

SIR DENIS ROOKE OM, CBE 1924 - 2008

Sir Denis Rooke, the Company's second Master, died 2nd September 2008. A Service of Thanksgiving for his life was held at Southwark Cathedral on 26th November. The cathedral was completely full and tributes were given by two other Past Masters of the Company, Gerry Clerehugh, a former director of Research and Technology at British Gas, and Sir William Barlow, President of the Royal Academy of Engineering from 1991 to 1996. These tributes are reproduced below.

Denis Rooke was a true Colossus on the world gas scene. He had earned this position and respect by his achievements in a long and distinguished career in British Gas and its predecessors. Basically he was an Engineer with a first class education in Mechanical and Chemical engineering at his beloved University College London, of which he subsequently became a Fellow. His engineering skills were honed in India, where he served in the REME, rising to the rank of Major by the age of 26.



He joined South Eastern Gas at the end of the coal carbonisation era. As an obvious high flyer, he was seconded to the LNG project at Gas Council. This culminated in him being our representative on the commissioning team and first voyage of the Methane

Pioneer from Lake Charles, Louisiana to Canvey: The first transoceanic voyage of LNG. Just look at the trade now.

Then a whole new era dawned with the discovery of North Sea Gas. This raised formidable problems but cometh the hour cometh the man. Denis Rooke with his managerial and technical skills and leadership ability fitted the bill: first as Development Engineer then Member for P&S in Gas Council, and then Deputy and finally Chairman of the new British Gas Corporation.

Mammoth projects were undertaken:-

Joint ventures in offshore exploration and fields

New shore terminals

LNG Storage

A new cross country grid of all welded, steel, high pressure pipes.

The old cast iron mains started being replaced by yellow polyethylene.

Every single appliance in the country individually converted to burn the new gas.

All this produced the nuts and bolts of the gas industry we have today.

Successful years followed and Denis was honoured first with a CBE and then with a well deserved Knighthood.

At this time he was very proud of the fact that we were the only Nationalised Industry who was able to lend the Government money. He also had strong opinions about where gas could be used. I never dare tell him that I had an ornamental gas fire.

Eventually the clamour came for more competition and privatisation, following the political tide of the time. Denis' fight to keep an integrated Gas Industry is well known. Bowing to the inevitable, he led the "Tell it to Sid" privatisation campaign, which was so successful with thousands of investors. I think he went out on a high.

He didn't forget gas after he retired. He was a good supporter of the Institution of Gas Engineers, having a lecture named after him. He also kept up his contacts with GIIGNL, the LNG importers group. Much to his surprise, we built a brand new Research Centre in his University backyard at Loughborough. Now the University have perpetuated his name on the site with

the Denis Rooke Building, complete with an excellent bronze bust.

All the industry and a much wider engineering community rejoiced when Her Majesty the Queen appointed him to the Order of Merit. A very, very special award for all his efforts.

His work could be said to have been his hobby, but he did seem to relax in an engineering environment. He loved to get away from the office and dabble in the nitty gritty. I well remember him appearing out of the blue at the end of an inspection run trial in Lincolnshire to find out how it was going and to treat us to steak and kidney pie and the odd pint of beer. Although fine Burgundy, red or white, was more his metier.

Throughout his career he put into practice his strongly held belief that successful technical companies need a good scientific and engineering development base to keep ahead of the game. He was like a pig, with two tails when British Gas won the Royal Academy McRobert Award for Engineering Innovation.

He had a great love of music, especially opera and attended performances regularly. Can one forget the marvellous series of British Gas Cathedral Classics by the London Festival Orchestra which he staunchly supported.

He had a lifetime passion for flower photography. He liked Rugby football and supported the British Gas Challenge, the annual England v Wales match. Fortunately for his home life with Brenda, Wales managed to win most times.

Brenda and Denis almost reached the Diamond milestone in their marriage. Sixty odd years on from their meeting at Swansea University to where UCL was evacuated in the War. Denis, as a man totally dedicated to what he had in hand, was indeed fortunate to have such loyal and understanding support throughout his career. He was so proud of their daughter Diana, a woman with a technical bent, just what he wanted.

He was often thought of as austere and autocratic, but he was much the better for knowing. He didn't show his soft side often, but it was there all the same. Underneath he was very rather caring. He had a sense of humour and was be a good companion and friend. He made a difference for good in everything he turned his hand to. We all will miss him.

Gerald Clerehugh

I knew Denis Rooke for over 30 years and we had much in common. As I used to remind him, he was older than me having been born a few months earlier in 1924. We both received most of our engineering education during the war and then saw active service, he in the Army, and me in the Royal Navy. We were both knighted in 1977 and later that year when the government was trying to persuade me to leave the private sector to chair a nationalised industry he was the first man I went to for advice. With some others here today we fought many a battle together with the Treasury. And later I succeeded him as President of the Royal Academy of Engineering and Master of the Company of Engineers. It is thus a privilege for me to give this tribute to Denis.

I know how honoured he would be that Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh are represented here today as are the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Kent.

Denis was gifted with a first class brain and was a brilliant engineer who achieved high standards himself and did all he could to help young people who wanted a career in engineering to follow in his footsteps.

Prince Philip helped engineers to create an equivalent organisation to the Royal Society and Denis was one of the early fellows of the then Fellowship of Engineering in 1977. He was also elected an FRS in 1978.

He became the third President of the Fellowship and in the next five years he developed the Fellowship to having 1000 eminent engineers and negotiated its Royal Charter which led to it's renaming as the Royal Academy of Engineering. He liked ties and the tie I wear today is his design for the new Academy. As President he used his strength of character, leadership and ability to drive forward the Academy's objectives of promoting excellence in engineering, inspiring the next generation and producing informed public policies in matters of great importance to our country.

He felt that successive governments failed to understand the importance of engineering to every aspect of modern life and its potential for wealth generation for the economy. The same applied to the financial world.

He never missed an opportunity to speak out on major engineering problems and the need for a national strategy for engineering, technology and energy. In his five successful years as President of the Academy he raised the profile of the engineering profession.

With the objective of impressing on the City the importance of engineering to the economy a group of us formed a new City Livery Company to act as a spearhead, The Worshipful Company of Engineers, of which Denis was the second Master. Forming a Livery Company from scratch called for many decisions and I smile now when I recall how Denis rejected any notion of spending day working time in its court meetings. The traditional long lunches of livery companies were not on the agenda. He insisted on maintaining a high qualification for entry which quickly made it an influential company. He encouraged the company to support engineering education and as a wartime REME major he understood the engineering needs of the armed forces and formed links with them. He attended court meetings and events throughout the whole 25 years of the company's existence and when we celebrated our first 25 years at the Mansion House four weeks ago he was greatly missed.

If Denis served an organisation you could depend on his presence – never late – always doing his duty, always willing to help with wisdom and advice often offered with a dry sense of humour

When he retired from British Gas he made a policy of declining paid appointments so that he could spend all his time (and I mean all his time - ask his wife Brenda) in positions where he could help with education and engineering progress. When elected Chancellor of Loughborough University, he devoted much effort in supporting its Vice Chancellors and winning support for the University. In this, as in all his appointments he was loyally supported by his wife Brenda who attended thousands of engineering occasions with him up and down the country and countless journeys to Loughborough.

He was particularly keen on encouraging women to train for a career in technology and engineering and it must have given him great pleasure that his own daughter, Diana, chose a career in science.

I can't mention all the appointments he held at various times. I think only Mrs. Warren, his secretary, could do that, they ran to dozens- but His Chairmanship of the Science Museum, the National Museum Of Photography, Film and TV and The Royal Commission of the Exhibition of 1851 stand out.

Of course his successes brought him awards. The CBE, Knighthood , many university Hon Doctorates, Fellowships at home and overseas and personal gold medals They are too numerous to mention but nothing

equalled his pride and pleasure when HM The Queen appointed him to The Order of Merit which is represented by Lord Fellowes here today. We engineers were really happy for him as we believed he did richly deserve a very select honour.

I think of Denis as like the Rock of Gibraltar – big, strong, wise, kind hearted and a staunch, loyal friend who never allowed issues to be fudged and stuck to his principles. He was always there to help people of all ages, and will be greatly missed but I think he would be pleased to be remembered as a great engineer.

Sir William Barlow