

## CALUM GRANT AND L S D

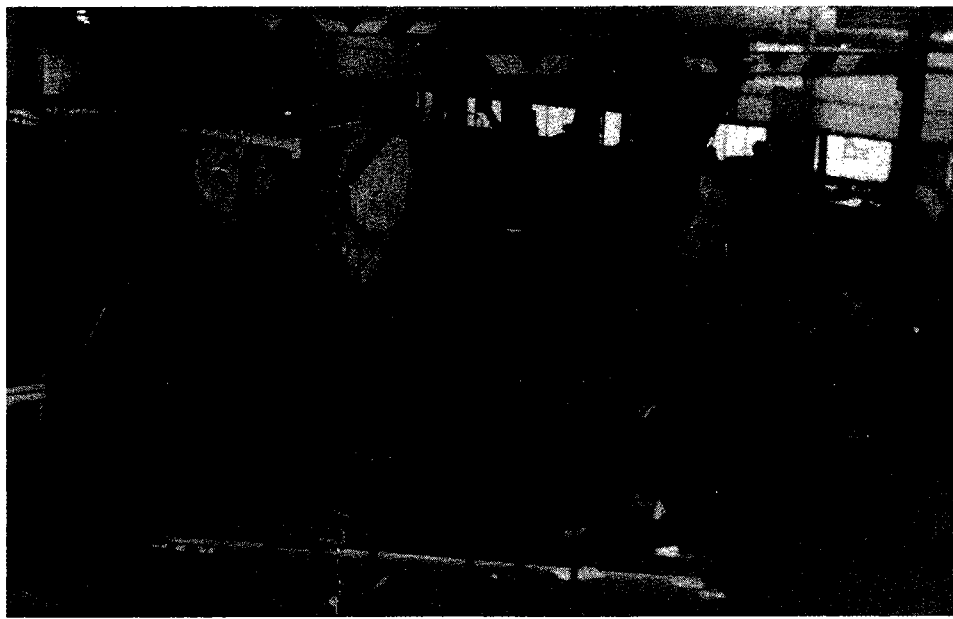
A GREAT number of elderly residents of East and Midlothian will know these names do not refer to drink and drugs, but to an important part of our local industrial history. From Edinburgh to Dunbar there are very few towns and villages which are not home to someone who had worked with Calum Grant of Gladsmuir.

In 1946, when the war was coming to a close, the workforce in East Lothian was greatly swollen with returning servicemen and redundant munition workers. Calum Grant, who worked in his family's shopfitting business in Edinburgh, moved into ex. RAF repair hangars in a wood at Gladsmuir and, with a small group of technical workers, founded a light engineering company called Calum Grant and Partners.

Calum had managed to obtain a contract to manufacture the steelwork for a very important venture. In the aftermath of the war another company was being formed in the East of Scotland, "Crudens". This company was taking advantage of the after war boom in house building and had designed, because of the timber shortage, an all-steel-framed house. Calum Grant and Partners were to be the sole manufacturers. The factory was leased, the contract signed - all that was needed was a workforce.

Recruiting was soon underway, and that was the beginning. Miners, grocers, white-collar workers - they came from all trades, eager not only to earn a living but to take part in this new venture in East Lothian. The Directors too were enthusiastic, determined to make this a really modern production unit. They did succeed in many ways, implementing workers' welfare ideas, ideas which were unknown before the war.

One of the first priorities was a works canteen, which was first class for its day as it was well staffed and supervised by a real chef - always immaculate in his whites and high chef's hat. The meals were good and reasonably priced, free for anyone staying to complete some extra work. The vegetable and fruit for the meals were grown in a garden inside the factory grounds, tended by gardeners, and a small poultry farm provided fresh eggs. As the factory itself was in the middle of a small wood, the setting seemed more suited to a farm produce unit than an engineering factory! Another priority was a first aid centre with a full-time nurse and welfare officer in attendance. The welfare officer, Miss McQuiston, must have had a stout heart to deal with some of the wilier

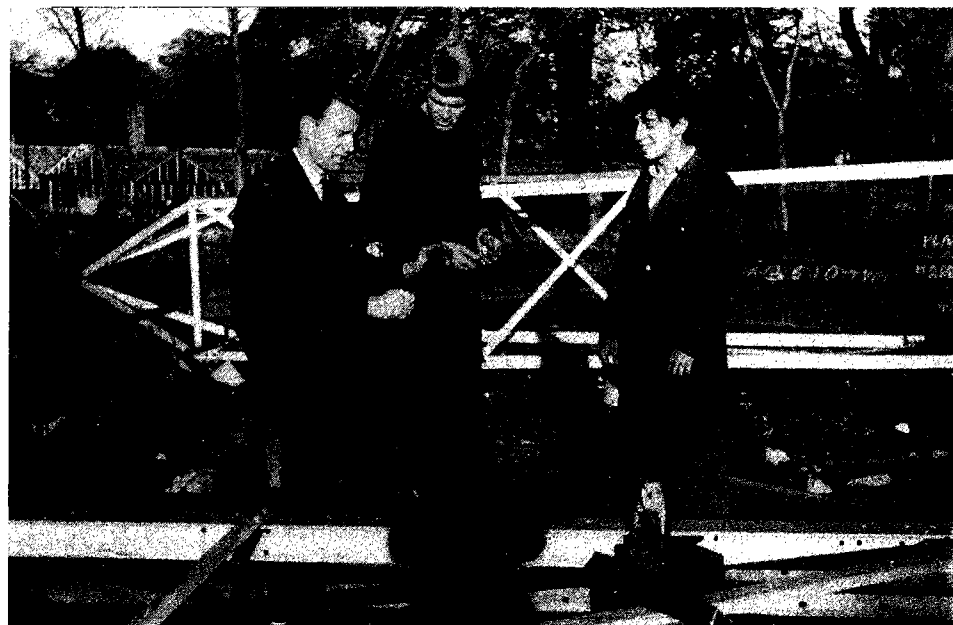


*Gladsmuir Factory main workshop*

characters among the employees. She certainly must have been a bit gullible and soft-hearted as she was often hoodwinked and played upon by them.

She wasn't the only one, as I can personally recall being taken in. A worker from the city professed to be a piano tuner and offered to tune my mother's piano, which was her pride and joy, for ten shillings. One evening he accompanied me home. After eating his high tea he produced his kit of tools and commenced work on the instrument. Two hours later he was paid and left for home. Maybe pianos have a different sound in Edinburgh but the piano was more out of tune than when he started! It cost Mother another fifteen shillings to have it re-tuned!

The work going on at the factory at the time was fabricating the steelwork for a house and a great deal of electrical welding was required for this. During the war female welders had proved to have a special flair for this work, so a third of the



*18th October, 1966 - (left to right) J. Wilson, R. Grant, D. Philips in the yard at Gladsmuir factory.*

workforce were women, mainly young girls. Needless to say many romances blossomed among the workforce, resulting in scandals, broken hearts and battles. Quite a few of those romances however, had really happy endings and there would be a spate of weddings taking place in the weeks running up to the 6th April to qualify for the tax rebate! Many families in the area were started thanks to Calum Grant and a nice windfall from the tax man!

Those getting married received a serviceable gift and anyone ill or in financial trouble could rely on their workmates for support. (No social security in those days). Groups and clubs were formed and the lunchtime football kick-around grew into a team called "Lothian Rose", which took part in local league matches. This reflected in the wonderful community spirit among the people in the factory at that time and everyone subscribed happily to all sorts of

collections. Sadly, perhaps because of Calum's modern welfare, ideas like flowers, gardens, duck ponds, free Christmas dinners, free meals, gardeners, chauffeurs and so on, he had to sell out and in 1959 Ayrshire Dockyard Co., took over the factory.

The new owners were much more business-like. They changed the name to Lothian Structural Development Co. Ltd. (L S D) and branched out into heavier engineering, starting to manufacture pylons and towers which carried the overhead electricity cables. The factory expanded rapidly with more buildings and plant being added, and the duck ponds, flowerbeds and gardens were claimed for material storage.

The main workforce was by now a very good team, which had been formed in the early years through everyone pulling together to establish the factory, and so it remained. Over the ensuing years workers came and went, although there were now less women being employed due to the work being heavier, with not so much welding required. Many of those who worked at Gladsmuir will remember some well-known characters. One of these was Wullie Fraser, who would never see anyone stuck for money and would lend them a few shillings even if it was just for entertainment. On the quiet, he would send the gift of a few pounds to someone who was off work sick, and I personally will never forget his generosity to my wife and family when I was off work for a long time. Wullie was too honest to make much bonus, as he would never cheat on his return sheets.

Archie Parks was another character. He would sing all day while his machine was running, and also wrote poetry in the style of Burns (mainly the bawdy type). Old Jimmy Thomson, nearly ninety years old, used to wander round the factory with a crown of some sort of weed on his head, which he maintained kept the midges and cornflies away. He was a great walker and told stories of the many miles he had covered on foot. One day he said he was going to walk from John O'Groats to Lands End.

A man called Luke Clerk worked at the factory but he was also a bit of an entrepreneur as he hired out deckchairs at Portobello beach. His job in the factory was "sweeper up" but you would not have guessed it, as with his suit, shirt and tie, and immaculate hairstyle, he was more like one of the directors of the company. He was an interesting man to know, being very well informed. He was a ready source of business news, as he claimed to be a personal friend of the Directors!

The Managing Director at that time was Pat Toner, who was always ready to stop

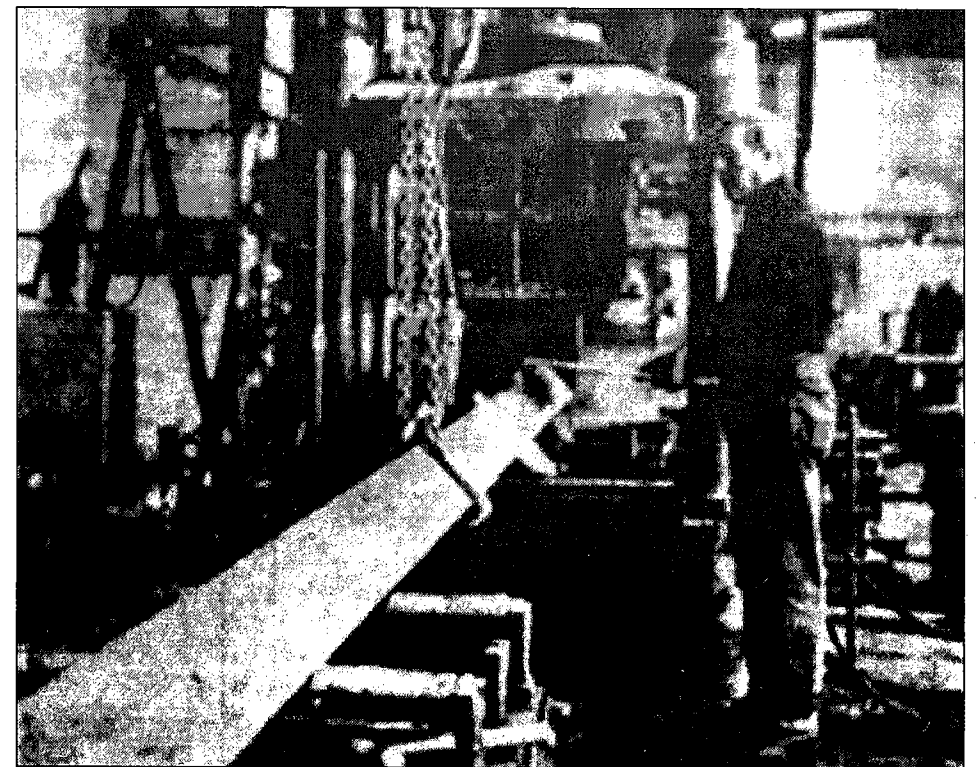


*Christmas Party-time in the early 60's*

and chat to the workers while on his frequent rounds of the factory, and like Wullie Fraser, often putting his hand in his pocket. It was his endless force, energy and leadership which built the company into one of Britain's main pylon producers. Such was the success of the factory at that time that the name L S D is still remembered as a symbol of perfection in tower steelwork. Its customers included all the major companies in Britain, all the electricity boards, Balfour Beatty, Marconi, Blaw Knox, J.L. Eve, and many others. All types of towers were made at Gladsmuir. Most of the top football grounds are floodlit by lights on L S D towers and ski lifts in Scotland and all over the world bear the company's mark.

The factory, which in its heyday employed 350 workers and produced 350 tons of steelwork per week, was in production from 1946 until 1980 and in that time hundreds of men and women found employment there. These people came from all over the country and indeed the world, as lots of nationalities were represented. Many of them on leaving the forces had settled in the surrounding towns and villages. That venture started by Calum Grant in 1946 has played an important part in the history of East Lothian. It was also the beginning of many lifelong friendships and marriages. Ask any ex-employee for his or her feelings about their time at Macmerry and they will agree that these were happy times indeed.

*JOHN KAY WILSON*



*W. Russell heating a steel bar before it is bent according to precise specification in the hydraulic press (in background).*