

Toton Sidings 1950 Bringing Electric Light

I am Alan Atkinson aged 82 yrs . When I was 15 yrs old, I worked as an Apprentice Electrician at C.A.Newton & Co of St James St, Derby. This company was asked to light up Toton Sidings with electricity. Formerly this was all gas lighting.

We came from Derby each day in an ex army “Bedford Van” and entered the Sidings via Canal St.

Most of my colleagues were working in the Garratt engine shed which housed an enormous turntable. During their arduous task of scraping all the soot from the iron girders to install the conduit and wiring, they were blacker than chimney sweeps.

I fortunately was working outside on my own installing a large green and white flood light to light up the ramp where a tank engine shunted the coal trucks to form a goods train which went to the collieries for coal.

My first task was to tie 3 pole ladders together – one on top of the other and climb up the outer wall of the engine shed. I used very primitive tools such as a piece of gas pipe which had teeth marks cut into one end and which I belted into the brickwork with a mallet. This was to make 4 holes. I then inserted the bolt heads, put clay from the canal underneath and poured in molten white metal which I carried up in a ladle. When this was set, the base plate for the flood was bolted on ready for the final fixing.

During this period, a company called Murphy’s supplied navvies to install ladders with a light on top between the lines in the marshalling yards. I assisted in connecting these to electricity!