## Some Family and Friends' Reflections on The Life and Times of Mike Lyons

## Elevonic Expert & Microprocessor Guru



Mike was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1945 in Kings College Hospital, Denmark Hill, South London.

His family consisted of his Mum Maggie, Dad "Big Fred" and his brother Freddie. They lived in South London near the Borough. Mike attended English Martyrs RC School in Flint Street, Walworth.

On leaving school, he started his lift career just one day before his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday in the stores for J & E Hall in Silex Street (within walking distance from his home) whilst waiting to start an apprenticeship at 16. Even then apparently, he was already displaying a great recall for part numbers.

Halls were founded in 1785 by John Hall. J&E Hall were always at the leading edge of many engineering developments. Two of their famous engineering pioneers were Bryan Donkin (for his paper making machines) and Richard Trevithick (one of the greats of high-pressure steam history). J&E Hall were working on early steam turbines in 1830! Business areas included food canning, refrigeration, and many other areas of engineering. But refrigeration became their major business. Around 1925 they started producing lifts and paternosters. Lifts provide vertical transport, so do escalators. So, in 1931 they teamed up with Carl Flohr and installed five escalators for Bentalls of Kingston, the first building East of the Atlantic to have escalator's as an integral part of the buildings structure.

Hall's had a well-established Apprentice training program for craft, technical and student intake. To this day Hall's still have a research and development office in Dartford.

When he was sixteen Mike became an apprentice on construction and lift repairs, but would you believe, he most enjoyed the service department, and in particular fault finding.

On completion of his apprenticeship 1966 he was assigned a service route on the Paternoster Row project in London, the installations used Norbit1 solid state technology. Hall's at that time were leaders in the use of Mullards Norbit 1 and Mike was in his element.

It was also here that Mike first met Margret, his wife to be.

At this time lift manufacturers were generally still using relay control systems, Otis using group control systems utilising hundreds of relays plus electronic valves - very sophisticated in its day. These were complex in operation and required a good electrical knowledge to be properly understood.

In 1960 Mallard's had introduced its Norbit 1 system, a series of components within a plastic shell which could be wired up to perform tasks that were usually performed by relays. Hall's had quickly spotted the advantages of the Mullard's packaged electronic system and had been building complex control systems using Norbit 1. Additionally, they had started to use glass balustrades on their new Crystalair escalators

Otis made a good purchase in 1968 when they acquired Halls lift and escalator section as they had some incredibly good people, Mike among them. He was obviously very technically orientated and was almost instantly seconded to Otis's technical section. Otis at that time were also going through some rapid technological changes from relay to Norbit2, then on to another technology called CMOS.

Construction and Service testing personnel were merged into the Field Operations Department with a new Field Engineer Gerry Arnold with two assistants, Dennis Kelly and young Mike Lyons. Their main job was to introduce the new equipment into the field and to assist in any trouble shooting. During this period Mike was always trying to extend his knowledge and expertise attending night school courses on programming etc.

Mike was sent to New York where the World Trade Centre was being constructed, working on a High-Speed system designed in the USA. In the late seventies Otis launched its Elevonic 101 system, their own first fully electronic system, featuring, electronic motion control, power generation door drive control etc.





The people in Otis UK, the Otis world, and the Lift Industry who held Mike in high esteem are legion.

The following are the thoughts and memories of just a few:

"Michael and I both went on a Norbit 2 training course at the Borough Polytechnic one evening a week, for six weeks. The first few weeks were electronics theory, but on the fifth week we were set the task of building a circuit to control traffic lights. I was sitting on the desk next to Michael. After some time, Michael had his light system working automatically in the correct sequence. My set blew a fuse, but no lights. As I recall Michael was the only one whose lights operated correctly. I will remember Michael as being smarter than most, always willing to listen, help and educate. In three words a nice person." - Derek Smith

"I have never forgotten, around 1969-70 as a construction supervisor on one of the first Otis Norbit 2 installations, a duplex five or six floors prestige job with a big penalty contract in St James Square, London. Following some advice, as I knew nothing about Norbits, I had allowed 3-4 weeks for test. The fitter was one of my best guys, the job was running on inspection, with test weights on site. Mike arrived on a Monday; I knew him from our time in Silex Street. I told the fitter to stay behind each evening and work over the weekends if necessary as I didn't want to see any items left behind when Mike had finished. I went to site the following Monday afternoon. Mike was in his suit with his brief case ready to go home and told me I could hand over the job if it was required. The architect and contractor were delighted, we were the first contactors on site to finish" - Johnny Nichols

"Mike was one of the very few people you would use Legend to describe. I started in 1983 and had heard of Mike Lyons years before I first met him, and then had the great pleasure of working in the same FOD team in 1993. I am sure he had a photographic memory. He could recall part numbers, and draw out parts of circuit diagrams with all the correct numbers and test points from memory - legend and a true gentleman!" - Tony Lippett

"He was lead technical support/superstar tester on Canary Wharf. Always so willing to help, always happy to explain and educate others, and how he would adapt what he said to suit who he was talking to making sure they understood, I learnt a lot from Mike, he was very kind and polite -agentleman" - Pat Gordon

"Some Express jobs needed a modification. Steve and I were to do the work. We met in London and Mike tried to explain what he was trying to achieve. When he saw our eyes were glazing over at his explanation, he just said I'll see you on site in the morning. It was about 150 miles, but that didn't bother Mike. We met the next day and the job was completed without any fuss. Mike was a big man with even a bigger heart." - Richard Hems

"Over the years we had many working trips together, Farmington and Bloomington in the US. The American's called us M<sup>2</sup> as we were always together. Visits to the Shibiyama factory in Japan, and many visits to other Otis facilities throughout in Europe. During the past few years since he retired, we have kept in touch over the phone and e-mail. Mike was a valued college and dear friend for nearly forty years"-Mike Bukata

"There are so many people Mike has helped for nearly half a century; we will all be forever in his debt". - Steve Scanes

"One of my fondest memories of Mike, was when he was made Canary Wharf Project Manager. He loved the position, and could often be seen round the Tower smoking a cigar which reminded me of Churchill. I kept expecting him to give the V for victory sign each time we successfully commissioned an elevator" - Chris Patey-Ford.

"Fond memories during a time of huge technical change for Otis, with Mike at the forefront. He was widely respected both in the UK and abroad for his exceptional ability and willingness to assist. As has been mentioned the term 'Legend' is not out of place, for someone who was not only an exception technically, but also a thoroughly nice person. It was a privilege to have known and worked with him" - Len Halsey Mike became Mr Elevonic in the UK and beyond of course, working all over the World. Elevonic used EPROM chips to provide a means to program the system to suit the building.

Elevonic 101 was surpassed by Elevonic 401. Mike was conversant with all these developments before finally retiring from Otis in 2006 after 45 years' service.

After a relatively short period of time Mike decided to develop a new enterprise with two ex-Otis associates "Lyons Lift Advisory Service". They provided technical expertise and supported many lift company's in the UK.



Mike often gave help and advice over the phone, as I can bear witness.

A big highlight of his later life was to be awarded an honorary life membership of The Royal Institution along with two other ex-Otis colleagues for their voluntary work restoring The Lantern Lift and The Victorian Passenger Lift, in The Royal Institution building in Mayfair London. Neither machines had been working for many years.



There are nearly sixty years between the design of the Royal institution Micro drive lift and the Elevonic 101 system that Mike was so familiar with. It is interesting to note that Elevonic 101 was the first system to consistently match the levelling performance of the old Micro drive.

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Derek Smith & John Nichols