

Newsletter

January 2016

Chopping vegetables Christmas morning listening to BBC Radio 4 Book of the Week wondering what is it about wood that has programme schedulers giving what must be considered prime time airing to a book about making things from wood – that book being, of course, *The Man who made things out of Trees* by Robert Penn – trees perhaps? Was it ‘trees’ which first caught their interest although the book is clearly about wood given what is emblazoned on the cover?

Not many weeks previously there was something of a media frenzy over a book about firewood would you believe; chopping and storing firewood – give a man a wood-burning stove and an axe and you have the recipe for a best-seller. Not forgetting, of course, the all-important moisture content and drying! That book is, if you have not come across it already, *Norwegian Wood - Chopping, stacking and drying wood the Scandinavian Way* by Lars Mytting. Was it by the simple expedient of adding ‘Norwegian’ which, in the minds of those first alighting on said book, brings to mind that well-known and much loved song – *Rubber Soul* was released just three years before the end of steam on British railways – from their formative years when for most of them/us the solid fuel of ‘choice’ was coal. How times change!

And around that same time, the timber trade thriving, there were many students up and down the country, some with company sponsorship, studying timber technology and wood science, full-time and part-time, culminating in an IWSc professional qualification as employers and employees alike understood the benefits to be gained from doing so. How times change! (See also January’s TTJ)

In a previous newsletter back in 2014 I included this:

In The Times Saturday Review recently Kate Muir did a review of ‘Brando’s Smile: His Life, Thought and Work’ by Susan L Mizruchi. She wrote “Brando’s tastes were broad and sophisticated: on his bedside table when he died in 2004 were Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*, Jung’s *Man and His Symbols*, James Gleick’s *Chaos*, *The Great Music of Duke Ellington* and (more puzzlingly) *The International Book of Wood*”.

What is it about wood (other than firewood, of course, or when it gets the blame for failing prematurely or for catching fire when it wasn’t firewood!) that, on its own amongst the mainstream media, seems to raise nothing other than mild perplexity and surprise that anyone should find it, simply for and of itself, interesting? How times change!

In this instance, that is a prediction rather than a statement of fact. By the time you read this it may have already happened. To what am I referring? Jim’s Shorts. See below.

International Panel Products Symposium 2015

A brief report from Gervais Sawyer, WTS Board

Last October saw the biennial meeting of the International Panel Products Symposium in Llandudno. The event, organised by the Bio-composites Centre of Bangor University was combined with COST Action FP1303 on the performance of bio-based building materials. The event brings together academics and industry to discuss technical developments as well as other important topics.

The conference opened with a paper by Phil Evans showing how X-ray micro-computed tomography can probe the structure of wood composites. This technique can, for example, give new insights into the distribution of adhesive within particleboards. The images are striking to say the least and were a brilliant opener. Adhesives, of course, attract a lot of attention particularly the development of adhesives derived from biomass and starch and the desire to develop formaldehyde-free adhesives attracts a lot of research effort.

For the basic feedstock for panels, other sources were explored such as coconut husk and maize cobs. The volumes of waste MDF and recovered wood in the waste stream were quantified in several papers. This potential resource has stimulated developments in turning these waste materials into high value products. Developments are at an early stage but pilot plants are already under construction.

We are daily bombarded with terms such as sustainable, low carbon, energy efficient, low emission etc. without much understanding of what they really mean. In his paper on the environmental impact of wood as compared to other building materials, Callum Hill demonstrated the complexity of the subject. He showed how Environmental Product Declarations can ensure that similar methods of Life Cycle Analysis can be used so that competing materials can be properly compared.

The sessions relating to the COST Action offered fascinating papers on new developments in panels to improve durability, stability by processes such as modified wood and wood plastic composites. The issue of emissions from building materials was clearly of great concern as new buildings become more airtight. Many researchers had travelled to the conference to display posters of their work. They demonstrated the wide range of subjects being researched worldwide.

Llandudno is a beautiful location for a conference. In another part of the conference centre, the Welsh Government had organised a Skills and Careers day for school children. As one who tries to do this kind of outreach in England, I can say that the Welsh do a superb job. To see the range of activities on offer and the engagement of all the children was truly heart-warming. Sadly, nobody was promoting wood. Any volunteers?

Bracknell Forest Careers Day - Thursday 15th October 2015 9.30 a.m. – 6.30 p.m.

In England, Gervais and I did the wood/WTS/IOM3 promoting bit at the Bracknell event. I put together a Powerpoint presentation to show off some more recent spectacular wood in construction projects together with those quite interesting facts

about wood and carbon sequestration; Gervais hauled along his quite considerable and somewhat spectacular visual aids resource including the two boxes of bricks he uses to demonstrate the tensile capability of wood.

As usual participation at the event was an eclectic mix of potential future employment for pupils from the local schools which visited. We were not inundated but neither were we completely ignored. A number of possible future architects and structural engineers were particularly interested in the use and uses of wood. At the opposite end of the scale was the inevitable “I’ve only come along to get out of lessons”! ‘twas ever thus!

IOM3 Library

Gervais Sawyer wrote: The wood section of the IOM3 library didn't have much to offer us but it did have the archive of the IWSc Journal. This has now all been relocated to Grantham. The librarians will of course get things for you if you know the reference. Trouble is that the old IWSc journals are not catalogued (any volunteers?) so you really have to go there and browse. Lots of interesting stuff in those old journals! Could we get them all scanned in electronically?

Interestingly and quite coincidentally, Hilda Kaune, Senior Information Adviser and Katherine Williams, Head of Publishing, both based at IOM3 London, are currently involved in a Pilot Scheme for the Digitisation of IOM3 publications. The content will include all the journals, magazines and books published by all predecessor organisations that constitute the current IOM3.

The complete BWPA archive is now stored at the Property Care Association in Huntingdon. Contact Steve Hodgson there.

WTS Annual Review Meeting and Board Meeting

3 December, IOM3, 297 Euston Rd, London

This was our first Annual Review meeting introduced to provide an opportunity for observer members to become more familiar with how we have been working as a team and also to enable them to provide both constructive criticism and suggestions as to what else we might also be directing our efforts.

Bernie Rickinson, CEO IOM3, delivered the welcoming address after which were the presentations: Summation of the year and strategy (Andrew True – outgoing WTS chairman); The International Wood Products Journal (Gervais Sawyer – Editor); Membership and Education (Ian Bowbrick – Deputy Director, IOM3); Timber Research Project (Graham Ormondroyd – WTS Board); The Coming Year (John Park – incoming WTS Chairman). The WTS Board Meeting, with those observer members who wished to remain after a very pleasant lunch, followed in the afternoon.

We were very encouraged by the feedback we received from observer members both in writing and in subsequent discussions. “I thought the meeting very positive and I was very heartened to hear of so many ongoing projects. It is good to see some positive action.” and “It was a very good meeting and glad to have been able to make a small contribution.”

Talking Heads

We have started to develop a series, two to date, of short videos as introductions to a number of wood-related, naturally, topics. Talking Heads is an IOM3 concept with the results residing within the main IOM3 web site at IOM3 TV under ‘Lectures’. Interestingly, they are currently the only ones there and can now be accessed via the Wood Technology Society homepage.

<http://www.iom3.org/wood-technology-society>

The current subjects are:

- Wood Composites delivered by Martin Ansell
- Wood and Moisture delivered by John Park

If you feel you would like to have a go with your specialised subject, please get in touch!

Did you know?

I don’t have anything new here, just a little something following on from the previous newsletter – yes, it’s Lyme Regis Boat Building Academy again.



Having forgotten about the Academy completely I had occasion to find myself, together with my wife and two friends, walking along the sea front at Lyme Regis heading west when what did I see just over there ... the Lyme Regis Boat Building Academy. With a curt “I’ll be right back” I was off. I wasn’t, of course, right back. Having been in contact with them for pictures and their logo to use in the newsletter I thought I would take the opportunity to introduce myself. Once the WTS/IOM3/PIABC ‘link’ was made – as well as boat building qualifications the Academy is a PIABC Quality Assured Centre with their Level 3 in Woodworking Skills incorporating Furniture Design and Making – I was treated almost like royalty!

I was given the full tour by the Principal, Yvonne Green, together with my friend Andrew, a fellow woodworker, leaving wives to wonder what on earth could be taking us so long! It was an utterly enthralling however long it was and we were eventually reunited with our partners. And so, if, like me, you happen to find yourself in the environs of Lyme Regis I would heartily recommend that you get yourself along and have a look. You will most assuredly come away with a desire to do that 38 week boat building course, their knowledge and passion is quite infectious! I did! Apparently their oldest 'student' to date was in his eighties!

And talking of infectious, I come at last to:

Jim's Shorts

Jim Coulson, with whom you will already be familiar, has put together a short video clip with his grandson, Spencer, which is not only an informative wood fact but also a delight to watch which you can do via the WTS homepage but here is the link anyway:

<http://www.iom3.org/wood-technology-society/wood-industry-information>

And that prediction I mentioned earlier – the clip is on You Tube and we have done a Twitter feed - has it gone viral yet?

People

As much as anything the WTS is about people, its members, its board and essentially those whose names crop up on a regular basis. It is a chairman's responsibility to keep things moving along but without the dedicated support of 'the team' it is an impossible task. I am taking this opportunity to personally thank Andrew True who has done such a splendid job as chairman getting the WTS back on track, fully embracing the new order within IOM3. It was inevitable that I should follow him as his proviso to me before he agreed to take on the role was that he would do it only if I followed him – he will be a hard act to follow.

I should also like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew Gibson who I feel also deserves mention having contributed in no small part to the cohesion of the group through changing times taking on the role of secretary and doing so diligently beyond the usual three years.

You can find out more about the others on the web site – superb dedicated team equally deserving of special mention all keen to grow the Wood Technology Society into a professional body with which all who have careers in wood will be proud to be affiliated.

And finally ... Th, th that's all folks! This has been not so much a newsletter as a 'call to arms'. Never got much feedback so I have no idea if anyone ever read it! I

was volunteered for the job in my absence but have relished the opportunity to pass on one or two snippets which would not otherwise have made it to your attention. This is my valedictory newsletter as I undertake the role of WTS chairman for the next three years handing over responsibility for the newsletter to Graham Ormondroyd - Head of Materials Research, BioComposites Centre, Bangor University.

We do at least like to provide our members, and possibly readers, with a little variety! Such fun!

Sayonara!

John H Park

WTS Chairman