

## HAPPY DAYS AT THE TECHNICAL SCHOOL

*In this article, Derek Barnard becomes a bit nostalgic as he tells us about the Rochester Technical School and his time in that establishment.*

A local school that failed to survive due to its lack of facilities and space to expand was the boys Technical School situated at Eastgate. It opened in September 1911 under the Board of Education Regulations for Day Technical Classes. At the end of the first term there were 32 pupils attending for 24 hrs a week, paying 16/- per term exclusive of text books but including sports and stationery.

The main school building, now the Adult Education Centre, had been built in 1907 to house the Medway School of Art and the proposed technical school. A new wooden annex (still surviving) was built alongside in 1914 and further wooden classrooms and a gymnasium were built opposite during 1922-23.

The purpose of this type of school was to give a good general education whilst meeting the needs of industry. Rochester's school had opened with a Preparatory Engineering Department to which was added a Preparatory Building Department in 1925 and three years later, an Artistic Trades Department. By the time the school celebrated its 21st year with a three day Fete and Fayre, there were 292 pupils drawn from Rochester (60%), the rural areas from as far as Snodland, Cobham and Grain (20%) and the rural areas as far as Faversham. The cost had risen to £2 per term but various bodies, including Rochester Education Committee, Watts and Haywards charities and the KCC awarded scholarships to poorer boys.

The fete programme shows not only a wide variety of activities but the support from local firms including Aveling and Porter (Thomas Aveling opened the third day), The Rochester Steam Packet Company and firms like Vickers-Armstrong from further afield, looking for likely employees. The school had all the usual laboratories as well as a machine shop, metal and woodwork rooms and a drawing office. For outdoor sports the trip had to be made to 'Holcombe'.

It was to the Building Department of this school that I went, almost 50 years ago as a 13 year old, to do the regulatory three years, and three very good years they were. Discipline was firm but not strict, uniform regulations almost non-existent after the first year, ties and badges only were compulsory. Caps did not have to be worn and homework was seldom given. It was a mobile school, certainly as far as the building section was concerned. For lunch we all marched up Crow Lane to East Row where a large canteen catered for our needs, or very nearly, The woodwork shop was in Free School Lane opposite the NE bastion of the city and sports were nearer now: we only had to drag up Nags Head Lane and up the bank to Fort Pitt where the new playing fields were beyond the girls school. All lessons were building orientated: Building Science, Building Construction etc. and for the practical teaching of bricklaying, plastering and plumbing, we went to the Technical College at Luton Arches. There we had great fun building walls, running plaster mouldings, beating lead into shape and causing as much mayhem to that part of Chatham as was possible.

We needed the exercise because if all 270 of us were packed into the area from Corporation Street to an invisible line at the gate to Eastgate Gardens there was little room for ball games, especially as there were railings to keep us off the grass.

At sixteen we were found apprenticeships into associated trades which means I have spent many years erecting buildings throughout Kent. But I don't think I would change that or the school. Two years after I left the school it was absorbed into a Gillingham School (1955) and Rochester Tech was no more.



**The Rochester Technical School from the 1932 Fete and Fayre programme.**

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