

**Foreword by E. R. E. Briscoe,
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President of the Norwich Engineering Society 1973/1974

The following address was presented to the Society by John Plumstead, M.A., M.I.M.I., on the occasion of a special meeting held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first sessional meeting of the Society on Monday, 29th October, 1973, and at the same venue, the Royal Hotel, Norwich.

John Plumstead is a Past-President of the Society, and since history was his special study at Cambridge University it was most appropriate that he should have been asked to place on record the principal achievements of the Society during the first 50 years of its existence.

There were over 150 present on this memorable occasion, including not only a large contingent of our younger members and students but also 18 Past-Presidents and one Founder Member. The very few Past-Presidents and Founder Members who were unable to attend sent congratulatory messages.

Among the distinguished guests were the Lord Mayor of Norwich, the Sheriff of Norwich, the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Ipswich, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth Engineering Societies, also of other kindred local Societies. The Society was also honoured by representatives of the Women's Engineering Society in the persons of Miss Sheila Leather - a Past-President - and Mrs. Rosalin Messenger, M.B.E., J.P. The latter presented an autographed copy of 'The Doors of Opportunity' - a biography of her sister, Dame Caroline Haslett, who was the Secretary of that Society when they had their 12th Annual Conference in Norwich in 1934, referred to in Mr. Plumstead's address.

The occasion was also marked by a message of Loyal Greetings to Her Majesty, The Queen, a copy of which, together with Her Majesty's reply, follows this foreword.

That John Plumstead fulfilled all our expectations will be fully acknowledged by all those who were present on that occasion. On behalf of the Society, therefore, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking John for the tremendous effort he put into the preparation and presentation of this Address.



GREETINGS TELEGRAM SENT TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

'The Norwich Engineering Society send Loyal Greetings to Your Majesty on the occasion of their celebration on Monday at the Royal Hotel, Norwich, of the Golden Jubilee of their foundation on 29th October, 1923.

The President.'

HER MAJESTY'S REPLY

The Queen sincerely thanks the members of the Norwich Engineering Society assembled to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of their foundation for their kind message of Loyal Greetings which Her Majesty greatly appreciates.

Private Secretary.'

NORWICH ENGINEERING SOCIETY

JUBILEE ADDRESS

29th October, 1973 - by John A. Plumstead, M.A., M.I.M.I.

I am very honoured to have been chosen to give the Jubilee oration on this occasion, which means so much to all of us, not only for the reasons your President has given, of which I am proud, but because as your only historian among engineers, I am glad to have the opportunity to do something for the Society which I hope will give you pleasure.

In reviewing the events and personalities that go to make up our story, my own memory goes back a little further than the 28 years for which I have been a member, but I have had to draw on such records as I could find, and I hope that some of your memories, of incidents and occasions that I have not touched on, will come to light tonight.

It is about 14 years since I was President, 16 or so since I was Treasurer and 25 since I was Secretary; 40 since my father was President; and so my mind goes back to start with 50 years ago tonight. Since the Society's records before the War, except the President's badge and hammer, were destroyed at Dawnay's in 1942, the only contemporary record of the first meeting exists in the "Eastern Daily Press" on the 30th October, 1923, fortunately giving a good report under the heading "A Great Profession".

Before I go on to quote this, I would like to discourse a little to set the scene of those days. There was a large advertisement of Mann Egerton above this report, of 'Showroom soiled' - a delightful expression - and included makes such as Calthorpe Overland and Belsize, as well as many we know today. Mann Egerton's telephone number was Norwich 482; Mary Pickford was appearing at the Hay market; and at the Theatre De Luxe (loo as it was pronounced) or TDL as it was popularly called, the Dempsey/Firpo fight was showing; Mr. Churchill's new book 'The World Crisis 1915' appeared and was reviewed; and old sherry was 4/- a bottle at Backs. (This must have been good stuff - I remember buying branded sherry at 4/6d. a bottle 15 years later.) In the same issue, there was a report of Mussolini addressing an early rally of black-shirts in Bologna; and, I quote: 'Howard Carter opens the tomb of Seti II and is arranging to open the tomb of Tuthankamen on November 1st, but this dependent upon the installation of electric light in the Valley of the Kings, which has not yet begun to operate for the winter season.'

A last report in this paper which would interest us today and foreshadow later events was headed 'Peaceful Belfast'. Intrigued, I read; 'Dr. McCrory, Roman Catholic Bishop of Down, speaking at Belfast yesterday, said that though they still had grievances to complain of they thanked God that the time of violence and what he might call savagery in Belfast had passed away and he hoped would never return. If the decent working people of both sides were left to themselves, free from all superior influence, they would live in peace and Christian harmony.' Let us hope that Dr. McCrory is eventually right.

A week or two before, Charlie Chaplin and Jackie Coogan were in 'The Kid', at the Haymarket, and the chief headline in the paper was 'Dark Days in Germany' - sub-titled 'No Wages, No Bread'. It was the period of the million mark note.

I was eight years old at the time. Doubtless, I visited my father's works, for when I was asked what I was drawing at school I said 'oxygen cylinders'. At about that age, I remember going with my mother to our grocer's, Bassingthwaites, where sacks of sugar,

peas, lentils and dried fruit stood inside the door, and stood in fascination at the noise and action of the Berkel bacon slicer as she gave her order, that is, when the shop 'traveller' did not call for it at the house, which seems incredible now; and this is the time when the milkman, with his cry of 'Milko', called at our door with a churn, to ladle out pints with a tin plated dipper - five years after the Great War and the foundation we are celebrating on the evening of October 29th, 1923.

'A GREAT PROFESSION'

Engineering Society for Norwich

A General Meeting of upwards of sixty Norwich engineers was held at the Royal Hotel, Norwich, last night, when an Engineering Society for Norwich was formed. Mr. A. E. Collins, City Engineer, took the chair. In moving the formation of the Society, he remarked that though there were several associations connected with engineering in Norwich they were connected with trades. The proposed Society would include members connected with every branch of engineering, but it would not be a trade association. It appeared to him that great benefit would be derived from the reading of papers and ensuing discussions. Already a great deal had been done by the acting Honorary Secretary, Mr. R. A. Lower, and Mr. F. M. Long, both of the Corporation Electricity Works, in the way of arranging for papers to be read. They would make a very good start for the present year.

Mr. Thomas Glover, Engineer and Manager of the Gas Works, in seconding the motion said that the company present was enough to secure success. There was a sufficient variety of experience and practice to ensure interest being taken.

Mr. F. M. Long, City Electrical Engineer, wished heartily to support the motion. The formation of the Society would be an important development because Norwich was becoming more and more an engineering centre. Many new firms had sprung up in the last few years, and the tendency was for them to increase. It was important, especially for the rising generation of engineers that there should be a Society. It would be open to any interested so long as they were connected with engineering. It should be their object to encourage the students to participate in the business and to hold their own meetings.

Mr. W. H. Scott, of Messrs. Laurence & Scott, also spoke in support of the motion. He felt that the formation of a Society would make the profession more interesting, especially to the younger generation. He did not think there was any doubt but that the Society should be formed.

The motion 'That this meeting of engineers resolves to form a Society to be known as The Norwich Engineering Society' was carried nem. con.

On the motion of Mr. A. E. Collins, Seconded by Mr. G. E. ffiske of Boulton & Paul Limited, the draft constitution and rules were adopted.

The election of officers was then proceeded with. Mr, F. M. Long said he would propose that Mr. Collins be elected first President of the Society; he was not only an excellent engineer, but also the leading engineer in Norwich. Mr. W. H. Scott seconded, and Mr. Collins was elected amid loud applause.

Other officers elected were;-

Vice-Presidents: Mr. F. M. Long, City Electrical Engineer
 Mr. W. H. Scott, of Messrs. Laurence & Scott Limited

Hon. Treasurer: Mr. C. J. Jewell, of the Tramway Company

Hon. Secretary: Mr. R. A. Lower, of the Corporation Electricity Works

Council: Mr. Thomas Glover (Gas Works)
 Mr. J.B. Willis (L. & N.E.R.)
 Mr. T. Lakey (Post Office)
 Mr. G. E. ffiske (Messrs. Boulton & Paul Limited)
 Mr. W. Le Neve Bower (Messrs. Barnards Limited)
 Mr. G. Egles (Messrs. Laurence & Scott Limited)
 Mr. A. R. Pank (Bedford Street)
 Mr. J. D. North (Messrs. Boulton & Paul Limited)
 Mr. F. W. Doggett (Messrs. Mann Egerton)

Hon. Auditors: Mr. V. E. Harston
 Mr. G. T. Redgment.

The first milestone after the foundation meeting was of course the President's inaugural address on November 12th, 1923, in the Billiard Room of the Royal Hotel, setting a tradition that has lasted uninterrupted but for the war until now, and I hope will continue. The report of this in the next day's E.D.P. was very full, too long to read; but I would like to quote from it.

Mr. Collins spoke of City traffic and congestion, and rightly said that one of the biggest problems was loading and unloading, and thought the solution lay in a clearing-house and pool system of delivery. He said that since he was articled to the Borough Engineer at Plymouth he was a professional descendant of Sir Francis Drake, Smeaton and Brunel. He said it was little known that Drake was one of the best engineers of his time, and constructed the Plymouth waterworks, still in use in Mr. Collins' time. His talk was evidently full of anecdotes, and at the end of the report, in reply to a question, he said that the membership was now 185, but only 62 had paid their subscriptions. (Laughter.)

The new item alongside this report by the way was about the mystery of the whereabouts of Little Willie (Ex Crown Prince of Germany).

I would here like to acknowledge the kind assistance of Mr. A. A. Jenner, Editor-in-Chief of Eastern Counties Newspapers, and Mr. Atherton, their Librarian, in providing copies of these articles which I shall have pleasure in handing over to you, Mr. President, for the Society's records, and of Mr. Hepworth, the City Librarian, and Mr. Sayer of the local history section of the City Library for placing at my disposal all the files I could ask for. They both wish us well; Mr. Sayer and Mr. Atherton I feel sure will garner in the reports of this meeting tonight, and the Press have already done us ample justice with a report to be proud of, and a leader of praise for the men of the Society and their works on Friday last.

In the rest of the first session, Mr. Glover spoke on elevators and conveyors; Mr. F. M. Long on the forthcoming new power station; and S. E. Glendenning on electric motor and control gear.

The next year my father (predictably) talked about acetylene; H. O. Clarke on 'Old Engineering'; Mr. Jewell, of the Tramways, Treasurer until 1930 - whose son was a close friend of mine - on 'Railway Electrification'.

On 28th April, 1924, Fred Hawkins records in a later Year Book there were 140 members, 143 associate members and 51 students, making a total of 334 'all paid'.

In 1924/25, J. B. Robertson, evidently a versatile member, talked on 'Chemistry and Mineralogy relative to Pigments and Paints' and the next year on 'Road Wheel Construction from Prehistoric Times'; Mr. G. A. Parfitt, now an honorary member, spoke appropriately on 'Water'; Sidney Hines on 'Ornamental Turning', which he gave again in 1948; and H. O. Clark on the 'Railway Centenary'.

In 1926, Thomas Glover, the Gas Manager, a founder member and later to be the only man to be President twice, was Lord Mayor, and gave a Civic Reception to the Society, making a happy and historic parallel to this our 50th year, when the last Lord Mayor of the City and County of Norwich under the old local government system, and the second Lord Mayor to be a member of the Society, again gives, for the first time since, a Civic Reception to the Society.

Thomas Glover also opened the new Electric Power Station in 1926, built to the plans of F. M. Long, at a cost of £300,000 - a lot of money and a bold civic venture in those days, placing Norwich far in the forefront in electricity in many ways. The Society was represented prominently by Mr. Long and Mr. Collins, and I see my father in the photograph of the occasion. There was a grand lunch at St. Andrew's Hall.

In 1926/27, J. B. Willis spoke on 'Engineering Freaks', one of the papers I would be intrigued to hear, like 'The Pianoforte as an Engineering Proposition' by C. H. Frewer, President in 1951/52, given in 1930/31.

We have now moved to the Stuart Hall until 1926/63, and Lincoln Sutton, whose name is still well remembered in Norwich, gave a talk on the London water supply. I remember, in the thirties, when I was interested in Chemistry, spending a time in the school holidays in his laboratory, alongside where the old E.D.P. offices were, and learned about phenolphthalein as an alternative to litmus, and how it reacted to spit. I also remember doing the same sort of thing at the Gasworks Lab at Bishop Bridge, where under the care of a young chap nicknamed Tubby Scott, who played rugby, drank beer and told stories, and who was later to be the manager of the Gasworks at Diss, so far as I can tell, I only learned to clean my tie with toluene.

At this time, when Boulton & Paul, who had already supplied the Royal Air Force with the Sidestrand, were building the Overstrand with its hydraulic gun turrets, the forerunners of the defensive power of our bombers during the second World War, and the R101, with its 47 miles of tube and 65,000 nuts and bolts, A. E. Plumstead gave his second talk on the electric welding of gas holders, which was reckoned to be quite a trick in those days; and I remember going to Kent and seeing them do it, and Rodwell Smith a dapper little man with a moustache, who, until I undertook this, did not realise he was an engineer, spoke on wrought iron and mild steel tubes. He was better known to me as an accompanist to the type of entertainment appreciated then, including many given to the Engineering Society, and also on the occasion of the entertainment of the Women's Engineering Society later on.

There was a talk on the history and development of the electric lamp (we must remember that many of us were then still or until recently, lit by gas at home) by A. C. Green, the third Secretary of the Society; on coal, by V. E. Harston, who was our second Treasurer from 1930-1936; and another by S. E. Glendenning, before the Presidential Address of 1930/31, in which year the first electrically-heated floor in the Country was installed in Strangers Hall, with elements by Heatrae, and Laurence Scott contributed the greatest horsepower by a single firm to a single ship, in electric motors, to the Empress of Britain. About this time, Presidents tended to give a published title to their address, though this did not last long, and there was a change towards a preponderance of invited

speakers, though Glendenning spoke again on Michael Faraday.

In 1932/33, my father gave his Presidential address, without title but with films, doubtless about welding. E. P. Ladbroke gave the gyroscopic compass, and C. B. Smith, High Speed Compression Ignition Engines, on February 2nd, 1933. In October, he talked on Power Generation from Wood Waste, and in November, 1936, on the Installation of a Works Power Plant. C. B. Smith is still a member, though he cannot attend so often, and is retiring from his post in the Engineering Department of the City College at Christmas; I am sure members wish him well.

In 1933/34 F. Buckley cemented the tradition of Presidents keeping the title of their address to themselves; Ladbroke gave another on Building a Mammoth Liner; and Sam Gregory gave one on Woodworking Machinery. I can remember that striking appearance of Sam Gregory to this day; a massively stocky man, he had ample ginger hair all over the place, bushy eyebrows, and sprouting out of ears and nose, all cauliflower, so that his visage would make Henry Cooper by comparison look effeminate, though withal a genial man and far from frightening. This may be a boy's recollection in caricature, but perhaps one shared with older members.

In this year, Fred Hawkins appears as Assistant Secretary and Editor of the Year Book. I suppose I may have met him in 1946, when I took over as Secretary, and wish I could remember, as I think the Society owes him a debt as one of its great servants for all the work he did in this long period. His editorials during this time are all extremely thoughtful, and show the pride and devotion he had for the Society.

1934/35, when Heatrae were still called Electric Fires Limited, saw the Presidency of G. Roadley-Simpkin. He thought of the idea of the Year Book, and suggested that the President should have a badge of office. During his year of office, a superior syllabus card was introduced, which lasted five years until the War - which I have seen through the courtesy of Mr. Harrison. He was chairman of the committee appointed to make arrangements for the proposed visit of the Women's Engineering Society, which evidently caused considerable excitement. I notice my father was a member.

The Society had a supper instead of the annual dinner they had apparently formerly had, at the Thatched, for 3/6d., and they all enjoyed it and kept it up every year until the war.

In this year, Frank Buckley died, following his year of office, and J. B. Willis (also a Past-President and a Founder Member), and the Willis prize was instituted for the best paper in a session by an associate member, and continued until 1948.

The outstanding event of 1934/35 (in the words of the Year Book) was the visit of the Women's Engineering Society, Their twelfth Annual Conference was held in Norwich, and on the evening of the 21st September, 1934, a Reception and Dinner was given to the delegates by our Society at the Haymarket Restaurant. The President, G. Roadley-Simpkin, was in the chair, and among those present were Thomas Glover, who was now Deputy Lord Mayor; Miss E. M. Kennedy (President); Miss V. Holmes (immediate Past-President); Mrs. E. M. Douglas; Miss A. M. Ellis; Miss H. C. Hollands; and Miss C. Haslett (Secretary), who stated that this was the first time they had been entertained by a men's society, when giving a vote of thanks for the assistance that had been given towards making their Conference such a success.

The following edition of 'The Women Engineer' records that Miss Kennedy, in her response to Mr. Glover's toast to their Society, embodied her Presidential address, reviewing her experience in engineering, going back 30 years from then - apparently to

1904 - and says that 'East Anglia has seen her first conference of Women Engineers, but if those delegates who were present in Norwich have any say in the matter, it will not have seen the last.' The following morning (Sat) they paid a visit to Laurence Scott, welcomed by W. H. Scott, and were entertained at a Civic Reception at the Guildhall (the year before the City Hall was opened by King George V), had lunch at the Bell, and at their A.G.M. elected Amy Mollison their President, and naturally followed with a visit to the Aero Club at the new municipal aerodrome, opened in June, 1933 by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. Naturally, also, they went on Sunday to the Cathedral, and paid a visit to the Broads. A few visited Caleys on Monday, but for most it was only a busy weekend. The promised return visit has not materialised, but we hope it still will, in less than another 40 years; the ladies may be sure that the City and Society will welcome them no less well than before.

As well as the election of Mrs. Amy Mollison, the 'Woman Engineer' records that year the passing of Madame Curie, and of Lady Parsons, the founder of their Society.

In the next Year Book, Fred Hawkins refers to his last editorial, in which he had hoped to celebrate the Jubilee of King George V, and took most appropriately as his text the motto of the Prince of Wales, 'I serve', relating it to the Society; and in 1937/38 there is an interesting event. Thomas Glover, who must be one of the most illustrious figures of our past, in his second Presidency, having been Lord Mayor in 1925/26, President in 1926/27, as well as Deputy Lord Mayor and President of the Rotary Club in 1922, when Mr. F. M. Long gave a talk to the Club on the 'Norwich Electricity Supply', gave his Presidential address on October 18th, and the programme shows that R. B. Glover, the same evening, gave a paper on the use of Town Gas in Industry.

In 1935/36, E. W. Mirrington, I see, joined the Council, and was a Council member in 1945 when I joined, and there were five Sabbertons in the Society in 1936.

In 1937, a private Company dinner was given to celebrate the 75th birthday of W. H. Scott, one of our greatest members; the man who founded his Company, for some time now the largest employer in Norwich, the man who electrified the City, and invented a system of costing that set the pattern for the Nation and may still be known as the Norwich Tariff.

In 1938, the Power Station was extended to the plans of the City Engineer, Alexander Pask, who like his predecessor, F. M. Long, was also President of the Society.

LSE contributed 14,000 hp to the Queen Mary, and 18,000 hp to the QE1 and the Mauretania.

By 1938/39, the preponderance of papers were given by invited speakers, and in the Presidency of A. L. Higham the only member speaking was O. F. C. Bender, later President in 1948/49. The Society had a lapel badge then, which the Year Book says enjoyed a ready sale at 1/3d., and Mr. Harrison has one still.

In 1939/40, Fred Hawkins' editorial and R. W. Steel's foreword were apprehensive of war, and in the event there were only four meetings besides the A.G.M., of which the President's address was the last. This year saw the first lady member, Miss Messiter, of H.M.F.I., and the deaths recorded of founder members W. H. Scott and F. M. Long (who had been in charge of the Norwich Electricity undertaking for 40 years until 1932).

1940/41 saw the death of R. G. Green, Secretary since 1933. Fred Hawkins wrote his editorial to the sound of the air raid warning, and the Council, at the A.G.M., after the suspension of activities for the first half of the year, resolved to make every effort to keep the Society intact, and to have meetings, owing to the blackout regulations, on dates as near to

the full moon as possible* Geoffrey ffiske was elected President, and was invested by my father on 29th April, 1940; and kept the Society intact until I met him in October, 1945, when in a kindly interview I was asked to be the Society's Secretary, and served under Presidents G, S, Howell and R, A, Weston, both of whom I am pleased to see here tonight, the latter representing our three surviving founder members. Unfortunately, G. A. Parfitt and G. H. Wilson are not well enough to come.

I will not embarrass George Howell and Ronald Weston with the praise I have had for earlier personalities, but will simply say that my years as Secretary were happy and satisfying, and I have remained on the best of terms with both these gentlemen ever since. I kept in friendly touch, also, with Geoffrey ffiske until his death in 1970. Until very infirm, in his last year, he busied himself with his hobby of mechanical repairs for his friends and neighbours in Brundall.

The years since the War seem to pass more briefly in review than before. They are far more crowded with recorded incident, and, sadly, with obituary notices. Much of what I could say is in common memory, and, in any case, through the secretarial and editorial work of Ronnie Smith, the second great servant of the Society after Fred Hawkins, and Gordon Lerner, who for a record length of time from 1955 till now has edited the Year Book and Handbook, and is still doing it long after anyone else would have stopped, most of what can be told can be read, and I can properly sketch the last 25 years more briefly than the first.

In 1949/50, after the period of the War, the heat pump, the 150th anniversary of Boulton & Paul, and the nationalisation of electricity, your President read a paper on 'Water Supply', and in that year life membership was conferred on S. E. Glendenning, and V. E. Harrison retired after 17 years as Treasurer, and I was able to report that membership exceeded that of 1936/37 for the first time.

In 1952, it was said that more than half the ships completed in Great Britain the year before had motors by LSE, 66% of the tankers and half the ships built in Holland.

In 1953/54, R. Smith's editorial regrets, echoing Fred Hawkins, not being able to make it a bumper coronation number, *but I regret, he says, it closely follows the pattern of previous years'. This year saw the disastrous coastal floods, and the epic story of the restoration of electrical supplies. E. P. Ladbrooke was President, and was honoured by the presence at the Annual Dinner, as chief guest, of R. H. Mottram as Lord Mayor, one of the most distinguished sons of the City, who said in his speech that he could not understand why Norwich had no statue to commemorate W. H. Scott.

In 1955/57, after my father died, I was Treasurer, and during this time there was much concern over dropping membership and cash difficulties, but with the advent of a new Treasurer, H. L. Jones, by the time I was President we had 250 or more members again and 115 at the annual dinner, when Michael Bulman, as Lord Mayor, was chief speaker. I did not realise at the time that he was chief guest in 1937/38 when A. E. Plumstead gave the toast of the guests, but I remember enjoying his company at dinner and the wisdom of his advice to me on speaking; he also tactfully spoke on the tradition of family influence in Norwich engineering.

1956/60 was an eventful period. It saw the 21st anniversary of the presentation of the President's badge in 1935, the beginnings of the gas revolution in Norwich, Laurence Scott fitting out the Canberra, the Andania and the Empress of Britain, the gas grid, and the death of V. E. Harston; the development of the Boulton & Paul 'Jumbo' steel handling plant, the brainchild of Lionel Measures, the retirement of John Sumner and the succession of W. M. Bishop, another Past-President, and the retirement of G. Roadley-Simpkin, President

1934/35, father of the Year Book and originator of the Presidential badge and one of the great figures of the Society, though not a founder member. I became acquainted with him when he was elected to the City Council after his retirement, and found him a charming, courteous and public spirited man. He was 80 in February this year, but I am sorry to say that since a severe stroke in October, 1968, while for a long time his indomitable spirit made it clear he recognised his visitors, he has been denied the power of communication, and is still in Whittingham hospital.

1961/62 saw the deaths recorded of Lionel Measures, C. H. Smith - the inventor of the thermostatic control of Electric domestic hot water supply, R. G. Taylor, Reuben Clarke, Sidney Cowell, Reg Bussey, Sidney Hines and F. E. Payne, whose partner, William Brown, a founder member, had died some years before.

In 1963/64, we had over 300 members again, and moved to the Assembly House, and this year saw the retirement of D. H. McCracken, M.B.E., and Reg Hubble, who still attends our meetings, J. V. Knight, who was Treasurer when I was Secretary, and Reg Woods, M.B.E., and the deaths of Dr. Schwarz, C. H. Frewer and J. B. Campbell.

I was talking with Leonard Howes the other day, who was Lord Mayor in 1963, and our chief guest at the Dinner of that year, who told me the anecdote that during the customary interval between dinner and speeches, he, in company with several prominent members, became stuck in the lift. The members were baffled apparently, but the porter according to Mr. Howes remedied matters with a hairpin or paperclip, remarking that people should not meddle with matters they could not understand.

In 1963/64, P. A. Bailey was President. In a few words, in 1964 the first two VI form girls applied to join the Society, in 1961 he instituted the Phil Bailey award for students, and in 1971 two Wymondham College girls gained it. Members will know his dedication to the original aims of the Society in encouraging students, and his success.

Ten years ago only saw the promise of electricity to all who wanted it by 1966. The last few in Norwich were in fact in 1964 and were in the tenancy of the Gas Board. After this final mopping up of the little bastion of antiquity, the electricity supply industry seems to have reached a stage of organisation where no further dramatic advance occurs, but only breakdowns, deficits and price increases interrupt the monotony of efficiency, and the features of the last few years are disputes, strikes and power cuts, and this very weekend the Sunday papers threaten another.

The last fifteen years have been a dramatic period in the Gas industry, with as much or more change than in the 150 before. It was at first supposed that Norwich would go out of production by 1960, and Mr. Dyde in 1959 mistakenly promised town gas made from low grade coal underground in the Midlands, fed back in reverse through the Grid, Practically the sole requisite for this would have been a large gasholder, and there was great controversy over this. As the 'E.E.N.' said on 28th December, 1956: 'Everybody wants the gas, but nobody wants the Gasworks.' In the event, a new plant was built and opened at Cremorne Lane in 1962, to make gas from oil, somewhat as the Gas Company had done in its early days in 1815. By 1965, its capacity was multiplied enormously and now processes liquefied gas from North Africa. In 1965, the last of the coal boats, the Rose Julie M. was scrapped, and though the 1897 water gas plant was still a usable standby, the Palace Works which had made gas from coal since 1851, and Bishop Bridge since 1839, were superseded, closed and down by 1970.

In 1969 there was North Sea Gas, but not yet for the City, or events would have moved even faster, but the amazing thing is that the new Works, far more efficient than anything before, were closed after a bare 10 years of existence and down by this year. The story is

told very well in the 'E.D.P.' leader of 5.7.73 which though I would like to read it in full I haven't time to, but I am rather taken by the last paragraph, which I quote: -

“Such is the speed of the present industrial revolution that masterpieces of chemical engineering are, it seems hardly less evanescent than fashions in modern art. Industrial archaeologists have called for the preservation of Fakenham Gasworks (built in 1846) as the last relic of its kind. Shall we next see, in place of Thorpe Gasworks Protest Association, a Cremorne Lane Preservation Society, to conserve an industrial relic of the 1960's?

But a more important question, which no one has yet cared to answer, is what will happen in 20 years time - when, as we are told, the supplies of North Sea Gas will be exhausted? Shall we then have a grand reopening, by a technologist with a shovel and wheelbarrow, of Fakenham Gasworks?”

The only thing left to record is that the gas industry also has its troubles that affect us all seriously, in the gas strike of February and March this year.

Also, in the last ten years, the new City Engineers Depot, at a cost of a quarter of a million pounds, was opened in 1965, and the Society visited it; and the new airport was opened, rather less gloriously than the old one, by a mere transient politician named Mason in 1970.

1966/67 saw the change from a Yearbook, which we could no longer afford while keeping our subscription moderate enough to keep up membership and fulfil the original aims of the Society. It is worth noting that it is still only just over twice what it was in 1923.

In 1962/63, Mervyn Moore became Secretary of the Society after Ronnie Smith, by this time rightly an Honorary member and technically relinquished it to become President for a year in which he spoke up for the riverside walk for the City, which is now becoming a fact, and like Gordon Larner he is still in office, and who knows what record length of service he will reach before he stops. Members will not need reminding of the influence he has had on the Society in bringing in new members, lively programmes and guidance to a succession of Presidents. Our Treasurer, too, has quietly done his job for the same length of time, without a year off, and of him, only some later record can fully tell.

With the brief history of Gas, and a couple of gas men, I feel we are up-to-date, though I have not touched on many things, the successful visits the Society has made over the years, or those who have given distinguished service on the Council, and I hope no one will be offended or too disappointed at omissions of names which have contributed to the Society or the City, such as Colmans - a history in themselves - Jarrold's - leaders in colour printing, Mackintosh's, May and Baker, the success stories of Auto Wrappers and the Skyline factory for example. My talk is long enough already.


To my mind, this 50 years has been a great record; we have always been up-to-date or ahead of time. In recent years, in our syllabus we have dealt with Concorde, Oil Rigs, the Channel Tunnel, Foulness Airport, and the Norwich water process. We have had memorable ones, like 'Twists' by Paul Bower in 1967, giving the fascinating interacting histories of the families Barnard, Bishop, Bower, Boulton & Paul, and that one by Colin Chapman, when he had just moved both home and factory and produced the first Lotus at Hethel, the day before. Among our speakers has been W. G. Wilson, the inventor of the preselector gearbox, C. S. Milne, at the time President of the Institute of Welding, and Professor Emeleus, of Cambridge University, twice, by popular request, on atomic energy.

The Gasworks has given us 6 Presidents, Electricity 7, Laurence Scott 7, Boulton & Paul 2, two City Engineers, and the others were individuals, this year's President being the first independent professional of his category.

It is not in my brief to predict the future, Lord Mayors and Sheriffs, who, I am glad to record, have attended our Annual Dinner without break for as long as I can remember, and find with astonishing ingenuity a variety of ways of telling us what fine fellows we are, often do this, and so has your President this year, and very well too, with the remark 'One thing that is certain, is that scientists will continue to seek out the secret of life and matter, and whatever by-products their research may yield, the Engineer will be expected to find a practical application thereof for the ultimate benefit of Mankind.'

It is my duty, I think, as a final remark, to comment that most of the customs of the Society have stood the test of time and ought to be continued and some revived. The only aberration, that as a purist, I disapprove of, is the departure from our traditional colours in the Society tie. You will observe that I am wearing a blue one.

May the Society long continue to prosper, jealously guarding its hallowed habits, and only adding good new ones.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. A. Plumstead'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a large initial 'J'.

J. A. Plumstead

THE NORWICH ENGINEERING SOCIETY
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE DIAMOND JUBILEE
EXHIBITION HANDBOOK

On 29th October 1923 about sixty Norwich engineers met in the Royal Hotel, Norwich to consider a proposal put forward by Mr. A. E. Collins, the then City Engineer, to form an Engineering Society for Norwich. The proposed Society was to include members drawn from every branch of engineering, but it would not be a trade association. Its formation was regarded as an important development because Norwich was becoming more and more an engineering centre with many new firms having sprung up and there was a tendency for the number to increase. Such a Society would encourage the rising generation of engineers to participate in its business as well as to hold their own meetings.

Thus the Norwich Engineering Society was born over sixty years ago.

The first President was A. E. Collins and the Vice-Presidents were F. M. Long, the City Electrical Engineer and W. H. Scott, the founder of Laurence Scott and Electro motors. The other officers were drawn from the Tramway Company, the Gas Works, the London & North-Eastern Railway, the Post Office, Boulton & Paul, Barnards, Panks and Mann Egerton.

The first meeting of the Society was the President's inaugural address on 12th November 1923 when Mr. Collins spoke of traffic and congestion in the City with the biggest problem being loading and unloading. His suggested solution was a clearing house and a pool system of delivery. The programme for the rest of the 1923/4 session comprised:

Aircraft	Pattern Making
Elevators and Conveyors	Foundry Practice
Thorpe Power Station	Water Lifts
Bridge Building	The Motor Car

The Application of Electric Motors and Control Gear to Industrial Purposes

In its first year the Society's membership climbed to 334 of which 51 were student members.

Over the sixty years more than 600 meetings have been held and the range of subjects covered by speakers is fascinating. Naturally the titles reflect the engineering developments of the period and the old programmes are a history in themselves. 'Aircraft' in 1923 and 'The Metric System and how it was adapted by the Swiss Engineering Industry' in 1924 were followed by 'London Tube Tunnelling' in 1927 and the 'Gyroscopic Compass' in 1932. The building of the Queen Mary gave rise to a number of papers in the early thirties and as early as 1936 there was a meeting on 'A survey of Television'.

Understandably the Society was not active during the war years but on 1st October 1945 the Presidential Address opened a session which included papers on education in engineering, the heat pump, abrasive wheels, fluorescent lighting and electric power cables.

In the late forties the programmes included the development of rocket armament, application of atomic energy, optical plastics and gas turbines. The 1950's brought speakers on jet airliners, man-made fibres, transistors and the BRM racing car. The sixties brought us construction of motorways, communication satellites, computers, hovercraft and space travel. The gas and oil developments in the North Sea were also included from the mid sixties and it was about then that the Society began to include in its annual programme a medical - engineering subject which continues today.

Many of the meetings over the past sixty years have covered important and interesting local developments. The building of Thorpe Power Station (now demolished) was covered in 1923 and members were updated on Norwich Sewerage in 1925. 'Future Technical Education in Norwich' (1930), 'Land Drainage in East Suffolk and Norfolk' (1952). 'Lotus Racing Cars' (1966). 'Lowestoft Bascule Bridge' (1971) and 'The Yare Barrage' (1982) are but a few of the local subjects considered by members over the years.

Some of the titles are intriguing and one's imagination can run riot with 'Old Engineering' (1924), 'Engineering Freaks' (1926), 'The Pianoforte as an Engineering Proposition' (1930), 'The Problems of Elastic Stability' (1932), 'Romance of Soap Making' (1935), 'Hands Full of Power' (1954) and, more recently, 'Explosives' by Blaster Bates

(1975).

The Many branches of engineering provide an endless flow of new developments from which the Society chooses its programme for the year. In the Norwich Engineering Society we are fortunate in being able to attract the best speakers in our chosen subjects and most of them are keen to visit us again at a later date.

In October 1973 the Society celebrated its 50th Anniversary when over 150 members attended a special meeting in the Royal Hotel - the venue of the original meeting - to listen to John Plumstead deliver a Jubilee Address full of history and personal experiences presented in a witty and light-hearted manner.

Ten years later the Diamond Jubilee was marked by an exhibition 'Sixty Years of Engineering in Norwich' at which over twenty local companies and organisations demonstrated the importance of engineering to the community and the progress made in all its branches over the life-time of the Society. Over 3000 visitors attended in the three days. At the Jubilee Dinner which followed, the principal guest Sir Monty Finniston FRS delivered a stirring speech on the essential contribution required from engineering to the future prosperity of the country.

The young people of today accept as commonplace the computer and electronic equipment which, just fifteen years ago, were the province of a very few specialists. This rate of change will accelerate so that it is impossible to forecast what fundamentally new developments will take place over the next fifteen years. We can be confident, however, that when the Norwich Engineering Society celebrates its Seventy-Fifth Anniversary in 1998 its programme will still be comprehensive, challenging and relevant because that is the strength of the Society.

The Writer is indebted to Mr. John Plumstead, a Past President of the Society for much of the background material which was drawn from his interesting history of the Society presented on the occasion of our Golden Jubilee in 1975 (1973?).

W. McCraith

W. McCraith
December 1983