

Obituary - Sir David Evan Naunton (DEN) Davies CBE FREng FRS FLSW



Known to many as Den from his initials, Sir David was Master Engineer in 2003/4.

Born in Cardiff in 1935, Sir David studied electrical engineering at the University of Birmingham, graduating in 1960 before embarking on PhD research there.

He was appointed Professor of Electrical Engineering at University College London (UCL) in 1971, becoming head of the department in 1985 and Vice-Provost from 1986.

In 1988 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Loughborough University. Under his leadership the University enjoyed significant growth. Student numbers increased greatly, and the University executed a building programme including new engineering-related buildings, one of which is still known as the Sir David Davies Building.

Following Loughborough, Sir David took up the post of Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence, before going on to serve as Non-Executive Chair of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and later Chair of the MoD Nuclear Research

Advisory Council. In 2000 he became Chair of Railway Safety, a new company set up to coordinate UK mainline rail safety which became the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) in 2003. RSSB remains the rail industry safety coordinating body to this day.

Throughout his career Sir David's research work was highly regarded—he won the Rank Prize for optoelectronics in 1984 and the Institution of Electrical Engineers' (IEE) Faraday Medal in 1987. He was elected to the Fellowship of Engineering in 1979 and a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1984. He was President of the IEE from 1994-95 and became President of the Royal Academy of Engineering in 1996.

It is no exaggeration that he was one of the most influential engineers of his generation, advising government on some of the most sensitive issues of modern times. One of his greatest contributions was his report to then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, on the options for Automatic Train Protection (ATP) after the Ladbroke Grove collision in October 1999, which killed 31 people and injured many more. Sir David's well-reasoned report, published in February 2000, provided a voice of calm in the clamour for immediate action. He showed that the cheaper and less complex Train Protection and Warning System (TPWS) would save more lives over 20 years than far more expensive ATP systems such as the European Train Control System (ETCS). His recommendations were endorsed by the ensuing public inquiries; albeit they recommended installing ETCS on the higher speed mainlines by 2008. In fact, ETCS took even longer than predicted to mature and deployment on the high speed routes is still in its early stages. Meanwhile TPWS has proved even more successful than Den's predictions. In the 20 years before TPWS was deployed 66 people died and 1734 were injured in ATP preventable events on the UK mainline railway; in the 20 years since TPWS deployment there has been one injury in similar events. Without Den's support it might not have happened.

Just one of the legacies of a great engineer and a fine man. He will be missed.

Rod Muttram