

The Textile Institute Parliamentary Lunch 2009

After our lunch in The Cholmondeley Room of the House of Lords overlooking the Thames, The Lord Haskel began his address by noting that this was the 13th Parliamentary Lunch, and welcomed us with a toast 'Here's to a more mature relationship.' Gathered together were members and guests from all over the world, from lifetime associates to those embarking on their careers. For the first time, 10 newly graduated students, one each from a number of leading UK fashion and textile colleges, were invited to exhibit their work during pre-lunch drinks and join the networking opportunities that such an occasion offers. I was sitting next to Chloe Albert who has recently completed a Masters in Technical Textiles at Central St. Martins, and during lunch we had an engaging conversation on the new techniques and possibilities in textile innovation. On my other side was Sean Chiles, Head of the Division of Northumbria University based in London. One of his aims is to create opportunities for design students to explore the innovations in textile manufacturing that can only be realised within a manufacturing environment that has specialist machinery. This will mean making close working relationships with manufacturers globally. Across the table was Shelley Benwell from Taylor and Francis who publish The Journal of the Textile Institute and conversations continued on the importance of academic research and its commercial application. Discussion was never dull, and I found myself trying to listen to all the different topics being covered simultaneously, and with some success!

Our Guest speaker was Sir Duncan Michael, an eminent engineer recently awarded a Hon. Fellowship of the RIBA, and from their website I quote his citation – *'...because of his tireless efforts to help improve our built environment through a number of different avenues. ...the affably eccentric Highland Scot Michael has placed his vast experience as a teacher and practitioner*

with Arup at the disposal of a number of charitable construction industry causes through the Arup Foundation. ‘

And so this affable Highland Scot spoke about engineers and unsung heroes who explore the improbable and solve problems from the smallest to the greatest of scales. Of note was his admiration for Charles Kao who is credited with calculating, back in 1966 in his PhD thesis at University College London, how fibre optics could be used to transmit data, and which paved the way for the use of the technology in broadband. For his groundbreaking achievements concerning the transmission of light in fibres for optical communication Kao was awarded half of the 2009 Nobel Prize for Physics. Sadly, Sir Duncan said, this has been given 30 years too late, as he is now suffering from Alzheimer's and is not aware of the award. Sir Duncan alluded to this being the norm for engineers who get on with the job in hand, are near sighted, and more concerned with making something work, rather than the how or the why, or the accolade. Sir Duncan used the key buildings for the Beijing Olympics, the Birds Nest and the Cube, as being a good example of how engineers work; building for function, image, budget, the occasion, in this case the 2008 Olympics, and the future, and that these buildings have made Beijing a capital for the 21st Century. A question put to Sir Duncan was did he have a message for the Textile Manufacturers in Yorkshire now? He replied that he was long passed telling people what to do, but that the history of the textile manufacturing industry in Yorkshire and Scotland showed that they had the heritage of real knowledge of textiles and colour chemistry, and suggested that they need to be relevant to today and true to their roots.

Our Chairman, Subash Anand replied to Sir Duncan, thanking him for his illumination address on ropes, optical fibres and bridges, adding that Textile Materials played a major part in all of them, and

that without textile materials some of these structures would not stand at all. "Textile materials are", he said emphatically, "the most versatile, and it is often said that 'A life hangs by a thread'"

Prof. Anand reminded us that the aims of the Textile Institute, which embraces 80 countries in all sectors and disciplines of Textiles, Clothing and Footwear, are to facilitate learning, recognise achievement, reward excellence, and to disseminate information to the sharing of best practice. Prof. Anand particularly thanked John T Smith, the Chairman of the Textile Institutes' Events Committee, for his work in reconstituting the Bangladesh Section of the TI and attracting its many new members. John is currently in Bangladesh working for Unido (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation) to revitalise education and training in the country, but is also working on behalf of the T.I. and it was really heartening, said Subash, to see how the T.I. is actually contributing to the development and training in Bangladesh.

What I understood and was reminded of by the speakers, was that we all work in the same world, share aspirations and recognise excellence, and while the awards that were next to be presented were not Nobel Prizes, in their own way were perhaps more valued as being a recognition by ones peers of personal achievements, be it in architecture or textiles. Mervyn Davies brought us to the highlight of the occasion by announcing the awards of Fellowship of the Textile Institute, and Companionship of the Textile Institute. While not detracting from other recipients, I must tell you that there was a great cheer as Bill's name and citation was read.

Next year the lunch will be a part of the 100th Birthday celebrations, an event among many being organised to mark the occasion. It's the 5th November 2010, put it in your diary. - Maggie Stott