

Bowled Over by the Mighty Atom

By retired local vet Richard Huddart MRCVS



Christmas over and we have been sorting things out at home. The study seems full of boxes of family heirlooms and documents which have accumulated after the inevitable sad passing of dearly loved relatives. So I apologise if this article

appears to have no animal or veterinary interest, but please indulge me!

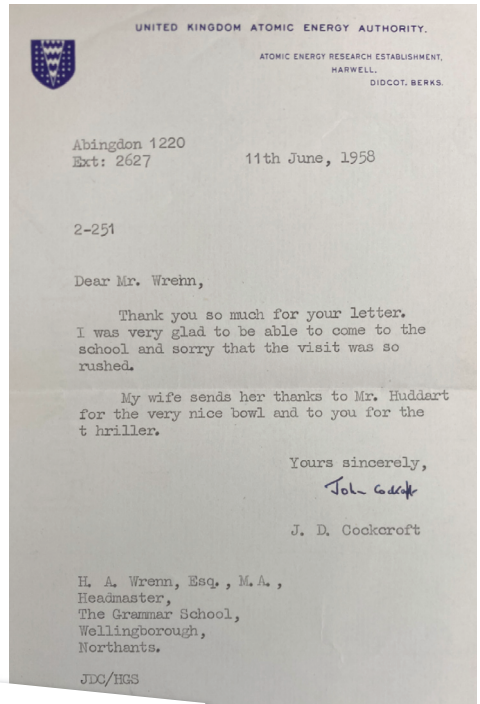
One short letter in particular which I came across among my father's documents has rather knocked me sideways! As a bridge between generations and the changes in technology, it serves as an interesting example.

By way of preliminary explanation, I should explain that my late father was also the Physics teacher and Head of Science at Wellingborough Grammar School, where he taught my two brothers and myself during the 1960s and 70s. After I left to go to veterinary college, the school became the Comprehensive "Wrenn School", named after its last Headmaster, Harry Wrenn. I must also add here that my

father's hobbies were highly practical, including all things electronic, radar, ropemaking and, above all, woodturning.

Mr Wrenn somehow managed to book amazing guests for the school Speech Days and Prize-Giving ceremonies. So I was a little surprised to find this rather badly-typed letter addressed to Mr Wrenn in my father's belongings. However, my father is mentioned in the letter, which is dated 1958.

The sender of the letter, J.D. Cockcroft, had evidently been the Guest at the recent Speech Day, and his wife the lucky recipient of one of my father's beautifully turned wooden bowls. I can only assume that the "thriller" for Dr Cockcroft's wife was a best-selling book of the era! I also came across a photograph of him at the school awarding a prize to a Sixth Former at the time,



(and subsequently famous) David Frost.

Nothing in the letter seemed particularly remarkable, until I read up a little more about its sender, and the address from which it had been sent.

Sir John Cockcroft had been a joint recipient of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1951, along with Ernest Walton. This was awarded for the first artificial disintegration of an atomic nucleus. This

accomplishment, carried out in 1932, was popularly known as "Splitting the atom". Along with a vast array of other achievements and awards in physics and academia, he was now also one of the proud owners of one of my dad's wooden bowls. I expect he kept his keys in it! I can now understand why my father had kept the letter!