

HISTELEC NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN POWER ELECTRICITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Web Site: www.wpehs.org.uk

No. 71

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25 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

It is 25 years since the inaugural AGM of SWEHS at Taunton on 28th March 1994. This is an occasion to celebrate, so a special luncheon is to be held at the Castle Hotel, Taunton on Saturday 5th October. This is an excellent venue which, without generous support which has been given by WPD, would have been too expensive for us to use. Your committee have decided to ask Peter Lamb, the leading founder of the Society and principal driving force behind its growth over the years, to give a short-illustrated appraisal of those 25 years after the meal, particularly the early times. It will be entitled "Archives, Exhibits and Events – the Story of the Electricity Historical Society". This will undoubtedly be a memorable event, so look out for more details later.

David Peacock

25th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 25th AGM of the Society was held at the WPD Taunton Training Centre on Saturday 23rd March, with some 32 members and guests attending, David Hole, V. Chair read the Chairman's report in the absence of Mike Gee (on holiday), expanding on some of the highlights of the year. David Peacock, Secretary read the Treasurer's report in the absence of Clive Goodman. The accounts showed the net assets to be £6812.77, an increase of over £500.00 from the previous year, a healthy situation.

John Muggleton was elected Chairman, replacing Mike Gee. The rest of the committee largely stayed the same, although we have a new recruit in Andrew Smith.

Chairman: John Muggleton
Vice-Chairman: David Hole
Treasurer: Clive Goodman
Secretary: David Peacock
Committee: Charles Bristow, David Cousins, John Dike, John Ferrier, Susan Hole, David Hutton, Peter Lamb, Roger Neck & Andrew Smith.
Membership Secretary: Mike Gee, also
Webmaster: Paul Hulbert
Hon. Accounts Certifier: David Legg

In the absence of Mike Gee, Peter Lamb, the founding member presented the jokey chain of office, a chain of old danger & safety notices, to John Muggleton!

After the morning elections etc., everyone retired for lunch at the Toby Carvery. In the afternoon John Dike gave a fascinating talk on the "The Princes in the Tower", see page 2 for a review.



John Muggleton with the jokey Chain-of-Office presented by Peter Lamb

BREXIT AFFECTS ENERGY POLICY?

Britain's power grid is fully integrated with Europe with four undersea interconnectors and one in the planning stage. Over the last five years British engineers have been heavily involved in updating the EU rules on energy policy. The UK imports roughly 6% of its electricity at present. The main knock-on effect of leaving EU, according to an article in the latest IET Journal, would be to the loss of funding for the programme of Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). Another money source, the Innovation Fund offers large sums for developing low carbon technologies, which would include perfecting hydrogen vehicles and carbon capture.

HYDROGEN TRAINS TO THE FORE

It has become apparent recently that the electrification of our railways is costing too much, and a cheaper solution was needed. Suburban networks use largely diesel trains which are causing pollution. The French company Alstom has already built an entirely new hydrogen train for Germany, largely paid for by the German Government, the first of its kind in the world. Our Government has supported a project for a fleet of Diesel trains owned by Eversholt Rail class 321 to be converted to running on hydrogen. The conversion will be carried out at Alstom's works at Widnes, Cheshire. hydrogen gas storage tanks will be situated at both the front and rear of the train. How does it work? Hydrogen is fed to the fuel cell which generates electricity by combining hydrogen with oxygen. The electricity is sent to the lithium-ion batteries to store and then to drive electric motors. The only emission is water.

REVIEW OF THE WINTER LUNCHEON

For our Winter Lunch this year we returned to the popular “Batch Country House Hotel” near Weston Super Mare. Although the weather was wet and windy we were given a very warm welcome when we arrived at about 12 o’clock and, with lunch not starting until 1 o’clock, there was ample time for a drink and a chat with old friends. It was gratifying to find that 58 members, partners and friends attended, one of the highest turnouts for quite a while. Our lunch was most enjoyable and the service excellent. It was a disappointment therefore, that our planned speaker, Pat Hase, was unable to attend due to ill health.

However, Peter Lamb, who organised the whole event, managed to secure the services of Terry Stevens to give us a presentation about “Tyntesfield House” and its history. Terry’s presentation was exceptional, and his knowledge was amazing with his enthusiasm and humorous talk, being laced with many fascinating “asides”. He explained that the Gibbs family was able to buy the house in 1843 thanks to a fortune made from the sale of guano for use as a fertiliser, (bird droppings to you and me). They expanded and remodelled the house in the 1860’s and added the chapel in the 1870’s resulting in the house as we know it today. Following the death of Richard Gibbs, Lord Wraxall in 2001, the house was bought by the National Trust in 2002 and opened to the public soon after. Work to restore it still continues. I am sure that, following Terry’s presentation, those who have not visited Tyntesfield resolved to do so, and, those who have, will be keen to make a return visit. We must sincerely thank Peter Lamb for organising this most successful event.

David Hole

HOOVER BUILDING

The old Hoover Building, which was originally built in 1933 to manufacture suction cleaners, was bought by IDM Properties in 2015 and has been converted into 66 luxury apartments, 1, 2 & 3 bedded. It is a very special building on the A40 coming out of London with a façade in an Art Deco style and was listed for protection in the 1980’s. At that time, it was taken over by Tesco and illuminated at night in a green glow and was very striking with the “Hoover Building” letters highlighted. The developers have taken great care to recreate the flats in the same Art Deco style and each new owner has been given a suction cleaner as a gift from Hoover!!



The Hoover Building as it is today

REVIEW OF AGM TALK

After lunch at the Toby Carvery, we all gathered back at Taunton Training Centre for an entertaining presentation by member John Dike on “The Princes in the Tower and its association with Coldridge”. It transpired that of the many people involved in the murder of the Princes in the Tower, one man who is buried at Coldridge Churchyard who may have been involved. The church is in the village in Devon, where John and his wife Jo live. This tenuous link was explored with the panoply of all those involved with superb pictures (from paintings) of the characters involved. Finally, he explained about the tomb research at the church of the suspect. He had persuaded David Hole and his daughter Sue to dress up as a hapless knight and Queen, see picture, which caused an almighty stir and howls of mirth with the assembled throng. One can rely on John to provide us with superb entertainment always going to great lengths to do so.



WIND FARMS BONUS?

Roughly 7,000 on-shore wind turbines have been built in this Country so far, capable of generating 12 gigawatts. Planning permission has been given for a further 1,800 units mainly in Scotland and building more could save customers £1.6 billion on their bills. Cost reductions have meant that electricity could be cheaper in the future. The Industry is calling on the Government to offer the same incentives as those offered for off-shore wind farms. However, it transpires that the Government is keener on off-shore wind-farms and are backing proposals to the tune of £250 million, a 60% involvement in new projects! It is predicted that of electricity generated, Britain will be reliant upon one third of off-shore wind by year 2030!

TRAMS OF THE WORLD

Graham Warburton has written a further instalment following his article of Melbourne Trams: -

No.2 BUDAPEST

We have visited the beautiful city of Budapest three times as part of Danube river cruises with great memories of walking over the Old Iron Bridge to Pest. (One side of the river is Buda and the other Pest). The city has an extensive tram system with 36 routes. Of particular interest is that all travel for the over 65s is free in Budapest and the whole of Hungary for that matter. Simply present your EU passport, or as we do, make a copy of the relevant page and get riding, but what will happen after Brexit? If you are under 65 a day ticket can be bought, but Euros are not accepted and make sure you exchange your £s for the Hungarian Florint in a Hungarian bank.

The No.2 route goes along the side over the River Danube and the Old Chain Bridge can be seen in the background with Pest being on the eastern side of the Danube. The first tram ran in 1866 drawn by a horse, steam was used from 1887 to 1900 with electric trams commencing in 1887 firstly being metre gauge then changing to standard gauge.



A Budapest Tram

ELIZABETH U/G LINE

This Crossrail project is nearing completion from Shenfield near Brentwood to Reading via Heathrow. It is interesting to read that the rolling stock is being built by Bombardier at their Derby Works, but after what must be assumed a successful contract, future work for the London Underground has been awarded to Siemens, who intend to build a new factory in this country. Siemens are already providing trains for South West Trains from their German plant at Krefeld near Dusseldorf.

NEW BATTERY BUSINESS

A new company, Zenobe Energy has been set up in 2017 to make giant batteries. The initial market is aimed at the proposed electric buses, the idea being to install giant batteries at Bus Depots. The batteries can charge up the buses at night and then be recharged during the day when the buses are in service. Zenobe has secured £25 million funding from two Japanese companies Tepco and Jera. The firm already operates 73 megawatts of battery storage units in the UK.

NEW PYLON LINE

The latest news from National Grid on the 37mile 400kV pylon line between Bridgwater and Avonmouth is that contracts have been awarded. The Project Director is a lady, Sue Adam and she has stated that Balfour Beatty are the main contractors to build both the new "T" design pylons and the underground sections, with both Siemens and J. Murphy & Sons sub-contractors. Work is expected to start shortly with completion by 2026. Siemens will be building a new major substation at Sandford to make connection to the existing 132kV network, which will enable some existing 132kV pylon lines to be removed. Incredibly NG have stated that they intend to construct temporary roadways along the main route to reduce the amount of construction traffic on public roads.

NUCLEAR STRATEGY IN DISARRAY

With EDF having problems with financing Hinkley C, it was sad to hear that two other planned stations are unlikely to go ahead. Hitachi have pulled out of constructing both Wylfa in Anglesey and Oldbury-on-Severn. It is surprising because they have already spent £2 billion at Wylfa on preparatory work and having been offered several sweeteners by the Government.

ROLLS-ROYCE INTO NUCLEAR

Maybe not all is lost with Hitachi pull-out, Rolls-Royce have approached Chinese general Nuclear (CGN) to manufacture control systems for the Bradwell, Essex plant. CGN reported that they were quite happy with their own control systems!

It is a strange response when RR struck a deal with CGN last year to provide integrated instrumentation and control systems globally.

RE-USING CO2

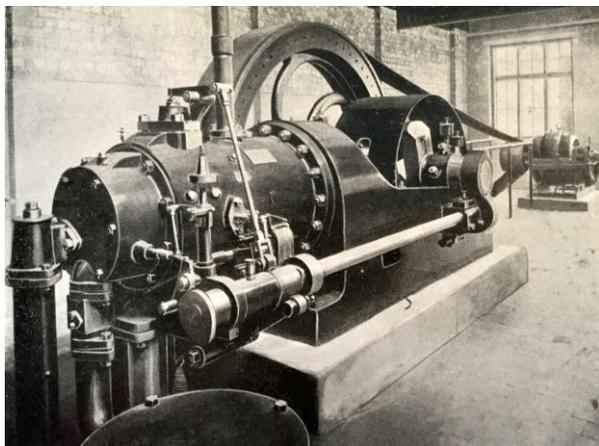
A firm in California, Blue Planet is making concrete from CO2. The process takes flue gas and turns it into calcium carbonate, a type of mineral with a high carbon content. The CEO says that a tonne of limestone contains 440kg of CO2. The International Energy Commission says that the mineralisation of carbon is the most stable form of carbon sequestration, but of course it is an expensive method. Is this the future of carbon capture?

VERTICAL FARMING

The first commercial venture has been constructed at Scunthorpe inside a converted cold store. Paul Challinor, Chief Technology Officer and co-founder of Jones Farms Group said "Unlike a field we can control everything that affects the plants. We can monitor air quality, fertiliser levels and the light. There is no winter, we grow all the year round!" LEDs provide the light to allow balanced growth. A controlled liquid is fed to the plants for nutrients and as the plants grow robots move the plant trays around. It is constructed with 17 levels of trays in multiple racks covering 15 acres!! What are they growing? Initially the plants are herbs and salad leaves, but the intention is to grow five crops a year including high value pharmaceutical products.

MOTORS IN THE MARCHES

The former Shropshire, Worcestershire & Staffordshire Electric Power Company (SWS) opened its power station at Stourport-on-Severn in 1927. To 'build load' it acquired a clutch of smaller undertakings, linked them to its regional grid - mainly 33kV - and shut existing power plants. These installations used internal combustion engines working on producer or other gas, occasionally on oil or even paraffin. Current tended to be low voltage two wire dc, but there were exceptions.



Church Stretton Gas Engine

This illustration shows an example at Church Stretton. It was an 80 bhp National gas engine, constructed by the National Gas Engine Co. in Ashton-under-Lyne. Its belt drive operated a dynamo from Thomas Parker of Wolverhampton, the both leaders in the field. The station ran from 1904 until takeover by SWS in 1928. Similar systems worked in Bishop's Castle, Clun, Ludlow and Leominster. Ludlow was partly the odd man out. It also drew hydro-electricity from a local mill.

Today it is the site of two hydro installations, one of them based on a low head Archimedean screw generator. A similar system is being operated at Nene Sollars. The larger undertakings like Hereford or West Midlands JEA (Ironbridge) were steam powered, although Shrewsbury used steam and diesel. One of the few committed rural electrifiers, SWS lasted until nationalisation in 1948 when most of this area fell to the Midlands Electricity Board. **Roger Hennessey**

TV INVOLVEMENT

Several dozen domestic artefacts from our Museum have recently been loaned to a TV production company for a new antiques programme provisionally called "Curiosity", which is hosted by Paul Martin, who presents "Flog It!". The format is a team quiz based on identifying the age, value etc of various objects. We were offered the opportunity to see the programme being filmed at a TV studio in Brislington, Bristol by Hungry Gap Productions, who have previously worked with the Hairy Bikers cookery duo. Peter Lamb, David Cousins and I were able to watch from the gallery where the director and assistants were controlling the filming. During a break we met the host and later we

had a tour of the set (it was a lot smaller than it will appear on the TV!). We also had a detailed tour of the editing suite, where we found that the editors were using the professional version of the same software that Dave and I use at home.

We were made extremely welcome. Our artefacts will be appearing throughout the series, and many of the staff were keen to know more about the Historical Society because they had been intrigued by our items they had been filming.

The staff are all freelancers, working on a contract for this series. They were much more laid-back than in other TV studios I have visited in the past, but they were still very professional and systematic. The format is scripted but the exact words are not - it was fascinating to see how they would feed Paul Martin a prompt, but he would reword it instantly to make it sound much more off-the-cuff.



Peter Lamb, David Cousins & Paul Hulbert at the TV Studios

We look forward to seeing the programme on air in a few months' time - we believe that it's going to be on one of the BBC channels. Another production company working for the BBC has also recently asked about using some of our vintage photographs for a programme on Victorian engineering - they had seen the photos on our website. **Paul Hulbert**

SOLAR CHARITY

An unusual use of the profits from a solar 36,000 panel array is being used to good effect by donating it to charity. The site is at Wick Farm, between Lympsham and Brean, Somerset, and the profits are being donated to the Sunshine Fund managed by Somerset Community Foundation. From this, the Fund is anticipating making awards for local community projects to the tune of £20,000 a year, which is quite surprising!

TESLA CAR IN EUROPE?

The Dutch have agreed to allow Tesla Cars to be sold in their Country. A cargo of the Model 3 has already been delivered to Zeebrugge, the Belgian port. It is essential to the Palo Alta factory in California as the American market sales have fallen below target, causing the need for lay-offs of the car workers. The boss Elton Musk is keen to get his cars in Europe before the other car manufacturers get theirs.

MARGARET PARTRIDGE

Recently we were asked if we would like to attend an unveiling of a blue plaque at Willand in Devon devoted to a very active woman engineer in the 1920's, who organised some early electricity supplies in Devon. This was promoted by Women in Engineering, who had previously alerted us to the lady's work in Devon. We then hadn't heard of her, so the lady sent us two articles written by Margaret. It appears she organised the early electricity supplies at two small villages, Bampton (1926) and South Molton (1927), both DC hydro-schemes, of which we have records. There is no mention of Margaret, but she set up her own contracting business in Exeter for many years and was largely put out of business by the rural AC revolution of 11kV circuitry of the Exe & Culm Valley Companies (West of England Electricity) in the 30's.

BILL TINCKNELL

One of our founder members died last year, Bill had an interesting background in the electricity supply industry. He was born in Cullompton in 1935, the son of the Manager of a local Christy Bros of Chelmsford Undertaking, called the Culm Valley Electric Supply Co. The family moved to Chelmsford in the late 1940's with Bill joining the firm later and being trained as an engineer. He returned to the West Country working for the West of England Electricity, which had absorbed Culm Valley based at Exeter and ended up in a senior position. On joining our group, he passed to us a history of West of England Electricity, written by Selwyn Grant at nationalisation. He had two sons who both went into engineering and had a passion for horse racing, owning horses of his own. He retired and set up what became a major company, called Connaught, with one of his sons. The other son has been I/C of the redevelopment of Battersea Power Station and stepped down from that last year. He has been a keen supporter of our group, insisting the first 30 copies of Histelec News should be bound for posterity for which he paid.

DICK PASSMORE

Dick has sadly died in Devon. Although not a member, he used our Archive extensively in writing a range of books including "Power to the City: The History of The Exeter Light and Power Station" (the story of Haven Road Generating Station). He was also very active online as a major contributor to the Exeter Memories website and the associated Facebook group.

NATIONAL GRID INTO WIND

NG Have bought an American company called Geronimo Energy, which was only set up in 2004 at Minneapolis specialising in renewables, wind and solar energy projects. NG have spent \$100 million in this purchase apparently in order get entry into renewables, when they are forbidden to get involved in any form of generation in the UK by their mandate. In so doing, they plan to acquire some large projects, 200-megawatt solar array in South Dakota and 100-megawatt wind farm in Texas. It makes you wonder where this strategy is leading?

XMAS LIGHTS

Members Terry and Mike Checkley-James have raised more than £11,200 from the charity Christmas lights display at their home in Bradley Stoke, South Gloucestershire. The display of over 30,000 lamps received a lot of publicity and was even voted second best in the UK in a national TV poll.



Lighting up for Christmas

Their original target was to raise £4,000 for St Peter's Hospice, a Bristol charity which cares for adults with life-limiting illnesses. However, the attention generated by numerous media appearances meant that this was soon exceeded. Christmas Eve saw an astonishing £1,019 collected on one night alone. Mike said: "We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of friends, family, neighbours, the local community and the wider community too. The total raised has surpassed our wildest expectations and we understand that it is one of the largest amounts ever raised for Christmas charity lights in Bristol and South Gloucestershire"

Paul Hulbert (Note: Sadly Terry recently died)

SMART METERS NOT SO SMART

The Government's £11 billion Smart meter Programme is likely to cost £2 billion more and the promised benefits may never materialise says the National Audit Office (NAO). The benefits were a reduction in tariffs due savings in meter readings, customers would reduce gas and electricity usage, using less energy and to enable the use of variable tariffs throughout the day. Some of the meters installed so far are not suitable for the latter benefit and it is unlikely that the 50 million meters in every home and small businesses will be achieved by the target date of 2020!

DRAX LATEST

Drax is in the news again; not surprising when you realise that it supplies 7% of UK's electricity. In August we reported how Drax had transformed three coal burning boilers to wood chip burning and that the remainder two boilers would be converted to gas burning. The wood chip or pellet use as a fuel has been criticized by many, but now the USA is criticizing the firm. It appears that the wood pellets come from America, where the firm owns three plants producing these pellets. It appears that the production process is causing concern due to particle emissions in the procedure involved. They are working on how to reduce this problem!

REMEMBER IRA SKELTON?

Back in the early 80's when I was Operations Training Engineer at Redland Training Centre, we were engaged by the British Council to train electrical staff from overseas. One memorable electrical fitter trainee was Ira Skelton from the British Virgin Islands (BVI). Ira was a very likeable lad and kept us entertained with his humorous asides, not all of them intentional! Like the day he tried to drive a fork lift into the workshop and got it stuck, because the door was too low for it! He was often ribbed by the other trainees and his normal response was "stop laffin!" But despite the banter he always bounced back with a smile.

However, Ira got his own back. On coming to the UK, he had thought it was a very promiscuous country and bought a mega load of contraceptives only to discover all was not what he thought, and they remained unused. On his final day at Redland he handed out all the unused packets to the other lads on the course. It was only later that we found out that they had all suffered a subtle sabotage! (Not sure if there were any consequences!) I got on really well with Ira and he invited me to his home in the BVI but sadly I was unable to go.

So recently I thought I would Google his name, it's only a small place, and I wondered if he made it to be an electrical fitter. Well it transpires that Ira Skelton is now a senior board member of The British Virgin Islands Electricity Corporation and must be a local celebrity as he has a village and a music festival named after him! We're not "laffin now" Ira! *John Dike*

HAYNES BACK IN FALMOUTH

Ex-Chairman John Haynes and his wife Ellie spent a few days back in Falmouth last year, where they once lived staying at a B & B. They were surprised to find a map of SWEB hanging on the wall!!



John Haynes at the Falmouth B & B

FUTURE IS ORCADIAN?

<https://twitter.com/BBCArchive/status/1072869537282895879>

This site describes electricity-rich mainland Orkney. Here sustainable sources of the most conceivable kinds (wind, solar, tidal, pumped, batter-stored) from 700 generators support a population of 22K, with power to

spare for export. Meanwhile, the former diesel generators lie mute. *Roger Hennessey*

NEW "SAUSAGE" FIRE

The historical collection at Cairns Road has always had a "Sausage" Fire, one obtained by Peter Lamb before the Society existed donated by Redcliffe Church, Bristol. They are very rare, being the first heating devices produced around 1900 to 1910. We have just acquired another one (pictured below). It doesn't appear to sport a manufacturer's name and we think it was an "one-off". The name was a colloquial name given to describe their design, I guess; but basically, they are four stretched carbon filament lamps sprayed in a reddish colour, which of course gave out more heat than light, but then it would only have been the equivalent of ½ kW, not a lot!!



FOR YOUR DIARIES 2019

Sat. 18th May – TALK AT CAIRNS ROAD

Buffet Lunch at the Eastfield Inn, then a talk at 2.00pm on "The History of Birnbeck Pier" by Peter Lander

Sat 6th July - TALK ON DELIVERY OF FIRST SWEB HELICOPTERS

Illustrated talk by David Cousins 2.00pm at the Nutwell Lodge Hotel

Sat 7th Sept. VISIT to KINGSWOOD MUSEUM, BRISTOL

– Lunch at Willy Wicket details to follow

Sat 5th Oct. 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATORY LUNCHEON, CASTLE HOTEL, TAUNTON

- details to follow.

NEXT EDITION –

This newsletter is produced every four months. Please send articles, photographs etc to: - Peter Lamb at 1 Fairfield Way, Backwell, Bristol BS48 3RQ Telephone 01275 463160 or e-mail him on lambpandv@btinternet.com.