfolded defied societal norms and left an indelible impression on our collective memory.

In the aftermath of the incident, murmurs of disapproval and discomfort circulated among the alarm centre staff. The scene they had witnessed was regarded as distasteful and unsanitary, challenging the boundaries of acceptable behaviour within the workplace. Conversations ensued, with colleagues expressing their astonishment and sharing their personal reflections on the matter.

The incident served as a reminder that even in the most unexpected of circumstances, it is crucial to maintain a certain level of decorum and respect for communal spaces. The sanctity of the restroom, a space traditionally regarded as private and separate from the professional realm, had been momentarily disrupted, leaving a lasting impression on all who bore witness.

As time went on, the incident became a cautionary tale, a story that was retold among the staff as a reminder of the importance of appropriate conduct and respect for shared spaces. It served as a lesson in workplace etiquette, prompting a renewed commitment to upholding professional standards and boundaries.

While the memory of Andrew's peculiar act may have faded over time, its impact lingered as a collective reminder of the unexpected and the need for common courtesy in even the most mundane of situations. From that day forward, the alarm receiving centre remained a space where professionalism and mutual respect prevailed, ensuring that the focus remained on the important work at hand, rather than on unconventional dining practices in the restroom.



Cable confiscated on the bus

One day, I was at the stores when I was told by a supervisor, I was to assist an engineer in the centre of Leeds. I was given a length of MICC (mineral insulated copper sheathed) cable and a large bag of other parts to carry to site, I pointed out that I had a motorcycle, not a car and was told, get on a bus.

So, I duly caught the bus, the roll of cable was very heavy and approx. six feet in diameter, making it very cumbersome. The bus driver was not happy when I climbed aboard and put the cable in the rack for luggage and pushchairs.

Next an inspector joined the bus. He was seriously concerned that I had this huge roll of metal cable, he called the police who threw me off the bus and confiscated the roll of cable. It fell to the supervisor to recover the roll from the police station and explain why I had been sent on public transport with an inappropriate item.



The boudoir – service engineers terrified

On a seemingly ordinary Monday morning in the bustling stores, where installation and service engineers gathered to coordinate their assignments and collect necessary parts, a rather unexpected topic emerged from the lips of Martin. He eagerly shared an intriguing detail about a recent installation he had completed—an unconventional boudoir master bedroom.

As Martin's words reverberated through the room, a sense of intrigue and curiosity settled over his fellow engineers. The vivid description painted a picture of a bedroom adorned with a mirrored ceiling and walls, draped in sensuous red bedding. Whips and bondage clothing hung provocatively, while wardrobes concealed an array of sexually charged costumes and gimp masks. The revelation was met with a mix of amusement, astonishment, and perhaps a touch of apprehension.

Aware of the unique nature of this installation, the service engineers quickly realised that they might find themselves on call when the lady of the house decided she required the services of an engineer beyond the typical working hours. Discussions among the engineers turned to the question of whether they could refuse to attend such a request or demand that, if called, two engineers be dispatched to handle the situation.

A palpable tension filled the air as the prospect of a strike loomed. The engineers engaged in passionate conversations with their union representative, exploring their rights and potential courses of action. They grappled with the delicate balance

between personal boundaries and the obligations outlined in their employment contracts.

Days passed, and a resolution began to take shape. Letters arrived for each engineer, their contents illuminating specific sections of their contracts of employment. As they carefully read the highlighted passages, it became clear that they were indeed obligated to attend should the lady of the house call upon their services. The weight of their contractual commitments prevailed over their initial hopes for negotiation.

Reluctantly, the engineers acknowledged that they were bound by their professional duty to respond to all service requests, regardless of the unique circumstances they might encounter. The reality of the situation settled in, and the initial fervour that had ignited talks of a strike dissipated. While a sense of trepidation remained, a newfound professionalism took hold.

Though discussions around this particular installation had stirred emotions and sparked debate, the engineers realised the importance of separating personal opinions from their professional obligations. They understood that their role as service providers required them to approach each assignment with a high degree of professionalism and respect, regardless of the idiosyncrasies they might encounter along the way.

The story of the boudoir master bedroom installation became a memorable chapter in the engineers' collective experiences. It served as a reminder of the diverse nature of their work, the need for open-mindedness, and the importance of upholding professional standards in all circumstances. Ultimately, it deepened their understanding of the unique and varied challenges they might encounter as service engineers, inspiring them to approach each task with a combination of expertise, professionalism, and an unwavering commitment to customer satisfaction.



For the benefit of the deaf

College day came around again, it was often dull but sometimes things occurred which lifted the day out of the dull category. One such occasion occurred when we returned for the evening class, this was to be held in a portacabin and we all piled in when the lecturer arrived with the keys.

Within a few seconds we all piled back outside, as one of the students had dropped his guts and the smell was intolerable. Standing outside waiting for the air to clear, the lecturer said, do you know why farts smell?' We started to think but after a minute or so he told us, it's for the benefit of the deaf.



Roundhay swimming pool

On a particular day, my colleague and I found ourselves at Roundhay Park outdoor swimming pool, a seemingly peculiar location for a service engineer to be working. Curiosity piqued, I couldn't help but inquire about our purpose there. To my surprise, the response from my colleague was that we were tasked with removing the alarm system. Perplexed, I questioned the rationale behind such an action.

My colleague proceeded to enlighten me, explaining that the building housing the outdoor swimming pool was particularly susceptible to vandalism during the off-season. Aware of this vulnerability, the decision had been made to remove the alarm system temporarily, ensuring its safety in a secure storage box until the next operational season. The intention behind this rather counterintuitive measure was to safeguard the alarm system itself from potential damage or destruction by vandals.

The irony of the situation struck me—here we were, service engineers whose primary role was to install and maintain security systems, actively removing an alarm system to protect it from vandalism. It was an unexpected twist that challenged my preconceived notions about the purpose and function of security systems.

As I contemplated this paradox, it dawned on me that our actions were driven by the pragmatic need to safeguard valuable equipment. By removing the alarm system during the period when it would be most vulnerable to malicious acts, we were taking proactive steps to ensure its longevity and effectiveness. In a world where unexpected scenarios often call for unconventional solutions, this approach demonstrated a commitment to adaptability and resourcefulness.

While the removal of the alarm system from a location supposedly in need of protection may have initially appeared contradictory, it underscored an important principle: the value of strategic thinking and proactive measures to preserve the very tools designed to enhance security. The decision to temporarily store the alarm system not only prevented its potential destruction but also showcased a prudent approach to safeguarding valuable assets.

This experience served as a reminder that the world of security is complex and multifaceted. It challenged my assumptions and reinforced the notion that effective security requires a holistic approach—one that considers both the immediate and long-term protection of assets. Sometimes, unconventional solutions are necessary to address unique circumstances and ensure the integrity of the systems we work with.

As we completed our task and securely stored the alarm system, I couldn't help but appreciate the unexpected lesson I had learned. It underscored the ever-evolving nature of our profession and the importance of adaptability in the face of diverse challenges. From that day forward, I carried with me a newfound appreciation for the intricate balance between security measures and the need to protect the tools we rely on to maintain that security.



Jewellers ‘lost’ diamond ring

Whilst working in one of the oldest established jewellers in Bradford, I found a large diamond solitaire ring under one of the counters, I pointed this out to the engineer I was working with, he said, do not touch it, just leave it exactly where it is.

Later over lunch off the premises, he said, the ring is an honesty test trap placed there by the store management, if it goes missing we will be held to account, even if you pick it up, you could be accused of intending to steal it.

When we returned after lunch the ring had gone, no one said anything but it came to light later that some years ago in the same shop, a pearl necklace had been discovered down the back of a wall unit by an engineer working on the alarm, foolishly he took the necklace and was subsequently dismissed from the company never able to work in the security industry again.



Tea in jam jars

Chapelton Road in Leeds was a poor area, the shops were run down and very shabby. Working in a store selling clothes which looked like it had not seen any changes for seventy years, we were disappointed when the staff made tea for all, excluding us.

After two days, my colleague said, loudly enough to be heard, “I would love a cup of tea” when the staff were handing out freshly brewed cups.

Next time the staff made tea, they asked us if we would like a cup, and we both replied enthusiastically, yes please. A few minutes later we were pointed towards a tray by the kettle, on the tray were two jam jars with tea in them, picking the glass jars up, you could see remnants of mouldy jam still in the jars.

We elected to leave the jars untouched and they never asked if we would like a cup again.



Tools law

At technical college one day we were brushing up on several laws. First up was Ohm's law and Kirchoff's voltage law.

Then we covered Joules law, gouss's law and Calumb's law when one of the students interrupted the lecturer.

Have you heard of Tools law, he asked?

The lecturer thought for a minute and said, no I cannot say I have heard that one.

To which the student replied, it's the angle of the dangle multiplied by the heat of the moment.



Control panel on the back of café door Skipton

On one occasion I was in Skipton and called in to the bus station café for refreshment, sitting down with my mug of tea and anticipating the full English I had ordered, I was struck by the Chubb CA45 control panel fastened to the bottom of the entrance door to the café just a few inches above the floor as the top three quarters of the door was glass.

Every time a customer arrived or left; the panel would stop the door from opening fully as it collided with the serving counter.

It struck me that this was a serious fire risk, not only was the door not able to fully open in an emergency, but rechargeable batteries installed in the panel could be heard rattling around when the door banged shut, a short circuit would cause a fire.



Dead animals in panels

Throughout my career as a security technician, I encountered countless intriguing moments that merged the realm of technology with the unexpected realities of life. One recurring occurrence that never failed to bewilder me was the discovery of lifeless creatures within locked intruder alarm control panels. These unexpected encounters often held curious clues, as if carefully staged to convey a message.

I vividly recall the instances when I would cautiously unlock the control panels, only to be confronted by the stillness of death. A lifeless mouse would be meticulously positioned on one side, while on the other, a fully loaded mouse trap stood ready, baited with a tantalizing piece of cheese. In other instances, a deceased bird would rest alongside a packet of sealed bird seed, as if in an eerie partnership.

The perplexity of these scenes lingered in my mind, raising questions that remained unanswered. Why were these arrangements left behind within the control panels? Was it an elaborate prank, a cryptic message, or perhaps an attempt to highlight the vulnerability of these systems?

As I pondered the motives behind these enigmatic scenes, another thought crept into my mind: Did the customers even notice the faint odour that gradually permeated the air as the decaying creatures lay undisturbed within the confines of the control panels? Were they oblivious to the silent presence of these unexpected guests, their attention consumed by the pressing demands of their daily lives?



Insulation error

Working in the stores I had noticed that one of the service engineers had arrived and been handed several boxes full of polystyrene packing chips, this occurred three times over a period of several weeks, so I asked Mark the storeman, what is he doing with all that.

Mark said, he is insulating his loft space, he has had us collect all we can for almost two years now and as far as I am aware, he is about three quarters completed.

Another nine months passed, and the collection service continued. Then one day in the stores, the service engineer had borrowed the work van over the weekend.

Mark nudged me and said, you know it's taken him three years to complete the insulation of his loft, well last week a surveyor was employed to check the property as he is selling it.

Guess what, they deem the polystyrene as a fire hazard, he has had to remove it all and fit fibreglass insulation instead. Hence the loan of the van to dispose of all the chips.



Using packaging as a toilet

During my time working alongside Martin on various construction sites, I encountered my fair share of challenges and unexpected situations. However, none left me as flabbergasted as the day I realised the site we were working on had no proper toilet facilities. It was a distressing revelation, and I couldn't fathom how we were expected to continue our work without such a basic necessity.

Determined to find a solution, I approached Martin, hoping he had some ingenious workaround up his sleeve. And to my surprise, he did. With a mischievous grin on his face, he opened the external bell box, revealing a makeshift arrangement he had devised. He removed the cardboard carton and carefully unwrapped the polythene bag that contained the bell, placing it inside the box. Martin then gestured toward this peculiar setup and proclaimed, "Here's your toilet!"

My jaw dropped in disbelief. The bell box, which was originally meant to serve as an important component of the alarm system, was now being repurposed as a makeshift restroom. Martin even pointed out that the bell had come wrapped in tissue paper, an unconventional but supposedly suitable substitute for toilet paper.

Though I appreciated Martin's resourcefulness, I couldn't bring myself to accept his unorthodox solution. The thought of using a bell box as a lavatory, regardless of the tissue paper, was just too unpalatable for me. I knew I had to explore other options,

Alarming Stories – Philip Wilkinson

even if it meant venturing farther from the construction site in search of a proper facility.

Reflecting on that bizarre moment, it serves as a reminder of the unpredictable nature of our work environments. Sometimes, we are faced with challenges that push us to our limits, testing our creativity and adaptability. While Martin's solution may have been unconventional, it highlights the resilience and problem-solving spirit that can arise in even the most unexpected circumstances.

End

I hope you enjoyed reading Alarming Stories, Tales of an apprentice intruder alarm engineer. Please look out for the next volume. Tales of an alarm engineer which covers the period following my apprenticeship.

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Other publications by the author

<https://www.alarming-stories.co.uk>

Alarming Stories II

Tales of a security engineer

During my period as a security engineer I witnessed many interesting situations. The following tales give a flavour of what it was like in the industry in the early 1980's.

It also provides an insight into many rude, funny, and sometimes downright dangerous situations I encountered during the early years of career.

The stories that follow were mainly witnessed by myself first-hand, a few were related to me in great detail by the engineers I worked with. Care has been taken to conceal the names of the people I worked with to protect their identity, however I suspect many will be able to recognise themselves when they read the book.

Alarming Stories III

Tales of a security company director

In this captivating book, drawn from the author's recent chats, we are invited into a world of captivating stories, poignant reflections, and transformative experiences. Over the course of just seven days, we are taken on a whirlwind journey that encompasses the full spectrum of human emotions and explores the profound depths of the human spirit.

From the laughter that echoes through light-hearted banter to the tears that flow in moments of vulnerability, these chats are a testament to the power of connection and the resilience of the human heart. Through the author's words, we gain insight into the challenges faced, the lessons learned, and the growth that emerges from navigating life's twists and turns.

The blurb provides a glimpse into the diverse range of topics that unfold within these chats. It highlights the author's ability to captivate and engage readers, as they share personal anecdotes, delve into deep philosophical discussions, and

provide thoughtful advice. Each conversation is a microcosm of the human experience, inviting us to reflect on our own lives and find meaning in the shared struggles and triumphs we encounter.

Throughout the pages of this book, we are reminded that within the digital realm lies the potential for profound connection, genuine empathy, and the exchange of wisdom. From discussions on personal growth and self-discovery to reflections on love, loss, and the pursuit of happiness, the author's chats offer a wealth of insights and inspiration.

Whether you're seeking solace in the face of adversity, seeking guidance in times of uncertainty, or simply craving a deeper understanding of the human experience, this book will resonate with you. It is a testament to the power of conversation, the beauty of vulnerability, and the limitless potential for growth and transformation that lies within us all.

Prepare to be moved, uplifted, and inspired as you dive into the pages of this extraordinary book, crafted from the profound conversations that have unfolded in the author's recent chats. Let the author's words resonate within you, and embark on a journey of self-discovery and connection that will leave an indelible mark on your soul.

<https://www.itsonlythedirtyoneswedontwant.co.uk/>

It's only the dirty ones we don't want

The story of a kid growing up I the 1970's

Within the pages of this book, you will find a collection of delightful conversations, where the ordinary is transformed into extraordinary tales filled with humour and wit. It is a testament to the power of imagination and the joy that can be found in even the most mundane moments.

The title of the book refers to one such tale involving a camping trip to the Hill Inn, Yorkshire, arriving soaked to the skin and plastered in mud, having fallen off a motorbike in the muddy construction for a car park, we noticed a new sign on the door, no motorcyclists allowed, the landlord called us back and holding the door open said "you two are alright, it's only the dirty ones we don't want". This is typical of the many tales in this book, a reflection on life, sometimes shocking, sometimes

rude, sometimes laugh out loud funny and when put together a record of a kid growing up in the 1970's.

Recalling this tale, I was reminded of my experience starting high school, Government free school uniform was cheap and nasty by comparison with that offered for sale to wealthier families, once again I spent two years being bullied and segregated for being poor, my peers took one look at me and decided it's only the dirty ones we don't want.

In a journey through these light-hearted exchanges, we encounter an eclectic mix of topics, from tribulations in school, to motorcycles and rallies to pub escapades and unexpected surprises. Each question, transformed with a touch of humour, breathes new life into the mundane, inviting us to embrace the absurdity and find laughter in unexpected places.

Through the lens of this writer, we are transported into a world where storytelling and amusement collide. The author's playful approach, rewriting ordinary narratives with a twist of humour, infuses each page with a sense of whimsy and delight. From camping trips to rally mishaps, no subject is off-limits when it comes to tickling the reader's funny bone.