

Acceptance speech on Induction to the Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame

James Watt Dinner, 3rd October 2025

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you to the Institution of Engineers in Scotland for your kind invitation to tonight's fabulous James Watt Dinner and for the nomination to be inducted into the hugely impressive Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame. It is a great honour to be recognised by fellow Engineers in this way – I have been an Engineer all my working career.

Watching the list of Scottish engineering heroes from past and present scroll by me this evening prompts me to ask myself the question "what is my great engineering achievement?". My personal career highlight is undoubtedly my engineering leadership role on the A380 wing design but when I look at some of the listed achievements of other individuals I am in awe. I conclude perhaps the nature of engineering has changed – it requires strong personal contributions, but it is much more of a team sport where personal nominations are often a recognition of the engineering excellence in teams that you have led. In my case I have had the privilege to work with outstanding engineering teams mostly in the field of aerospace.

I had the privilege to lead the A380 wing engineering project through to its entry into service with Singapore Airlines. The highlight of my engineering career was on 27 April 2005, the day of the first flight of the aircraft in Toulouse – I shared the moment with the entire wing team live on the big screen at Filton – that moment of lift-off is a moment I will never forget.

Ironically that day, 27 April 2005, was also the day that my interest in Scottish Aerospace history was truly ignited. Somebody sent me a clipping from the local Stirling newspaper reporting that on the same day of the A380 flight there was the unveiling of a statue in Stirling in honour of Frank Barnwell. Frank Barnwell had made the first heavier than air flight in Scotland. Frank and his brother Harold were Scotland's answer to the Wright Brothers.

Frank Barnwell went on to become the Chief Engineer of the Bristol Aeroplane Company – based at Filton, Bristol and a precursor of the Airbus design office that had gone on to design the A380 wing. There is an aerospace engineering connection between Scotland, Frank Barnwell and the A380.

I think Aerospace continues to inspire and I believe the work done by your Institution in inspiring the younger generation to become engineers is so important for our future. Congratulations to the Institution of Engineers in Scotland for that work and for promoting Engineering in Scotland. Once again, I thank you for this recognition which means such a lot to me. Thank you.

Sir Iain Gray