

# An account of the Harris Lebus factories by Olive



In 1935, when you left school, you were expected to go to work. I was 14 years old and was offered a job at Lebus to join their stock-taking team. Stock-taking at Lebus seemed to be an annual event and, for me, an opportunity for first employment. I remember well the long pink form I had to fill in with information about the quantities of wood held in stock. From this I learned how many different types of wood there were.

The office I worked in was called "the cost office" and on most of the desks there was a machine called a comptometer. Being a curious youngster, I took every opportunity to get acquainted with this strange machine. This interest was noticed and led to my attending lessons at Aldwych House every week. I will never forget how grown up I felt travelling alone to attend these classes. I even had the courage to enter Lyons Corner House and buy a cup of tea and a crumpet, that being the cheapest dish on the menu!

Following these lessons I became a "Comp" operator and had to finish off the completion of the aforesaid pink forms by entering the cost price of each piece of wood and then calculating the total value of the whole stock.

Before becoming a Comp operator I had been the office runabout (I can't remember the actual job-title or even if there was one). One of the duties of this job was to deliver post throughout the whole of Lebus works

and offices. Walking from the office down a long corridor you reached two workshops; one side was making and assembling the furniture before putting it on conveyor belts. The conveyor belts then took this furniture to the opposite workshop to be finished off, polished etc. I had to manoeuvre between this and many other workshops, hopping between wardrobes and sideboards on my route around the building.

Eventually I would arrive at the Field Office which was outside and amongst the piles of wood that had just been transferred from the barges on the River Lea. How lucky I felt to have such a rewarding job and I always looked forward to the daily routine of delivering post throughout the firm. One fond memory of my trips through the workshops was getting a really loud wolf whistle from some poor-sighted worker. This was a boost to a shy, unconfident teenager and something you miss at 94 years old!

Then came the war and I joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and, in this role, ended up some nights back at Lebus. They had organised entertainment for the night workers and to my great surprise and embarrassment I was 'marched' from Fire Service duty to where this so-called entertainment happened and told I was to do an act tap-dancing and community singing. I'll quickly draw a curtain over that; I was not equipped or of any use for either.

The air-raid shelters provided were used quite frequently and if you didn't go too far in you could sometimes get a glimpse of a dog-fight in the skies above.

I really enjoyed my time at Lebus and it gives me great pleasure that my son is working at Lea Valley Estates which stands where Lebus once was and who now has a fresh interest in my first job.



## Hale Village Wins Silver Gilt Award for London in Bloom

For the first time Hale Village entered into London in Bloom 2015 and we were delighted to receive a silver gilt award.

The London in Bloom campaign is the largest horticultural campaign in London, and takes a more integrated approach to community improvement using horticulture as its foundation. Hale Village was judged on three main areas; horticultural achievement, environmental responsibility and community participation. We hope to re-enter the campaign next year in addition to applying for a Green flag

The judges commented that; "overall site has great potential and feels very community orientated. The engine room is definitely the hub of the community, engaging a wide variety of community projects, people and ages. The standard of maintenance is high but still evolving".

We hope to improve upon Hale Village's entry each year and would like to thank the many organisations and individuals who helped to make the Village a shining example for urban development. If you would like to help Hale Villages campaign please contact [James@halevillagelondon.com](mailto:James@halevillagelondon.com) for advice on how you can participate.