

Acceptance speech on Induction to the Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame

James Watt Dinner, 2nd October 2015

Mr President, My Lords Ladies and Gentlemen

I was greatly honoured when I first heard about this award but concerned that there had been some mistake. I was even more concerned when I realised that very few of the previous recipients were still with us. It was then our eldest daughter suggested that perhaps the Institution would be prepared to postpone the award for a few years.

I have to admit that I used to think that IESIS was for engineers in shipbuilding and that therefore I hardly qualified for membership. So I am glad that has now been rectified.

Having studied the list of distinguished recipients, I feel I have no option but to make a clean breast of the matter at once and admit that I have never invented anything. I am just not that sort of engineer. At most I can claim a reasonable feel for the technologies and management in electricity supply and, I believe, the ability to recognise a good engineer when I see one.

It is now over 70 years since I first worked in electrical engineering and the last 25 of my active involvement were in Scotland. I certainly take a good deal of satisfaction from the fact that by the time I retired, we could claim to have one of the most secure and cost effective systems world-wide. Some 60% of our energy was from nuclear and with the hydro we could, incidentally, also claim to be one of the greenest systems with the lowest carbon emissions - although that was not an issue at that time. The coal fired station at Longannet (a ground breaker when built) was used mainly for back up and profitable exports to England for the benefit of Scottish consumers

Today we see a very different picture. The decommissioning of our conventional generation is fast approaching and yet there are no plans to replace the generating capacity at Longannet or the nuclear. Even more incomprehensible is that we shall, in a few years, be importing power for much of the time from the new nuclear station to be built just over the border in England at Sellafield. You may wonder just why Scotland (birthplace of so much engineering) should be importing power we could well generate here, exporting highly skilled jobs in the process. And moreover ending up with the least reliable and insecure electricity supply that we have seen for a hundred years. And this at a time when electricity has never been more important in the life-blood of modern society.

We seem to be drifting into this situation with our eyes shut; just hoping it will be all right on the night. But with no electricity for twenty four hours (and perhaps even longer) it will seem a very long night indeed.

No engineer would set out to build a complex structure without a detailed plan and an electricity supply system is no different in this respect from a road network or an aircraft carrier. But there is no plan and nor is there any significant engineering input into the main decision making.

The Institution has taken a lead in drawing to the attention of Government the fast developing critical situation in electricity supply and explaining just how fragile and inse-

cure a system the Country is facing. In this IESIS deserves the support of all the engineering and scientific Institutions. And engineers everywhere.

Thank you for listening.

Sir Donald Miller