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Engineering the future

IEE History of Technology Newsletter - December 2005

The hardest part of writing a newsletter is always the first few sentences - a sort of stage-fright - what is there to say? In fact there is a lot to say: a summary of the Keele meeting, the letter to Dr Roberts, CEO of our Institution - and his response, our new status within the IEE and our resulting modified constitution.

New role of History within IEE

There is a role for a history specialist group within the IEE, but it never really fitted into the 'PN model'. However, during the iconoclastic period it was necessary to go with the flow or we would have disappeared. We are probably in calmer waters and our role has now changed. The important links to the IEE Archives has been accepted and the Archivist, Anne Locker writes:

Preserving and promoting the history of technology is an important aspect of the IEE's activities. At present, members' activities are represented by the History of Technology PN, whereas the IEE Archives preserves historical collections and makes them accessible to members, academics and the general public. In future, these two bodies will work more closely together.

The new History Group will work with the Archives Department in organising events within and outside the IEE, recording and preserving records on the history of technology and advising the IEE on historical issues. It is hoped that the Group will work closely with IEE Branches and other institutions such as universities in organising events on historical themes. These will include an annual weekend meeting.

In administrative terms, the first point of contact for all historical enquiries will be the IEE Archivist. The new Group will sit in the Library and Archives Department, but it will be an independent body with its own committee.

History Weekend 2005

Last July we were guests of Keele University in an arrangement that ensured that our costs were significantly less than at some recent meetings. There were two visits of which the first was a visit to Keele Science Park. The major visit on Saturday afternoon was to Apedale working coal-mine and heritage centre which included a journey to the underground coal-faces. The journey there and back was arranged to ensure that we passed sites which were associated with Sir Oliver Lodge. The lecture programme covered a broad spectrum with an emphasis on electrical themes. These included electrical companies, experiments on three-phase systems and a presentation on the illuminations at the Barcelona Exhibition of 1929. There were also papers on electronics and instrumentation.

All present deemed the meeting an outstanding success and expressed thanks to the organisers, Pat Wilson and Bob Martin-Royle and to our hosts at Keele, Mark Ormerod and Alan Donnington.

Matters arising

From the Keele meeting

During the meeting there were expressions of surprise/sorrow/anger that the death had occurred of Dr Arnold Lynch and that his passing had not been marked by the IEE. The Chairman was instructed to write to our CEO, which he did in October. The Chairman drew attention to the death of Dr Lynch and the more general issue of communicating with the membership following the demise of *IEE News*. In reply, Dr Roberts pointed out that the IEE relied on its members for contributions such as obituaries and suggested that a piece be submitted. Dr Roberts also acknowledged the need to communicate effectively with the membership, citing *Watt* magazine as one successful means of doing so, and informed the Chairman that work was being carried out to improve the navigation of the IEE website. If you have any questions on this correspondence, please contact the Chairman for further information.

Arnold made an enormous contribution to the Institution and to our group, particularly in the PG S7 days. There is a suggestion that if people have special memories of him, they could write to the Chairman (preferably in typewritten or electronic format). We will try to collect these as a memorial. *The Book of Tributes* for Ed. Waller, who was killed in the Bali bomb atrocity (<http://www.edwaller.com/>) might serve as a template.

Alternatives to IEE News

The Institution has recently acknowledged the passing of significant members in IEE Review: how many noted the obituary for Ewart Farvis? We would like to see more like this and there is a suggestion that Professor Martin Campbell-Kelly, who writes some excellent obituaries for the Independent should be approached to see if he would be willing to flag up pending contributions. Obituaries can also be submitted to our web-site.

Alternatives to ESEJ

During its time the Engineering Science and Education Journal (ESEJ) was the home for many contributions with an historical perspective. Its passing was a serious blow for a significant group within the IEE. Again, we are pleased to see that historical articles are appearing in IEE publications. The inclusion of an extremely interesting article on Ovshinsky in the most recent IEE Review augurs well and one can only hope that we see more like this.

From the last Newsletter

A comment in the last newsletter about the state of archives drew a broad range of responses, but perhaps the most robust came from David Robertson, who many will remember gave the splendid talk and follow-up article on Alec Reeves. As a result, David was invited to join the committee and devote some of his considerable energy in our direction.

Marconi Archive

Many will be aware that a large part of the GEC/Marconi archive has been moved to Oxford. It is reported that a “representative set” of items will remain on display in Chelmsford, where it has been held in recent years by the Essex Record Office and the local Museums Service. The company has already placed its photograph collection of 13,500 prints and negatives and 3500 glass slides with the Record Office. The details on Marconi's web pages (<http://www.marconi.com/MarconiCollection>) are somewhat dated. Does anyone have up-to-date information?

Faraday Memorial at Elephant and Castle

Long-term participant in our summer meetings, Mike Hearn has joined our Executive with the remit of looking after the interests of electrical power. An enquiry found its way to the IEE concerning the Faraday memorial located at the centre of the Northern roundabout of the Elephant and Castle gyratory system, in South London. Mike investigated and reports:

The memorial which can best be described as a striking steel box was designed by Rodney Gordon, in 1959, and completed in 1961; and honours Michael Faraday's importance both as a scientist and also the fact that he was born within the vicinity. Its interior houses a London Underground Substation that provides electricity supplies to the Northern Line which passes underneath the site at the Elephant and Castle. Gordon's original intention to expose the substation by having glass cladding was not realised, as fears over the prospect of vandalism and damage to the memorial resulted in the novel use of stainless steel cladding.

Possessing an ultra-modern design, since its construction, the memorial, sadly has had little impact on the surrounding area. Indeed as an undergraduate who read Engineering at South Bank Polytechnic (now South Bank University) one was somewhat ignorant as to what this large tin box represented, let alone why it was put there in the first place! Partly because it is located in what can be described as a very unwelcoming area, but surprisingly no ceremonial tablet exists detailing that it is a memorial to Michael Faraday, and why it is positioned where it is.

Featuring in the Evening Standard in 1995, an article about the memorial was printed with the headline “*But what on earth is it?*” Further publicity resulted in 1996 when a new lighting scheme was commissioned following the outcome of competition by Blue Peter, a BBC television children's programme. Within that year, the memorial received Grade II listing.

Plans to redevelop the Elephant and Castle site are currently in hand, the planners supervising the areas regeneration are keen to see the memorial relocated to a more suitable site. Certainly the designer Rodney Gordon, who is still alive, is also keen to see this happen. Timescales? Well with all large projects like these they will be ongoing for the foreseeable future.

Radio Propagation and Coverage

Before getting to the major topic of this Newsletter (next summer's meeting) the Chairman, in his enthusiasm would like to share an interesting item with all. He recently had the pleasure of examining a PhD thesis for the Open University. The candidate, Ronald Sandell had worked in the Field Strength and Service Planning Section of BBC Research Department and his thesis was on the development of the terrestrial broadcasting networks of the United Kingdom in the 20th century. It provides an excellent overview of coverage in the different frequency bands and since retiring Ron has done superb work on correlating coverage with meteorological data and has been able to give real substance to what we all know about the relationship between weather conditions and quality of reception. It is hoped that Ron will come to our next weekend meeting and tell us about this and particularly about the future in a digital world.

History Weekend 2006

Our meeting next summer will be at Swansea University and should mesh very nicely with the Brunel celebrations which are taking place in Bristol. Details of both, and the *Call for Papers* are given below. Information about the University and its environs can be obtained at the University web-site (<http://www2.swan.ac.uk/>).

The local contact is Dr Timothy Davies t.davies@swansea.ac.uk

A final word

If you received hard-copy of this Newsletter, but have access to the Internet, please register as a member of the History PN on the PN website: <http://www.iee.org/oncomms/pn/history/>

Greetings for Christmas and New Year and we look forward to seeing you in Swansea in July 2006

Donard de Cogan (ddc@cmp.uea.ac.uk)



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Engineering the future

ANNUAL HISTORY WEEKEND
Friday 7th – Sunday 9th July 2006

A conference organised by the
SWANSEA UNIVERSITY
in collaboration with the

IEE History of Technology Group
34th Annual Weekend Meeting

CALL FOR PAPERS

34th ANNUAL IEE HISTORY WEEKEND MEETING

Members of the IEE and all others interested in the history of electrical and related engineering subjects are invited to submit papers for possible inclusion in the 34th IEE Annual History Weekend Meeting, to be held in Swansea from the afternoon of Friday 7th July until lunchtime on Sunday 9th July 2006, in collaboration with Swansea University. Please note by the time of this conference it is anticipated that the merger between the IEE and IIE will have taken place and the conference will be held under the new title, the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET).

BRUNEL CONFERENCE

It should be noted also that 2006 marks Isambard Kingdom Brunel's bicentenary and immediately preceding the Swansea/IEE(IET) meeting an international conference is being organised in Bristol by the Civil Engineers in conjunction with others to celebrate this milestone. There will be some IEE participation in this event also. The 2 meetings are planned to run sequentially with the Bristol event ending lunchtime on Friday 7th July

34th WEEKEND MEETING THEMES

As with previous History Weekends any aspect in the field covered by the IEE(IET) will be considered for inclusion in the Swansea meeting. However 2006 will mark the 50th anniversary of the first Transatlantic Telephone Cable (TAT1) as well as the Brunel bicentenary. Accordingly offers of papers on TAT1 and Brunel related aspects e.g. Railways and Transport, will be particularly welcome. Additionally papers on semiconductor and power history are also sought.

GUIDANCE TO AUTHORS

Although the length of printed papers is not, within reason, restricted, authors must note that presentation time at the meeting is limited to 30 minutes maximum which must include an allowance for questions. Accepted papers will be published in a bound volume following the meeting and copies lodged in the IEE (IET) Library.

ABSTRACTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Respondents to this Call for Papers are requested to submit an abstract, not exceeding 100 words, explaining the topic and scope of their proposed paper for consideration by the Programme Committee. Abstracts should be submitted by the end of February 2006, preferably by Email to rdmartinroyle@iee.org. Those not having access to Email facilities may post their abstracts to:-

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