

HARRY MOFFAT PIERCY

(BOCM employee 1908 – 1959)

Harry M Piercy was born 18 November 1894, his father being a barge builder, building and repairing vessels for the onward travel of goods which arrived in Manchester via the ship canal.

Harry started work at the BOCM Trafford Park Mill in 1908 aged 14. Learning the milling business during the day, and furthering his education at night school in Stretford. He was to spend his whole working life for BOCM except for the years of the 1st World War 1914-18. He served in the Manchester Regiment, fighting in a number of campaigns and with the rank of Sergeant he commanded a platoon of Gurkhas (for whom he had a life long admiration and respect). He was injured from shell blast at the Dardanells, and after recovering in a field hospital, he continued to fight to the end of the war, returning home from Malta with the Rank of Sergeant Major. Demobbed in 1910, he was happy to return to work at Trafford Park Mill.

Things were altering in Britain after the war, and the corn trade was affected as much as any. Harry had joined the sales staff and spent much of his time at the various corn exchanges, which then abounded in the North West, selling oilseed cakes and grain to the local merchants who visited these exchanges. However between 1919 and 1921 BOCM decided to “modernise” (Is there anything new in this world?!!!).

In an attempt to by-pass the corn exchanges they experimented by introducing “Commercial Travellers” Harry being one of them. For the next 38 years he was what is now called the Area Representative in the North West. The boundaries of his area were altered occasionally. For example the Isle of Man was juggled between the reps for years – but his basic area was North and East Lancashire.

He often recalled to his family how difficult the transition period was. Dealing in the exchanges was fine and indeed continued for another couple of decades. But to gain the trust and respect of the local merchants as a “Traveller” called for a totally new type of selling technique. Indeed a full 6 months of persuasion and perseverance passed before his first success “on the road”.

This landmark sale was often quoted by him as “The best moment in my whole life”.

The sale was: “7 tons Decorticated Cotton Seed Cake to W & J Pye, Lancaster, by rail to Lancaster Green Ayre Station, carriage paid home”.

That sale cemented a life long friendship with one of Pye’s directors, Mr Tom Pye.

Other customers began to acknowledge the benefits of the new business methods, and so Harry carved out a very successful career.

Another early customer who also became a close and loyal friend was John Proctor of Goosnargh near Preston. He was a big strong man who challenged Harry to wrestle him to the ground to win an order. Harry was bigger and stronger – he won! We were always assured that this was a true story!

One of the first women to work for BOCM, as a short hand typist, was Ethel Hartley. Harry and Ethel were married in 1922 and moved into a house in St. Annes-on-Sea. They soon realised that a more centralised location would be more convenient for daily travelling, so in 1926 they bought a brand new bungalow at Broughton near Preston and lived there to the end of their lives. This new property had 3 bedrooms and 1 electric 2-pin socket and cost £560.00. They paid 27/6d (£1.37½p) for a second socket!

BOCM did not provide any transport for their salesmen until after the 2nd World War. Harry had been on the road for 26 years before a car was provided. During those years he bought himself 5 bicycles.

Bike No.1 - was at home for local journeys, and to get himself to Barton and Broughton Railway Station.

Bike No.2 – was kept at Jon. Huddlestons Mill on Lancaster Quay to cover that area.

Bike No.3 – was at Parkinson & Tomlinsons at Poulton-le-Flyed to cover the Blackpool area.

Bike No.4 – at E.J. Andrews of Ormskirk for the South West Lancashire area.

Bike No. 5 – was at Preston Farmers Depot at Colne to cover East Lancashire.

He was very fit, and was very rarely ill. As soon as a telephone exchange was built in Broughton he got a phone “Broughton 76”, and every morning at 7.30 the lady at the telephone exchange would ring him to make sure it was working. The whole family woke up every day to the words “morning Maud”.

Nobody seems to know how he came to possess a driving licence, he certainly never took a test. But when his first car was delivered by a man from Hull, he assured him that he was quite capable. This vehicle was an Austin 8HP Reg. No. HLD 15, the man from Hull drove it back to Preston Railway Station to get a train home. Harry then drove back to Broughton, his driving style being uncomfortably different to that shown by the man from Hull!!

He had arranged to garage this vehicle at a neighbour’s until we built our own garage, but unfortunately we had to repair some considerable damage to theirs first. This was caused by HLD 14 not stopping very first time it was being put to bed!

As life got back to normal after the 2nd World War, alterations within BOCM were immense. Most notable being the development in the manufacturing of compounds, rather than the selling of straights. A new service for farmers was introduced by the advent of advisory teams. Harry was duly given the title of ‘Area Representative’, and was allocated the services of two advisors initially, Dudley Wright was the Cattle Advisor, and Nat Nicholson for Poultry. Both men were real experts in their fields, and much appreciated in the farming community.

These two advisors were assisted from time to time by others, and due to their efforts and, no doubt, the high quality of the products, Harry's area regularly topped the BOCM National Sales Figures.

After the War, he introduced a warehousing scheme to save outlying merchants the trouble of having to travel to Manchester for their Provender. These warehouses were at railway stations and manned by B.R. staff. Butler Street in Preston was particularly popular.

Towards the end of his career, and because of his years of experience along with his natural outgoing personality, he would often be called upon to make speeches or presentations at Company events, even to retiring senior management.

The Austin 8 was soon changed for something bigger, because without the exercise he also got bigger. When he retired in November 1959 he kept the Austin A60 and he weighed 18½ stone. He would rather not have retired, but we believed he did enjoy the company of the grandchildren we provided for him. I know the feeling – half a century later!!

Harry died in 1977 aged 83.