

OUR DUTCH CONNECTION

The Rank Xerox Plant in Venray (Limburg Province) started life with several advantages. The site is flat (no massive earth-moving was involved), surrounded by forest yet within comparatively easy reach of large industrial and commercial centres such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Ruhr, Brussels, Paris and Milan. It was set up as a consumables plant and warehouse in 1965; machine assembly began in 1967, then in 1971 the Plant was extended and a new Supply Centre added, able to take advantage of connections with the main West European motorway network. Development has been rapid, and today there are some 3,250 employees. Though the Plant is well known to some of us, others have never been to Venray or even the Netherlands. To find out a bit more about it, and the much more recent development at Lille, VISION spent a few days looking around, talking to Mitcheldean people on assignments there.

June 17

I discover how trouble-free travelling is when you go Rank Xerox style. Driver John Bowkett chauffeurs me smoothly to Elmdon Airport, Birmingham. Roy Whittington of our Service Station comes too, talks about the weekend storms, says it was the first time he'd ever seen cars unable to drive up Plump Hill because of the water gushing down.

I think of the Netherlands, all that land carved up by canals, the continual fight with the sea which has given the Dutch such engineering skill.

It looks very watery as we fly over the polders — stretches of farmland, reclaimed from the Zuider Zee. We touch down at Schiphol (the only airport below sea level) after one hour's flight. Very warm, my fears of flooding recede.

Jos van Wersch, editor of Venray's magazine *Xerokrant*, drives me to Venray via Eindhoven, a bustling town virtually built up around the electrical firm of Philips. We visit the Rank Xerox showroom and say hallo to a selection of RX machines, then drink filtered tea at carpet-covered tables in a cafe nearby.

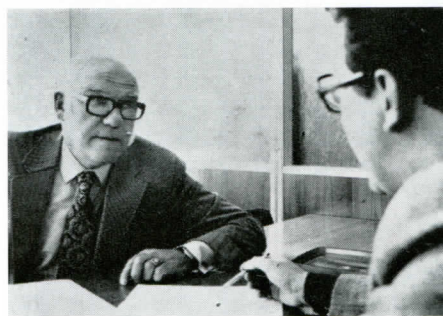
We leave Philipsville and make for Ranksville, wilting in the heat despite the open sun roof of Jos's Peugeot. I notice how straight life is — the roads, the lines of trees shaped like tulips. I note the sidewalk reserved for pedestrians, bicycles and motorbikes. I see people on bikes exercising their leashed dogs. Everything looks tidy — and so flat.

Am installed at De Zwaan (The Swan) in Venray's marketplace,

Hardly a Dutch person in the place. A Swede, a Swiss, a Spaniard (he turns out to be a QC man from the Madrid Plant), a Frenchman, a German girl (secretary to Mr Sonneborn, Aachen Plant General Manager) and several from the UK, including Ernie Phillips of Production Control, over here to do a 'support stint'.

June 18

Lille is my destination today. I go by taxi. Oh, those taxis! All black Mercedes and incredibly punctual, whisking people off to numerous destinations (no company cars at the Plant, I was told). My driver, tall and practically English-less, arrives.



Bob Baker, our galloping diplomat, talks with Josef Peeters, Manager, New Products Co-ordination Dept.

It's a 2½ hour drive to Lille — straight motorway all the way, bordered by small fields (no hedges, just wire fencing and those tidy trees), the odd house or factory, forests of conifers, never a suspicion of a hill. The radio belts out pop all the way, replacing the conversation we couldn't have anyway.

Into Belgium, then over the border into France and suddenly there it



Ernie Phillips of Production Control with Gerry van de Vinne, Manager of PCD's counterpoint at Venray. Their materials control system is in the process of being computerised.

is — the Lille Plant on our left, on a windswept plain at Neuville-en-Ferrain. We drive round to the gatehouse, fail to communicate with the French gate police but obviously have honest faces. I meet Isabelle Roussel, assistant to the PRO of SIRX (Société Industrielle Rank Xerox). She takes me to Lille for lunch (a major industrial centre). We drink to the fact that today Xerox stock has become available on La Bourse (Paris Stock Exchange).

At the SIRX temporary offices I meet Lille Plant General Manager Pierre Couque. I learn that production is due to commence in the next few months and final plans are now being formed.

Recruitment is helped by the fact that facilities and benefits are superior to those generally available. Am intrigued by the number of public holidays, some unknown to us. On September 2 there is the Braderie, a feast day peculiar to Lille area when everyone sells their second-hand goods!

We take a look at the super modern building of the RX Lille branch (Isabelle's husband is branch manager), then do a tour of the new Plant.

The production building is enormous (24,000 sq. metres). In most of the buildings all is bare and workmen's voices echo hollowly.

The evening sun catches the glass pyramids over the assembly hall-to-be, they blaze a golden Rank Xerox message as vivid as any neon sign. 'This will be a beautiful garden,' says

The Lille Plant — showing the office block and the vast production building.



Some of the PED team, seconded to Venray for the 3100 (Decoy) transfer — Geoff Howell (manager), Dennis Barnard, Don Meek, Roger Pearce and Clive Brain — outside the main office block. Mike Smith, George Swainson and Ian Forster returned first; by September all will be back except Clive Brain.

Isabelle, pointing to a square patio, blooming with builders' rubble. 'That's the lecture room/cinema. It will be egg-shaped! Here is the dining-room for visiting VIPs, there the medical and training centres.' I stumble over scaffolding to peer through holes in the wall and try to picture the finished decor.

The ground floor of the main office building will house a showroom, with offices on the two floors above. We walk through the cement dust, up stairs without benefit of bannisters.

A few men are working here, among them Pierre Coppernolle, Manager, Manufacturing Engineering. 'The third floor is for air conditioning plant — you want to go and see?' 'No thanks, I'll take your word for it.'

Goodbye to Lille, hallo to another 2½ hours' pop.

June 19

Around 8.15am most of the Swan's guests leave for Venray by taxi. I follow and meet the Communications Department team, headed by Cor Borsje. I see how the fortnightly house magazine *Xerokrant* is produced — each issue contains a critical article, not always popular in certain areas. Artist Cor Verbraak, who also organises the art exhibitions, designs the magazine; it is printed by the local newspaper and posted to people's homes.

I get the first of many cups of coffee;

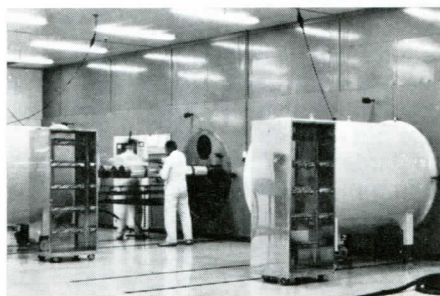
THE SWAN

A field engineer gets down to grass roots with a manufacturing programme co-ordinator; a production control chap drinks Pils (a light lager) with a computer operations manager; a plastics specialist talks to a production engineer. People of all nationalities representing all kinds of Rank Xerox activities get to know each other in this family hotel (one of several hotels used by the Company). Mine host is a lanky Dutchman known as George who sees to everything, including supervising the kitchen (he was once a Cunard chef). He's been to Mitcheldean and Rochester, he seems to know everyone. Certainly he provides a unique service to Rank Xerox — a kind of informal office extension. But the marketplace is too noisy at night for some, and George is planning a new hotel just outside Venray with 48 bedrooms, conference facilities, saunas — the lot — where he can look after RX people in more up-to-date surroundings. Here's hoping he can take the 'family' atmosphere with him.



the beverage is dispensed free all day long — a Continental custom.

Nolly Prinsen, Information Officer, who heads the team of plant hostesses (part-time), takes me round. The plant is not as big as Mitcheldean (it covers some 200,000 sq. metres) and the buildings are mostly single or two-storey. Because of the flat site, one is less aware of the extent of the place. Overall colour is grey, not red brick. Strictly regimented trees, plants in neat groups, everything tidily arranged. I note the numerous bicycles in their shelters, reflect what hard work it would be cycling to work over Forest hills. Cars are mainly Volkswagens, Fords — very few DAFs.



The aluminium drums which form the heart of our machines are coated with selenium in a dust-free air-conditioned atmosphere.

We start with Building A (all buildings are lettered, not numbered), the first to be erected in 1965. The tallest office building is called the Flat!

Nolly stops at the reception desk, speaks to the receptionist in Dutch, takes a 'phone call in French, then carries on her commentary to me in English. Three languages in five minutes. I feel a lesser European.

We take a quick look at one of the cheerful canteens (the canteen workers are employees). There was a restaurant for guests in the Social Centre before this was taken over

for offices. Current building work includes new canteen facilities plus a VIP restaurant and new showroom.

We visit the T (for Technical) Block and meet Geoff Howell, leader of the Decoy task force, and Dennis Barnard.

Remarkable variety of races represented at Venray (25, I was told) — people from Mozambique, Pakistan, Malaya, Borneo, Portugal, Ceylon, Indonesia, the USA — and so many speak very good English.

The PED first floor offices have inside windows overlooking the 3100 assembly floor. Dutch people love indoor plants but I'm surprised to see them on the shop floor — I catch sight of an ivy climbing up an airdrop!

There are three main assembly lines for the 3100; 7000, 3600 and 660 machines are also made at Venray.

Continued on next page

Julian Hazell doing a work-out in the Trimming Centre. Part of the 3100 programme management team at Venray, Julian is a voluntary keep-fitter, but the centre is dedicated to keeping RXV personnel who are over 45 and in the 'stress group' free from coronaries and other results of job pressure. The Plant has a full time doctor who supervises the medical side and 'treatment' in the centre is carried out during working time, under a qualified instructor.



OUR DUTCH CONNECTION

Continued from page 11

Offices below house Production Control Department where we meet up with Ernie Phillips once more. The people here are kindly and co-operative, he says.

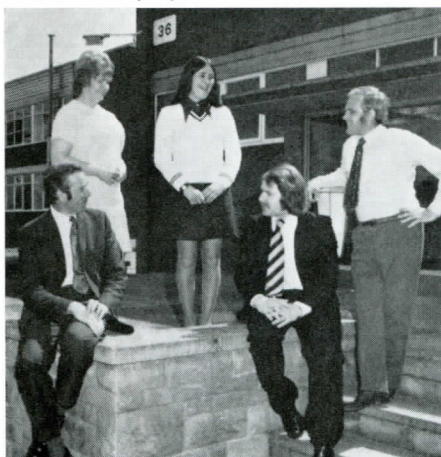
Am fascinated by drum coating operation in consumables department. Coated in white nylon first, I see the drums machined by automated diamond turning to get that polished surface, the chemical cleaning, drying ovens, inspection, etc. In dust-free, air-conditioned coating room I see rollers cleaned with hot air then loaded with drums; little 'boats' beneath filled with selenium (like ball bearings). Great white vacuum chambers swallow them up, low pressure causes selenium to coat surface of drums which revolve during process. Mr Hendrickx in charge; he tells me he used to work in coal industry — Limburg Province has large coal mines.

Visit Supply Centre and chat to Alan Phelps (now back at Mitcheldean) who has been helping develop a spares inventory control department. Richard van Wijk, Manager, Supply Centre, says there has been a big recruitment programme on the inventory transfer programme — workforce now numbers 151.

Supply Centre is currently 16,000 sq. metres and it is hoped to be able to increase this in 1976 by 10,000 sq. metres and again by a similar amount in 1978. 'We now supply not just EEC but also Operating Companies all over the non-American part of the globe.'

The Howells and the Barnards come to the Swan this evening. Dennis tells of Mitcheldean residents' debt to the RAF at Laarbruch station in Germany where some have participated in ten pin bowling, golf,

Editor of Venray magazine, Jos van Wersch (seated right), during his visit to Mitcheldean with supervisor Des Gibbs, operators Freda Jones and Marilyn Moore, and training supervisor Don Holder, all of 4000 Dept. Right: RX Venray is one of the few companies in the country to operate a crèche for employees' children.



Alan Phelps with his opposite number at Venray, Operations Manager Tom van Lanen, and (centre) Richard van Wijk, Supply Centre Manager.

squash and swimming. Darts was introduced into a local hostelry and Laarbruch people have provided strong opposition playing at a similar 'pub' close to the camp. Jennifer and Julian Hazell have become members of a tennis club, but many social clubs have long waiting lists.

We talk about TV programmes; lots of old English films on Dutch screen. Best story of the evening: full frontal nudes are commonplace on TV, and arouse no comment. But when someone impersonated Queen Juliana (back view, fully dressed, of course) preparing brussels sprouts, there was a howl of protest from the masses.

June 20

Jos takes me to visit the crèche, run by the Company for 30 or so children whose mothers work at the Plant (cost is around 50p a day per child). It is located at a Convent in Venray (it's a predominantly Catholic area). A specially-built single storey building copes with tinies from one to two years old — beds for daytime naps, and garden play area. The older ones are in a big, bright room in the main building. Fours and fives attend nursery school. Children start school proper at six years.

Later collect Julian Hazell's wife Jennifer and daughter from Horst. Like other school age children, their son goes to the Philips International School at Eindhoven. The family live



in Harry Hobus's house while he is in the USA and have made friends with Dutch and Irish people. We meet some other residents' wives at Brukske for coffee party. Brenda, Geoff Howell's wife, is our hostess. She shows me how Dutch builders make use of every available space in a small terraced house — fourth attic bedroom, downstairs toilet, lots of cupboards, open plan lounge/kitchen. We discuss food: Dutch breakfasts — cold meats, no cereals. Bacon is cut paper-thin, butter terribly dear, absence of English sausage keenly felt. *But*, excellent breads and vegetables, meat expensive but filleted so no waste. Children's shoes £10 a pair! Shopping easy in supermarkets. Dutch housewives are apparently very house-proud — bedding hung out on lines, furniture moved into gardens, windows cleaned energetically. No class discrimination as we know it, people are pigeon-holed by their income groups.

June 21

My last day. I manage a quick visit to the new Data Centre, due to open officially on June 27 with visit from General Manager Paul Kösters. My guide operates the badge lock system and I see the Punch Room (16 stations) with piped pop music, Input/Output Control, Data Assembly. I peer through armoured glass in the viewing room at the hardware, then take a privileged walk round the printers, tape units, etc. Same version as Mitcheldean's, but all blue and white.

Coffee again, this time with Anne, Alan Phelps' wife, also at Brukske. She introduces me to her Dutch and American friends. One has been teaching Anne and Brenda yoga. Anne says there are so many strange customs, regulations, etc, which they have had to learn the hard way but she's enjoyed her stay tremendously. 'It's gone too quickly,' she says. She shows me a painting by Eric

Rice of the view from Pleasant Stile, Littledean, which has brought a bit of Forest into their living-room. A talented artist, Anne was planning a visit to the famous Rijksmuseum (art gallery) in Amsterdam on the way home to England.

Our residents have been provided with Ford (German) cars and have enjoyed the chance to travel in Western Europe without having to cross the Channel.

After lunch I find myself sharing a taxi with Eddie Carpenter, one of our Programme Co-ordinators, who commutes regularly between Mitcheldean and Venray. He says mail is exasperatingly slow between the two places, so he and other commuters often act as postmen. He always takes a supply of English newspapers back to Venray with him!

We part company at Düsseldorf for our different flights. In no time I'm at Birmingham Airport, and it's down to earth almost with a bang. Just passed through Customs when the alarm goes — it's a bomb scare. I know I'm back in England all right. Miraculously I meet my driver and I return home with a keener appreciation of the rolling countryside in this beautiful part of England.



With residents' wives (from left) Margaret Barnard, hostess Brenda Howell (handing round Limburg apricot flan), Jennifer Hazell and Lucy, Janet Pearce with Claire and Jason, and Linda Brain with Richard.

There were many other things of interest at Venray — like the well-stocked library where one can sit and study 'on the spot'; the big presses (200-ton machines made in the UK); the completely automatic plating and paint plants, in separate compartments to reduce fire hazard but linked by overhead conveyor; the suggestions scheme under which some 200 ideas were rewarded in 1973. But space is limited.

EXTRA MURAL

Art exhibitions, open to the public, are organised six times a year, introducing cultural creativity into a working environment. The work exhibited is loaned by galleries, and can be purchased. At each exhibition (which usually has a particular theme) a quiz is organised, the prize being an item purchased by the Company. Another cultural activity: an orchestra which operates outside the Plant.

My sincere thanks go to my Dutch — and English — hosts for their hospitality.