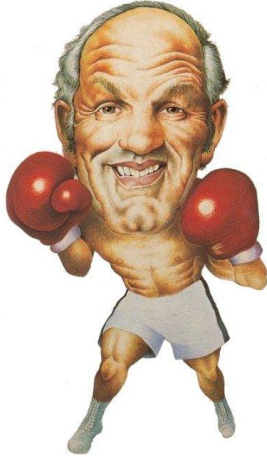


## Henry Cooper at AMC

Before Henry Cooper found fame as a British Heavyweight Boxing Champion in the 1960s, he had an involvement with the AMC factory that led to some red faces in the grinding bay, as Bill Cakebread relates:



There is an unusual story that connects 'Our Enry' with AMC. He was a much loved personality in South London and being adopted with the title of 'Our Enry' (specifically without the 'H) by Londoners probably meant more to him than any honour that could be bestowed on him by the government.

The working practice at AMC was by a bonus system based on the quantity of items machined in an allotted time. Cutting corners naturally produced a higher bonus but also potentially more scrap which was held against the operator so, if possible, any scrap was conveniently 'lost'. Small steel components could usually be hidden in the bins of swarf that awaited regular scrap metal collection and fragile items like brake linings were broken into smaller pieces and flushed down the toilets!

Now at the time of this incident, a new works canteen was being built. As the Plumstead factory was built on the marshy area near the Thames, it was necessary to sink piles into the ground and Henry Cooper was working on the gang that was doing the construction work. After sinking the holes for the piles and before they were ready, the holes filled with water which needed to be pumped out. Unfortunately, when the suction hose reached the bottom of the hole, a metallic sound was heard. Now this area, next door to the Woolwich Arsenal, had been heavily bombed during the war and the first reaction was a possible unexploded bomb! The alarm was raised and the work was duly stopped. However, this had been a period of much experimentation with centreless grinding of telescopic fork tubes which caused an embarrassing amount of scrappage. Too large to hide in the swarf bins, the deep holes had provided an ideal hiding place!

Apparently, Henry Cooper was highly embarrassed to have been the person who had inadvertently exposed the sins of his fellow workers to the AMC management but no one at the factory thought any the less of him for that.

*(This story of Bill's, penned for the Old Bike Mart newspaper, was based on John Rourke's first-hand account of the nefarious episode. You can read more in his 'Memories of Plumstead' article on the Links page).*