

*IPlayer inspiring memories.* 30/10/2022

Last Saturday evening quite by chance iplayer came up on my laptop and I saw this very interesting film about Rolls-Royce Aero Engine plants [https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0015qwh/we-are-england-series-1-inside-the-jet-engine-factory-derby#xtor=CS8-1000-%5BPromo\\_Box%5D-%5BSport\\_Promo%5D-%5BSport\\_Promo%5D-%5BPS\\_IPLAYER~N~m0015qwh~P\\_WeAreEnglandInsideTheJetEngineFactory%5D](https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0015qwh/we-are-england-series-1-inside-the-jet-engine-factory-derby#xtor=CS8-1000-%5BPromo_Box%5D-%5BSport_Promo%5D-%5BSport_Promo%5D-%5BPS_IPLAYER~N~m0015qwh~P_WeAreEnglandInsideTheJetEngineFactory%5D)

I really enjoyed it and remembered with pride that we were in those factories 25 years ago installing our new world leading machine tools - W&B Millennium Vertical Turning Centres.

In the three decades following WW2 Webster & Bennett was the world wide 'go to' supplier for vertical borers – *in one shop alone in R-R Nightingale Road factory, where the famous stained glass window was, there were 57 W&B manual machines.* During those decades R-R bought nearly 300 Webster & Bennett vertical borers!

No wonder I was in a great position when I conceived the W&B Millennium – a new form of CNC vertical turning, milling and grinding centre that captured the imagination of process engineers in several major industries. We had great success with these machines but never to the level it could have been. Lack of working capital was the problem – that history is described on our web site

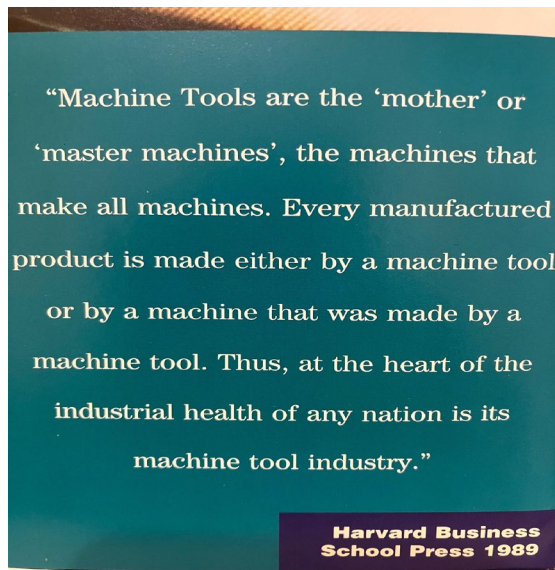
Successive governments have been hopeless to this industry, always more interested in inward investment than providing a level playing field for the home manufacturers. This was repeated in car manufacture, rail, airplane, energy, steel, shoe and clothing manufacturer, the list goes on

I watched the film again the following afternoon, Sunday last, then continued with our current 'final' home downsizing by opening yet more boxes, closed for decades and several house moves.

What a coincidence – the weekend I see the R-R film I open a box with brochures of machines we had built and in there is a 1996 report from the MTTA (Machine Tool Technologies Association).

1996 was the year we won an MTTA design award for the Millennium. That is why I kept the MTTA publication. However it is the quotation from the Harvard Business School 1989 report that brought back a flood of memories. More than 20 years earlier I had studied part time on of the first UK versions of the Harvard MBA and I was a Harvard Business School admirer. I took their report seriously, especially as it seemed to be making such an obvious point, something I had believed in for nearly 30 years and the timing was uncanny – just as I had the opportunity to buy Wickman Bennett, the No. 1 UK machine tool builder that had lost its way and was losing money. I knew I could turn it round - fast

This was a major influence to my seizing the opportunity to buy Wickman Bennett, right then in October 1989, and to set aside what had become a too comfortable multi-millionaire life so I could turn round this great company from loss to profit, (*Sales to £40m and profit to £4m in 16 months!*)  
Not just results - I saw this as a truly brilliant challenge, to lead the several hundred full apprentice trained workforce back to a world leading position. Above all it was necessary for the UK. This Harvard statement



The Harvard statement is still true. However it has been set aside by one government after another as they followed deindustrializing policies that have ended up dividing this country. *I despair for this country, especially when you see the nonsenses during Johnson/Truss/Sunak fiasco. That has to be the most frightening month of politics I have experienced during the 60plus years I have been aware of politicians. What a shower the main parties are!* If I ever vote again it will be for the REFORM party, but I'm still thinking about it.

For me it is very sad that the only politician I thought highly enough of to vote for her changed her mind over defence spending and she continues to be a major influence over the UK deindustrialisation. The team she had around her was rubbish. Had they been any good they could have influenced her to understand that you don't solve industrial relations by killing the industry – you may think you have won but actually it is 'lose : lose'. I dealt with some highly inflammable situations with unions in Belfast 1975, Dundee 1983, Coventry 1989, Czech Republic 2000, Belgium 2004. You need to have a credible history and then you have a very good chance to have sensible discussions and arrive at a fair and sensible result. Running a country should be like running a major business group.

**Back to iplayer** It was good to see R-R employing 7,000 in quality manufacturing but it is frightening looking back at the numbers in manufacturing when I was young – mind blowing in comparison