

### Third time lucky.

The summer of 1973, three A-levels behind and three months of holiday ahead of me, and I have arrived at the converted chapel on my first day at *Clog* – a small, but growing, manufacturer of climbing paraphernalia. It's already been a hot summer and there is no sign of it getting any cooler. I clock in and am taken to the machine where I will spend the rest of the day – it's a 'war-finished' lathe, thirty years old, and feeling the heat. I stand in the same spot, watching the same tool as ice-screw after ice-screw drops into the wooden box at the end. I am covered in coolant, a mixture of oil and some other unnamed stinking liquid, and struggle to breathe through the cottonwool mask. The constant scream of the machines is deafening so I wear earplugs and sing Beatles songs to keep myself sane. How do the others stand it? I never find out as four days later I clock off, never to return.

'Get yourself a bar job – it will lead to other things,' my father advises.

He's right. After three days of lacklustre bartending (I couldn't pour a Guinness, and who knew that you put Worcester sauce in a tomato juice?) I serve a builder and tell him I have always wanted to be a labourer. Early next morning, I am standing on a corner, packed lunch in hand, waiting for the arrival of a battered, white transit van. I flag it down, chat to the driver, and am soon surrounded by shovels, picks, and bags of cement, heading for a building site in Anglesey.

When I arrive, the gaffer takes a long look at me and decides digging is not for me – or, more accurately, me not for it. He asks if I have passed my driving test and I answer in the affirmative. 'Right,' he says leading me to a big, yellow tipper truck, 'Drive round the site and clear up all the plots – old bricks, bottles, litter – that sort of stuff.'

'What? I get to drive the tipper truck?' I ask, as a lifetime's ambition is within moments of fulfilment. He nods, and after the briefest of staff training, I'm off. The sun is shining, I am in shorts, T-shirt, and a baseball cap. I'm in seventh heaven!

The next day, the student (that's me) is called to the site-office. 'Oh, and take a shovel,' an old hand tells me. I am led to a new area of the estate, posts and string marking out the line of the ditches needed for a block of ten houses. The gaffer explains that the ditches need to be a metre deep and about the same width – 'and mind the sides don't collapse on you.' My jaw drops and I cut my first untidy clod, and stop only when my boss returns and, smiling, tells me that they've decided to bring in the mechanical digger. I have been duped – the labouring equivalent of 'standing there for a long weight, ordering the bubble for a spirit level, or requesting a pound of elbow grease.'

I am a rookie, green, and ripe for ribbing. But I am happy, and £5 a day better off. That's twice what the factory was paying.

What is there not to like?