

Yeovil Technical School

David Gibbs

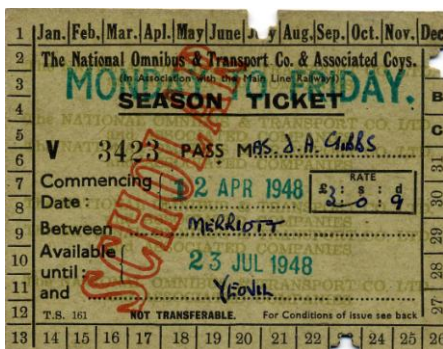
(Article from *A Miscellany of Merriott Memories*)

There was a secondary school in Lower Kingston as long ago as 1850, roughly where the hospital is now. Originally, it was a private school, and then it became Yeovil County School and eventually Yeovil School. In 1938, Yeovil School moved to new buildings in Mudford Road and the old premises became Yeovil Art and Technical Institute. The Technical School came into being in 1946. I started there in the September of the following year.

Each morning a little gang of us, gathered from the surrounding villages by the Southern National and Hutchings and Cornelius buses and disgorged in The Borough, made our satchel-swinging way through St Johns churchyard into Vicarage Street, past the Central Cinema and the little sweet shop next door, turned the corner by the Chelsea Tea Rooms into Princes Street; then along Princes Street, past the Sunshine Fruit Stores opposite the Jolly Farmer Cafe, and on until we came to Vincent's motor-car showroom; then we crossed the road to the pavement that skirted Bides Gardens, on past the bus shelter and the Red Lion pub and so to the Tech which was just a few yards further on. But there's no sign of the place now; the buildings were demolished in January 1968.

It wasn't a very big school. The intake for each year of the two-year course was about 90 pupils. Two thirds of the intake were destined to study engineering, the remainder building.

The catchment area was vast. There were boys from Yeovil, Ilminster, Chard, Crewkerne, South Petherton, Langport, Curry Rivel, Sherborne, Castle Cary and Wincanton. Some came from strange places I had previously never heard of like Bradford Abbas, Henstridge and Templecombe.



Southern National season ticket,
£3-0-9 per term

If you lived more than three miles from the school, Somerset County Council paid your fare providing there was a service bus or train to travel on. If not, you got a bicycle, or a bicycle allowance, like the lads from Barwick and Stoford and from East Coker.

As a result of all the travelling, boys arrived at school at all sorts of strange times. For instance, it was usually about half past nine before the Langport contingent used to roll in and although school didn't end until four-thirty in the afternoon they used to be off again at half past three. Even the Henstridge lot went well before

four. I often wished I came from Langport, or even Henstridge, rather than Merriott.

I didn't think much of the Tech at first. It was all very strange after a village school. For a start, there were different teachers for different subjects, and different classrooms for different subjects. We seemed to be constantly changing from subject to subject, teacher to teacher, and room to room.

Many of the subjects were strange too, like workshop technology, engineering drawing, and geometry. I loathed geometry. A simple thing like a circle that in the village school was nothing more than a 'ring' suddenly became very complex, having a radius, a circumference, a diameter, and degrees and things. Triangles, on the other hand, had corners they called angles, and it might be isosceles or equilateral instead of being just a three-sided square.

Of course, it being a technical school, much emphasis was put on practical work, and for budding engineers like me that meant metalwork. The metalwork classes were held in a workshop located on the ground floor of an industrial building in Market Street, next to Vincent's bodybuilding workshop.

The upper floor of the building was used for storing hides, so it was a bit smelly. But here there were lathes, milling machines, grinders, shapers, sheet metal working machines, brazing and soldering equipment, benches, vices and all manner of hand tools. They had been enthusiastically gathered together by a teacher called Mr Gwilliam, a man who played a leading role in establishing the teaching of engineering in Yeovil, first in the Technical School and later in the Technical College. It has to be said, however, that most of the machinery he had managed to lay his hands on had seen better days and had been discarded by local industry.

But discarded machinery or not, Gwillie's workshop provided many a future craftsman with his first taste of the real engineering world. We drilled and filed, hammered and forged, turned and milled - activities well outside the scope of village schools. And we actually made useful things, like a matching toasting fork and poker with twisted shanks and ringed ends, made to last a lifetime. Indeed, my poker lasted for years and was indestructible; I might even still have it somewhere. If only there had been someone with initiative to harness all this newly acquired expertise Britain could have lead the world in pokers and toasting forks.

I quite enjoyed metalwork but there were other classes I enjoyed more, particularly English. Perhaps Mr D L Smith had much to do with this. Dudley was fun. What's more, he was a very good teacher. He used to delight us with a piece of poetry about eating an orange and it had a punch line about '*spitting the pips in your face*'. We plagued him to recite this poem just for the spitting bit, and he often obliged, invariably, and I think somewhat deliberately, spraying the front two rows of the class in the process. One of the best, was Dudley.

Then there was the geography teacher, Mr James, who sported a RAF-type moustache that earned him the nickname of Flying Officer Kite, later abbreviated to just 'Kite'. He seemed to take great delight in punishing minor misdemeanours by roller-stencilling a blank map of the world in your exercise book and then keeping you in at break time to shade in the British Empire in pink. There was a lot of empire about back in those days.

The head of the school was Mr Pryor, 'JJ' to staff and pupils alike but only when he was out of earshot. JJ was a small man, but what he may have lacked physically he made up for by a very positive personality. He was very strong on discipline. He resorted to caning if the misdemeanour deserved it, so you didn't tangle with him. If JJ told you to button your jacket, you buttoned it, and quick. And if you saw JJ walking towards you along Princes Street, you wasted no time in putting your cap on. After all, he had made it quite clear that our caps, with their segments of two shades of blue and the YTS badge on the front, were to be worn and not stuffed in pockets. What's more, underneath each cap he expected there to be a well-behaved boy. Alas, boys being much the same then as they are now, both objectives were never totally realised.

Some boys went far beyond defying JJ by not wearing their caps. They actually climbed to the top of a high playground wall so that they could look through a window to see the nude model posing for the students in the Art School next door. Then they would report back to those of us too timid to risk such an adventure what they had seen - exaggerated no doubt, and exaggerated even more by the time the information they provided had been processed by our awakening adolescent imagination.

It was probably the very same wall climbers who had the courage to slip out of school at lunchtime - it was strictly forbidden to leave the premises - to buy the sepia-tinted *Health and Efficiency* magazine from Douglas Cant's, the newsagent just across the road. The playground barter rate, even for a much-thumbed *Health and Efficiency*, was at least five

Yeovil Art and Technical Institute
Yeovil Secondary Technical School

REPORT on GIBBS, D. SPRING TERM, 1948

COURSE ENGINEERING HOUSE NEWTON FORM E.1. NO. OF BOYS IN FORM 23.

AGE 13.6. AVERAGE AGE OF FORM 13.11 POSITION IN FORM 4

SUBJECT	POSITION TERM	EXAM	REMARKS	MASTER'S INITIALS
Scripture			Satisfactory	S.A.H.
English	1	1	Very Good	S.H.B.
History	3	2	Good.	S.A.H.
Geography	6	10	Satisfactory	S.H.B.
Arithmetic	1	1	Very good	S.H.B.
Algebra	6	5	A good term	S.H.B.
Geometry		7=		
Mechanics	5=	20	Poor examination result.	K.H.
General Science				
Metalwork	22		Work, but very attention & time	S.H.B.
Engineering Technology	5=	7=	Good.	K.H.
Technical Drawing	6=	7=	good work	J.H.B.
Practical Geometry	5=	7		
Woodwork	10	11	Fair and he can do better	R.H.
Brickwork				
Decorating				
Building Construction				
Physical Training			Good.	B.C.J.

No. of times Late — No. of times Absent —

Form Master's Report his conduct has been good and he has worked well.

S. A. Holt Form Master
J. Fryde Principal

A good record.

School report

Hotspur comics in good condition, because even *Rockfist Rogan of The RAF* couldn't compete with the pictures of the coyly posed female nudes, even if they did have an important part airbrushed out.

The playground was the only recreational area in the school. There was no playing field. Instead, every Wednesday afternoon the whole school had to go crocodile fashion all the way to Mudford Road recreation ground.

We played cricket in the summer and association football in the winter. Cricket failed to interest me to any great extent but I thoroughly enjoyed the football and my greatest joy



*Victorious school 1st XI, 1948. I am the fourth from left, back row.
John Sandford (see next page) is second from the left, front row*

was finding, much to my surprise, that I could play football well enough to play for the school First XI. And a very good team it was too. No other school was a match for us, except perhaps Stoke-under-Ham Stanchester School. Our toughest game by far was when we played them in the final of the Pittard Shield on the famous Huish slope. We won 2-1. And the following year, just a few short weeks after Alec Stock's giant-killers had beaten Bury and Sunderland in the FA cup, we played on the now-famous slope again, this time against Grass Royal School, and we won handsomely by eight goals to one. What a thrill it was to play at Huish!

Now Huish, like the Technical School, has gone. Huish lives on in the new stadium at Houndstone, or so they say. As for the Tech, well, I suppose that lives on too, in the form of the college in Ilchester Road. Certainly many of us who were the first pupils at the Technical School were also the first students at Ilchester Road, attending classes in the big house long before the present buildings were constructed. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if somewhere in the present-day workshops there lurks at least one item of machinery from Gwillie's Market Street workshop. Could be present day students still make pokers and toasting forks, but if they do I bet they're not as good as the ones we used to make.

Letter from America to The Visitor

Sir, What a surprise to see a photograph of the Yeovil Technical School 1948 soccer team beaming out from the September issue of The Visitor. The coincidence is fairly unusual when you consider I live in the USA.

The article by David Gibbs brought back many long-forgotten memories of youth, the Technical School and the town he describes so well. The two years I spent at the school were fun. They were also very formative years as it was there I received the basic education needed to pursue a most rewarding and successful career in the North American aerospace industry.

As I looked at the photograph of those young enthusiastic footballers I found myself wondering where the last forty years had taken my team-mates. I did stay in touch with several prior to leaving Yeovil in 1957 but then contact was lost.

I am writing this letter in hope that David Gibbs did provide an address and that you might pass a copy of this note to him. It is possible that he kept in touch or has knowledge of the whereabouts of some of the team. Who knows, it might provide him with the background he needed for a sequel in The Visitor.

Sincerely,

*John W Sandford
President and Chief Executive Officer
Rolls Royce Inc
Virginia
USA*