

April 2015 Blog Dawn Bonfield

As usual, this is a personal perspective on my time as President of the Women's Engineering Society, and reflects my own activities.

Waterloo Bridge Update

The Waterloo Bridge in London continues to be one of our themes this month, and we are making progress in getting it recognised as a symbol of women's work in construction during the second world war. A [blue plaque](#) has been applied for, and [Historic England](#) - the new name of the organisation which was previously part of English Heritage - is considering relisting the bridge using new information and photographs that have come to light. We have recently put out a call for further information and would love to hear from anybody who knows any of the male or female bridge construction workers during the second world war. A further meeting with Sandi Rhys Jones later in the month put the history of this campaign into context, and I learnt of a tremendously exciting fact that is being kept under wraps until we find out more details. Watch this space! The Waterloo Bridge is one of the themes of the WES [Prestige Lecture](#) taking place on 4 November 2015.

Council Meeting

In mid April we held a WES council meeting - my second as President, and we were very grateful to the Wellcome Trust for stepping in at the last minute to offer us the use of their boardroom when our usual venue at the Building Centre was unavailable. The new Council structure is working well and we are getting used to sending in our reports on time. If you would like to come along to one of the meetings, or know more about what we discuss, then please do get in touch.

Magnificent Women, Amy Johnson and our Archive

I attended a reception for Northrop Grumman in London on the same day that we delivered the [Magnificent Women](#) outreach activity that Northrop Grumman sponsor to a school in Hull, where Amy Johnson - a previous President of the Women's Engineering Society - was born. We have since been in touch with the [Amy Johnson Festival](#) organisers about the extended festival that they are planning for 2016, 75 years after the death of Amy Johnson and we are exploring how we can bring the significant archive of Amy Johnson material to life at this festival as a schools resource. [The WES archive](#), held at the IET Savoy Hill House, is an amazing collection and will be so well utilised when we finally get it digitised. Unfortunately the kickstarter campaign that ran last month did not reach its target, but we are hoping that the donations that were pledged will still be given, so if you pledged previously, or would like to give now, then please get in touch. [Further details here.](#)

WES worked with Prospect Union and other partners last year on the [Women in STEM survey](#), and we are exploring ways of continuing this work in 2015 to look at other ways of supporting women back from maternity leave. A further survey may be a possibility to look at what support women would like to see from their Professional Engineering Institutions, and this will feed into the [RETURN](#) project that is progressing well. Prospect are also one of the partners on the exciting new 50 Influential Women in Engineering campaign, along with Harvey Nash, Matchtech and a number of other partners just being approached.

Danish Engineering Society and Worshipful Company of Engineers

The [Danish Society of Engineers](#) were in the UK in April, and I met up with their Chief Executive and colleagues one morning to compare notes. A number of interesting points came from this meeting. In Denmark there is only one engineering institution, as opposed to the 36 or so we have in the UK, and this one institution counts approximately 54% of the engineering workforce as its members - approximately 94,000 engineers. They have a higher number of women than we do in the UK, but at 15% this is still not particularly high, and they have about 25% studying engineering at university. One real difference though is that approximately 95% of women return to engineering after their maternity break as this is the absolute norm, and it is very unusual for women not to do so. Some of the reason cited for this were the low cost of childcare and the cultural expectation that this will be the case. I did learn

something else that I liked - in Denmark they call the practice of employing somebody in your own image (for which we don't have a good name) the Donald Duck Syndrome, after the nephews of Donald Duck who are identical triplets (Huey, Dewey and Louie or Rip, Rap and Rup in Danish). I am going to use this from now on!

Towards the end of the month I had the very great pleasure of attending the Installation of the new Master of the [Worshipful Company of Engineers](#), Air Vice-Marshal Patrick O'Reilly, at Stationers Hall in London, and I think that this was the first time that the Women's Engineering Society have been guests of the Engineers. It was a super evening and this time next year our own WES Member Professor Isobel Pollock will take over as Master.

School Gate SET

Finally, on 30 April i met up with Kate Bellingham for a catch up on the newly christened [Sparxx](#) activity and the brand new and exciting initiative that Kate is launching soon called School Gate SET. Again this is another mechanism of supporting and utilising our women on career breaks, and she will reveal more details at the WES conference on 23 June [Engineering Women: Are they Returning?](#) that is now [open for booking](#).

As usual, thanks for reading this blog, and if you have any comments or suggestions then please let me know on president@wes.org.uk.

Dawn Bonfield, WES President