

Living the good life

MY wife and I bought a small and somewhat dilapidated bungalow mid-'86 in NE corner of Anglesey with superb views of sea, mountains, Puffin Island and Great Orme. Much work needed to raise status from hovel-set-in-wilderness to home-amid-garden but considered to be worthwhile on account of location.

Still at it, hoping to make the place more manageable before old age really sets in. Daughter and family within half a mile: son and his, 18 miles away. Another son is student at Bangor, now in finals. None of us is Welsh but four grandchildren and a son can speak it, so have a ready answer should anyone query our moral right to live here: not that they do or would — we have received nothing but courtesy and pleasantness from the locals.

Am keeping very well, occupied and happy. We must be happy because time passes so quickly. I dream about life in Marconi's most nights, still. Not nightmares by any means but almost always problems to do with getting something produced against a time limit despite some vital shortage, a developmental or experimental problem in the labs or — and this is so common — some organisational or accommodation snag to which a solution is never possible.

When, in waking hours, I think about my working life — 49 years of it — am struck by how the greater part was spent in such crummy surroundings. Except for a short period at Farnborough in 1940 and New Parks, Leicester, in the seventies, almost everything before and since was pretty rough. In latter years so

We asked Colin Latham to give us some idea of what life is like now that he has retired from Marconi. The breezy notes that he has sent us by way of response are more than just an account of his activities, they contain some typical Latham wisdoms.

much of my time, and that of other senior people too, was dissipated on problems of accommodation to the detriment of our proper function as engineers. I often wonder if the innovators in industries abroad — our competitors — spend most of their high-salaried time trying to find and juggle bum-parks for their staff! What a waste of talent it is.

I've thought a lot about such things and, seeing them now with the perspective lent by time and distance, feel moved to construct a simple book about that odd thing called 'Management'. However, do not feel too enthusiastic about completing that until I see some success with my MS 'Companions to Owls' which so far has failed to tickle the fancy of a publisher or agent. This full-length novel which, after initial planning, took 18 months of pretty hard slog-ging to knock into shape, is one that I would really like to have published, not so much for any money it might bring (though that would be welcome) but because I sincerely believe that the tale is worth telling.



It takes more than a hand-pushed lawn mower to tame the Latham acres.

Why should I be so presumptuous? — I will try to explain.

Like others, I am dismayed by declining standards and regret the apparent indifference shown by many today to those old traditional elements of British life such as church and chapel attendance, reasonable courtesy to elders, regard for public property and clean sports meetings without hooliganism. That is one element of two. The other is that I would dearly love to see more historical records of the spirit of the early radar chain.

My story, which starts just before the war, tries to portray the lives and thoughts and feelings of typical young men and women who get caught up in the secret but rapidly expanding radar system and how, in

their small way, they contributed so much to the total effort of the nation. It is also, in a way, a very gentle and incidental course in basic radar. Some publishers say I lose sight of the storyline at times: perhaps I do, but perhaps they do not see that all the incidental events have a purpose in describing that vanished world in which churches could be left open round the clock without danger of vandalism, and in which, despite the war, a letter posted on Sunday in the country would reach its destination on Monday.

If I have an ambition, it is to make this book successful. I feel it to be a work of conscience as much as anything. Perhaps I shall have to take it to pieces and learn how to rebuild it if my present style continues to leave the publishers cold.

I don't think there is a lot more to say. Imagine us here, happily doing endless jobs around the place. Vera tackles the garden and fights the ground elder! I cut the grass, maintain the vehicles and am gradually building up my little workshop, rejoicing all the while at the absence of accommodation problems and fictitious budgets. When tired of that I write, which is what I think I enjoy most of all, even if nobody takes much notice!

The city of Bangor (a bare 10 miles of easy driving), through the faculty of music in its University College, provides excellent opportunities for hearing really first class concert performances from time to time, and there is always the joy of Choral Evensong in the Cathedral whose high choral standards are renowned,

these days, through the widespread fame of its son, Aled Jones.

I have to confess that I support the Cathedral in preference to any local church from purely selfish motives. My experience in every village, and we have lived in many, is that soon after first attending church I am utterly committed — admittedly by volunteering — to repairing the organ, extending the lights or providing sound systems for the fête. (Even without trying at all I have become the electrician responsible for lighting the Art Exhibition of the annual Beaumaris Festival, both last year and this.)

Such jobs I have enjoyed in the past but they are best done by younger folk and there is nothing worse than an old bloke taking on too much and getting bogged down, to everyone's embarrassment. Worse still, one could be invited into that unholy circle where, so often and so sadly, the Devil and Intolerance reign supreme — the Parochial Church Council! With the Cathedral that is less likely to happen so I can come and go in peace. Very selfish . . . but I try to salve my conscience on the grounds that I AM supposed to be retired.

As a 'Visiting Fellow' of the University I go and come there, too, and that has led to many pleasant relationships with interesting people, so all in all, Bangor is a good place to be near.

They have recently restored and reopened the old Victorian Bangor pier, so if ever I do get fed up and want to jump off one, there's even a posh facility right handy!

28°C to +2°C in a space of twenty four hours — it is an excellent place for catching pneumonia!
The last few months have

Mulrooney!) remains Prime Minister.
We also had an earthquake in the area — yes, Ottawa in fact is on a 'fault' and in a

Canada most households make an effort to decorate a tree or the outside of the house or apartment with coloured lights. These look very

Christmas holidays behind and turning to Marconi Radar matters, I am pleased to report that all four of our S511 radar systems, sold to the Canadian Department of National

Graham Kirkington and Tony Icke, completed a 10-week S511 radar course in December, provided to DND at CFB Chatham, New Brunswick. This is the most recently com-

sales manager for the Americas based in Ottawa, Canada. Before that he was in a similar post in the Marconi Electronics Inc office in Washington DC.

Go on — you can manage

says A-Z writer
Colin Latham

PREFACE

IN recent years many books have appeared on the subjects of management, management principles and management techniques.
Most of them are quite useless because, after wading through thousands of words, the reader is no better suited to management and has got nowhere.
This book is equally useless. However, being shorter and cheaper than most, it does enable you to get nowhere more quickly and at minimum cost.
Also, if anyone asks whether you have studied management techniques you may truthfully answer 'Yes, of course' without revealing the dubious source.
Thus you may keep them happy for the time being, and that, in its way, is part of the art of management.

In his article 'Living the Good Life' which appeared in the August issue of *News and Views*, retired chief engineer Colin Latham mentioned that he was toying with the idea of writing a simple book 'about that odd thing called management'. We have persuaded him to let us publish some of his first random thoughts on this weighty matter, which to him, 'is being lent perspective by time and distance'.

MANAGERS, who come in a wide range of different sizes, are sometimes boringly similar in appearance (like a set of twist drills which, all looking alike, also go round with a cutting edge). Alternatively, managers may not look at all alike; they may be male or female; gorgeous or positively repulsive — usually the latter. Either way, like pills, they come in assorted strengths and sizes.
The fact is that the term 'manager' has become so degraded that it is now one of the most ambiguous and least definitive in the language. Indeed, it's almost as bad as 'engineer', applied equally to the chap who calls to fit service replacement bits to your telephone, cooker or other basic home equipment (a resourceful wizard, a downright yobbo, or anywhere in bet-

ween) as to the brightest university graduate in engineering science who goes on to become a latter-day Brunel or Marconi.
Range
To return to managers. Consider how it is that there exists such a range (some might say blight) of them. The local shoe shop manager is in charge of a staff of three or four. The supermarket manager, perhaps a dozen or 30 or more. The technical manager of a large engineering company may have a staff of hundreds, made up of engineers, draughtsmen, and technicians. The boss of a group of companies, himself a manager responsible perhaps for thousands of workers, will have many layers of managers under him with titles such as engineering manager, sales manager, forward planning manager, overseas business manager, establishments manager, personnel manager,

business development manager, management development manager and a string of u-name-it managers.
The list is endless and it grows all the time. It never stops: perhaps one day everyone will be a manager and then, as W S Gilbert pointed out, everybody will be somebody and nobody will be anybody. Still, we won't worry about that now; let's just think about what these various managers do.
Singletons
Most people bearing the title of manager in the large companies have a defined range of responsibility and a staff to assist them in carrying it out. Others are singletons: they have a responsibility — often a most important one — but they act alone, in some cases without even a secretary of their own. Nevertheless, the modern custom is to call them



Colin Latham — busy in his retirement

managers all the same.
I want to make it clear that in this useless book, I am directing my questionable thesis at the first lot: those, that is, whose primary task it is to run a gang, a section, a group, a department, a division or whatever, inevitably made up of real live, fallible, loyal, loving, mistrusting, industrious, lazy, apathetic, am-

bitious people. The usual mixed bag, in other words, be it large or very small, 'Hi-tech' or no tech at all.
So we are talking about all sizes and kinds of managers who manage PEOPLE. Therein lies the crux of the matter, because people are people and, as such, can often seem to be utterly unmanageable . . .

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