

### My First Job and a Trilby Hat

In 1956 my only aspirations centred on sport and girls. However a decision had to be made on what to do in my working life. Civil Engineering seemed like a good idea in that it offered both office and outside working. Also the prospect of building roads and bridges was appealing in that it offered something visible and useful to show for ones efforts.

With the decision made, I became probably one of the last in the country to become an Articled Pupil to Chartered Engineer Thomas Pritchard at Tarvin Rural District Council in Cheshire. It was a three year, unpaid commitment during which I learned about water, sewage and housing schemes, as well as having day release to attend the Liverpool College of Technology.

Now it was time for a "proper" job. I was interviewed by the City Engineer of Chester County Borough Council together with his Deputy, and the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Improvement Committee for the post of Junior Engineering Assistant. After a couple of technical questions from the City Engineer, the Chairman was asked if he had any questions for me. There was a short pause and then he said "Do you play sport?" This was manna from heaven as I launched into an exaggerated account of my prowess at football, cricket and tennis. I didn't mention that I had recently given up mixed hockey for the Young Conservatives as I thought it too dangerous having been flattened in the last match by Beryl who was built like a tank.

*I was offered the job at a salary of £610 per annum and the City Engineer said "When you pass your exams you won't expect any more money will you?" I quickly replied "No Sir."*

So it was that I entered the City Council Drawing Office, on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1960. There were approximately 30 members of staff, Engineers on one side of the office with Architects and a couple of Quantity Surveyors on the opposite side. There was not a Planner in sight.

We all sat at desks with drawing boards. There were no computers, no fax machine or photo copier but there was a plan printer and we did have telephones, albeit all calls were routed through a switchboard.

It was a totally male environment although there were many scantily clad females on the calendars which adorned the office walls.

Jokes and pranks were all part of the everyday life and helped keep morale high. Miss Tushingham was the City Engineer's Secretary and she ran the typing pool and letter filing system down the corridor. All files had to be signed for if removed from her filing cabinets and woe betide anyone who had not signed or had a file out for an unreasonable time. A cry would go up "Watch out, Tush is on the warpath!" seconds before the door would open and Miss Tushingham appeared with purposeful step and face glowering. You just kept your head down and hoped she wasn't heading in your direction.

There was one older Draughtsman named Harry Griffiths who was a slim, tallish, neat and dapper man. He was single and lived with his mother. One autumn morning Harry appeared wearing a very smart grey trilby hat, which was admired by all when he hung it on his peg at the end of the office. It was a birthday present from his mother.

At coffee break there was much whispering going on when the Chief Engineer George Smith called the senior Engineers together. Apparently, he said to them "I want 5 bob off each of you so that we can purchase a duplicate trilby for Harry - but two sizes larger".

There were several men's outfitters in Chester at the time. Cochranes, Austin Reed and Moss Bros to name a few, but if you wanted a hat, the place to go was Dunn's at the Eastgate. This was where Harry's hat had been purchased and where the duplicate trilby was obtained before being secretly substituted during the afternoon.

We were all watching at 5:30pm when Harry covered his drawing board with a dust sheet and went to the end of the office for his hat and coat. The hat immediately dropped right down bending his ears over. Obviously puzzled, he removed it and carried it out of the office.

The following morning, Harry arrived wearing the substitute hat which appeared to sit quite normally on his head. A secret inspection later revealed that his mother had packed it with tissue paper so that it at least looked as if it fitted. It was time to return the original trilby to his peg, but this time carefully packed with the same tissue paper.

At 5:30pm, Harry made for his hat and coat not appearing to notice that he was once again, the first to leave the office. The hat went on, but this time, it perched on the top of his head like a little pill box. He took it off, looked at it and carried it out.

The next day was unusual in that so many staff were in work early awaiting Harry's appearance, but he didn't arrive. At 9:30am George received a call from Harry's mother to say that he would not be coming to work as he was going to see the doctor. "Oh Dear" said George, "What seems to be the problem?" "Well" came the reply, "His head keeps on swelling."

It was time to come clean. George apologised and explained the prank. I never knew what his mother thought, but to his credit, Harry took it all in good part – and he did get a morning off work.

And what happened to the fearsome Miss Tushingam? Well, she married late in life and became Mrs Morris. As I got to know her over the years, I found her to be a lovely lady with a good sense of humour. After her retirement, I occasionally called on her for a cuppa and a chat about old times.... not forgetting "The Trilby!"

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