

Acceptance speech on Induction to the Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame

James Watt Dinner, 7th October 2016

PRESIDENT

Fame is the Spur - said John Milton. He was in Cromwell's Cabinet ruling Britain without a Royal. Minister for Propaganda. I like Milton's works.

I don't have a Caledonian Canal. Nor a Separate Condenser. We are a new world, children of these earlier worlds. To be here has caught me out, surprised and overwhelmed. Thank you IESIS for your great kindness to me.

The citation mentions Arup, as it must, there 54 years, continuing. Arup is belief based - with 2.5 chosen principles. Excellence of Products (quality of work), Equal Respect for all People (honourable in all our dealings) and Moderation on the Money (reasonable prosperity). Money is the half principle. If you rank money equally it will be a cuckoo in the nest, always edging the other two principles out.

It was a shock to find such a Firm commercially viable, on my Journey to America. But here I still am, still in love, still tolerated. Will Arup survive you may ask. Crashes happen. Can it survive - oh yes. Think universities, think churches. Could Arup be invented today - no way. The social soil has become just too sterile.

Excellence is Open Ended - better can be better than best. Nor perfect on People - you cannot impose respect. People revert to hierarchal - you must keep it loose. A paradox as between Equality ideas and Excellence ideas. An elite emerges up the Excellence axis. The multiplicity of Specialists, the focus on Team Working, the relative Anonymity, the wish to deliver Integrated Designs, a fairly flat Pay Structure - they all help to soften the paradox. Having no Ownership underpins it all.

My proudest moment? Pride is a sin. Maybe my best item is this great seething global organism, this surfeit of networks, mostly well within Ove Arup's principles. You still need self-respecting offices. I am in unredeemable debt to some key starter persons. In Iran it was Hossein Amanat - an architect - in exile. In Hong Kong it was Wu Ying Sheung - a developer. In China it was Chan Ka Ching - chair of the Arup Trustees - appoints the Group Board. In California it was Peter Budd - retired to Fife but not retired. In New York it was Guy Nordenson - now on the African American Museum in Washington. In Turkey it is Ahmed Hamdi Ataoglu - retirement resistant. All gave away beyond any call of duty. All remain good and trusted friends today. I have been very very fortunate in my friends. It is easy with goodwill.

May I say hi here to Hugh Gill - at Howdens in 1985, doing boring machines and wind turbine blades I guess. My Imperial College graduate recruitment was oddly low then. They were going to Howdens - which one can only praise. So I bought shares in Howden - if you cannot get the labour, get the fruits. Then Howden sold itself - doubled my money - but so sad. Why do UK owners sell out so much?

What do I do? - people things. Engineering is for people, is by people. You learn about people, who pays their debts, who doesn't. So - Disruptive books for my granddaughter, Running a Scottish charitable Trust, Raising 30-year capital for homes here for poor people, Supervising for Arup at Edinburgh University the Sociology of Fires in Shanty Towns, Trustee of an Arup competitor. As to the Future, it is yours not mine. Feel confident. Be bold. Society hugely needs you. No one else can do it. Be worthy of your opportunity.

Just met an old mate - has a big project in Bangladesh - the garment factories where 20 million women work making stuff for the big brands. He was hired to look at the Fire and Structural problems. Safety action could take 15 years to implement for the 8000 factories, deaths and damage continuing. So Arup is doing a lot on the ground itself. Now you don't order nice 25 year olds out onto such locations - they have to choose. Arup found it had a waiting list of its people and 100 plus are deployed. Little publicity. A commercial contract. I shed a tear.

Last week I was in Liverpool Labour, a fantastic experience. Yesterday I was in Queensferry at the New Bridge. Another tear - it is so comely, so inevitable in its setting.

But Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame, for me this caps everything. So Thank You.

Duncan Michael