



**VTT-WB NEWS - starts sad but gets better for a positive future** 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023

## **VTT-WB Limited joins the ACL-Accranut engineering group**

*from* Iain Exeter – the last owner of Wickman Bennett while it was one of the world's leading machine tool builders, the UK's no. 1. In 1992 the UK machine tool industry was destroyed by government ineptitude and ministerial lies. Wickman and Webster & Bennett, and other UK world class builders, were rescued but were instantly operating at less than 10% of previous levels.

I lost millions but invested my remaining capital in Webster & Bennett, builder of vertical turning centres, and took them back to world class during the 1990's and 2000's. This took more capital than I had left. Investment support came first from Venture capitalists and later from foreign investors. Despite the technical and commercial successes by 2010 two very different ownership problems had in each case proved too much for me to resolve.

**Sad to say 2010 was the last year that high tech, high value machine tools were designed and built in Britain as British machine tools.** Castings from UK foundries machined by UK companies. Precision components produced by UK and Czech companies.

The complete assembly, installation and commissioning processes were carried out by UK machine tool engineers and a Czech electrical team.

I had given everything to keep a machine tool industry in the UK but in 2010 it seemed to be over so I reduced my operation to a small size just doing Webster & Bennett service and rebuild work. I ran it alongside my gym at Stoneleigh Park. Sport and fitness are two other major obsessions

In 2016 my motivation returned when I was approached by **Webster & Bennett users** wanting me to modernize and develop the specification of the machines they had used so reliably for so many years. This included modernization of the wonderful **Millennium** models that had taken Webster & Bennett back to world class recognition so rapidly in the late 1990's. At that time they were regarded as **equal to or better than any other vertical turning centre, world wide.**

The Millennium still competes at that level, especially when we add updated electric/CNC specifications to the superb basic machine tool

**Despite the interesting modernizing work we do the frustration of not developing and building new models remains. While in that mood of frustration I was approached by a quality supplier, Accranut Limited, run by Andy Davies and his son Connor, many years producing precision parts for machine tool builders and rebuilders. VTT-WB is now an associate of the ACL Group <https://accranut.co.uk/>. Andy and Connor bring down the average age of the directors!**



During the last few years based in Sheffield we were very well treated by W&B users Andy and Luke England who made available to us the excellent space you see in the photograph.

Unfortunately the abrasive dust pollution from a neighbor found its way through the walls and made our operation very difficult. We need almost 'clean room' conditions so we are pleased to be back in a traditional quality machine tool environment

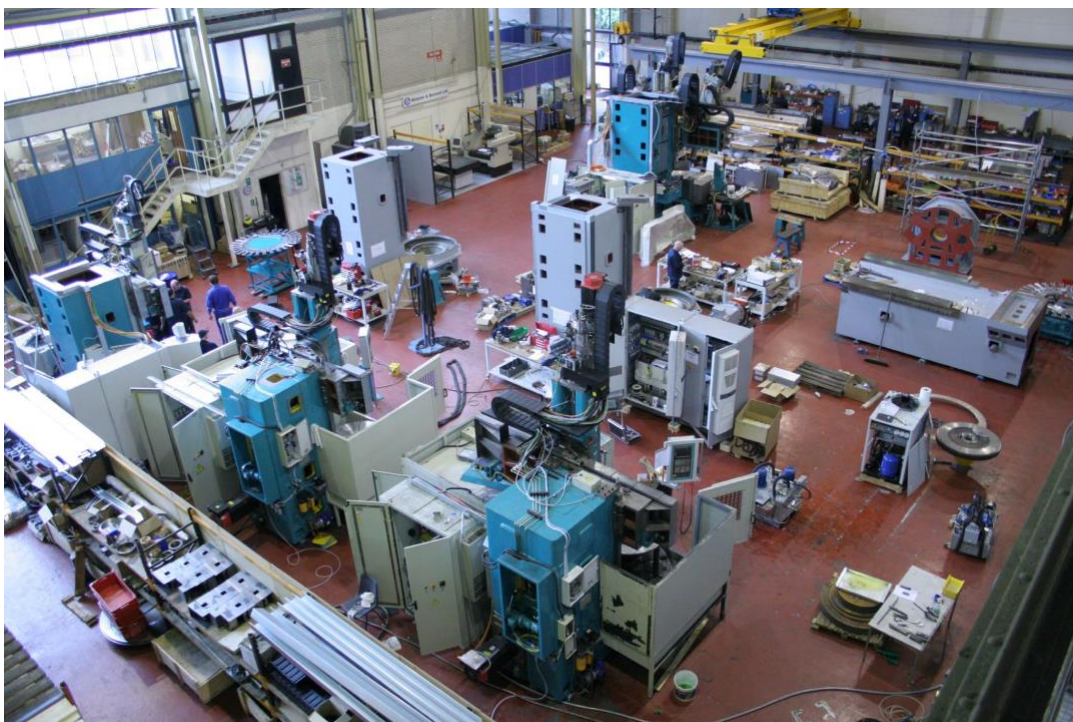
Through the action of Andy Davies we are relocating our **W&B** rebuilding and modernizing activities in a proper machine tool environment. The machine in the photo is a Millennium 3 Series. This model Millennium will be the first machine transferred to Birmingham to be prepared for resale

**A very positive development has been the progress of an engineer who joined me soon after I came back in 2003 from working in Czech Republic – Petr Gabrhelik.**

His original training qualified him as an electrical designer, then electrical assembly manager. In Czechia he was in charge of the 45 machining centres we were making every month for OKUMA America.

In W&B Warwick he was the main electrical commissioning engineer in assembly and on installations world wide of very complex W&B vertical turning, milling and grinding centres, fulfilling the qualities demanded by our very high level customers, especially those making aero engines and missiles.

During his 18 years working experience on **Webster & Bennett** machines he has developed into **the best multi task W&B engineer** I have worked with during my 60 years working with W&B machines. In recent years he has filled the most important holes in our mechanical fitting team. Successive governments have made it tough for our industry in the UK. Petr's high level qualities have given me the enthusiasm to keep fighting. In particular his contribution to design, development, build quality and commissioning has been invaluable as, despite all the problems we faced, we have produced 96 world class W&B vertical turning centres since 1993. *It could have been so many more!* **Petr is now Technical Director of VTT-WB Ltd**



**This is our Warwick facility in 2007. A real quality machine tool factory.** With processes developed by Petr and me it was described by German customers as the most efficient machine tool assembly they had ever seen – it was! They ordered 9 machines – 10million euros. Soon after the W&B owners at that time wanted to move W&B to Belgium. When we would not agree to move they closed it. What a waste! Crazy! Sad!

Warwick was the style of factory for the future build of machine tools like Webster & Bennetts – small numbers built, maybe 20 – 30 per annum but built absolutely to customer requirements

**In our smaller operation we are now providing top quality planned maintenance and breakdown service for the machines we built. Machine build is now modernization of machines built 50 years ago during Webster & Bennetts first major period. Customers are surprised at the innovative modernisations we have carried out using the wonderful castings of these older traditionally built machines as donor machines for the modernization program. Take a look – enjoy the surprise!**

<https://www.vtt-wb.com/>

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