

150th Anniversary Civic Reception

Manchester Town Hall 10th October 2006

The Deputy Lord Mayor of the City of Manchester, Councillor Glynn Evans, hosted a reception at the Town Hall to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of our Association. Twenty-seven members accepted, including Prof F.W. Johnson from Cambridge who had been President in 1973 - 74. Representatives of seventeen other Institutions were also present.

After a welcome by Councillor Evans, our President, the Rev. Dr. Richard Hills replied:-

'My Deputy Lord Mayor, members of the Manchester Association of Engineers, members of other engineering institutions and other guests, may I first thank our Lord Mayor for his generous invitation to mark the 150th Anniversary of the Manchester Association of Engineers in this splendid setting of the Town Hall.

This building is a remarkable blend of so many engineering skills. We have of course the architects and the civil and structural engineers who designed and erected a building with sufficient strength not only to withstand the ravages of over one hundred years but also to support the endeavours of Father Christmas to climb into it.

We remember also that Manchester has been the centre of so many pioneering achievements in the realms of engineering. I do not know whether the stones from which this building has been constructed may have been shipped along the Bridgewater Canal, that navigation which launched the canal age, so important for the Industrial Revolution, or whether other building materials arrived via the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, which has been called the world's first Inter-City Railway. That railway certainly created a locomotive building industry here in the city centre with the firm of Sharp Roberts, part of a wide-ranging body of Mechanical Engineers here.

Then there have been water engineers who brought that vital commodity into the Town Hall with reservoirs at Reddish and then the Longdendale Valley. Such schemes helped to reduce the scourges of cholera and typhoid, improving the health of the citizens of Manchester. Water also featured in another way in this Town Hall, and that was in hydraulic power to work the lifts and wind the Town Hall clock. The pressure in the mains was 1,000 p.s.i., one of the highest in any public supply in this country. While walking here tonight, I observed that the clock is still going so I assume it has overcome its objections to being wound by electricity.

It would not have been electricity but gas that first illuminated this Town Hall. In these hallowed surroundings, dare I mention that the first textile mill in the world to be lit by gas was that of Phillips and Lee just across the river in Salford. But the Manchester Police Commissioners quickly rectified this by inaugurating one of the first gas works for public supply in this country. And so of course we have gas engineers today.

Knowing the problems associated with the present supply of gas, perhaps the Town Hall authorities were wise to change to electric lighting, an industry rapidly taken up here in Manchester through the Hopkinson brothers linked to the University and firms like Mather and Platt, creating a demand for electrical engineers. As the electric light illuminates the various splendid textile fabrics around us, we are reminded how once Manchester was called Cottonopolis. It was a centre for fine spinning such as M'Connell and Kennedy in Ancoats. They may have used mules built by Hetherington's near-by. Some of these mills would have been driven by steam engines supplied by Galloways from Knott Mill. Of this firm, it has been said that if you were not in their church on Sunday, you were not at work on Monday.

Our Town Hall has been built and equipped through the work of people from a wide range of engineering backgrounds. This is equally true of the Manchester Association of Engineers. Looking through the list of papers presented, we can see how the interests of the Association have reflected the importance of Manchester as a centre of engineering excellence and innovation. For myself, I have welcomed the opportunity through the lectures of the Association to learn about so many industries way beyond those with which I have not been normally involved;

such as violin making, the latest Triumph motor-cycle or the Big Bang sculpture. As a reflection of this, it has been the social side of meeting so many different people from so many different engineering and professional backgrounds that has been of benefit and help to me especially when setting up the present Museum of Science and Industry.

This is why we invited colleagues from other institutions to join in these celebrations this evening. Thank you for coming to celebrate our 150 years young. If I have concentrated my talk on the past, we also look forward to the future. The emphasis of engineering in Manchester may change from mechanical or production engineering towards civil engineering but even that needs a multiplicity of skills as can be seen in the Bridgewater Hall, situated not far from the end of the Bridgewater Canal. I have no doubt that Manchester will continue to be a centre for engineering excellence and achievement, and I hope that the Manchester Association of Engineers will continue to be a forum where knowledge about past and present achievements can be shared.'

The Lord Mayor then presented Long Service Certificates to four people who had been members of fifty years or more. These were David Butterworth, 57 years and President 1970 - 71 whose father presented the Butterworth Medal; Kenneth Andrews, 54 years and President 1978 - 79; Ernest Andrews, 54 years and President 1987 - 88 and 1996 - 97, now Hon. Secretary and Jimmy Allan, 50 years. Mention was also made of our member Ashley Kirby who received the Association's Award for Excellence for his work in producing the PED Handbook which lists details of all the regional lectures. The evening concluded with a buffet.