

Happy Birthday to our Society



The Society celebrated its 10th Birthday with a lunch at the Royal Agricultural College. The photograph above includes some of our founder members who were able to attend.

Left to right in the picture we have: Prof. Peter Stoward FRSE, Prof Roy Postlethwaite FRCPATH, Dr Eric Gibson CBE FRSC, Prof Pat Clarke FRS DSc, Dr Geoff Richards OBE, Dr Doug Gunary MBE, Dr Fred James MD. Dr Bernard Tinker OBE, Dr Theo Stening FRSC.

The College maintained its reputation for a fine lunch which was much enjoyed by the forty members and guests. It was an occasion that we only rarely get in our Society where members were able to reminisce and to socialise with others of like mind.

A few notes on past events

This years programme has been perhaps one of the most varied and intensive yet. In particular the Patricia Clarke public lecture that Lord May presented to us at the end of January was a highlight of the year. However one must not overlook the quality of other presentations we have heard, which range through medical science, nanotechnology, power generation, and mathematics. All of these are reported in our website and form an interesting archive of our activities.

Apart from lectures we have had a most interesting debate where the motion was ‘ This House supports Euthanasia’. This proved to be a most interesting evening where members could be involved. The result was a spirited discussion from both sides of the argument.

The committee would like to promote similar evenings and would welcome suggestions from members as to the subjects we might discuss.

Visits made by the Society so far this year.

The BMW MINI assembly line at Cowley

The plant is very new and is a good demonstration what an automated plant can achieve. The visit really consisted of two parts first of which was the assembly of the car body from preformed panels parts. This process is entirely managed through computer controlled robots.



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Cars are only assembled when the Company has a specific order for that car. Some 1¼ million options are available for the MINI, all these options are incorporated on the production line. The result is that on the line a sports version of say bright red with cd player and GPS can be followed immediately with a family salon hatch back in black with no hesitation. Even the wide range of engine variations and transmissions is coped with.

The first impression is of flailing robotic arms picking up, placing and welding pieces of all sorts and in any order (although of course it is computer controlled). It is by any standard a staggering sight particularly when there are few if any humans to intervene in the process. The flying sparks from the welding are a hazard and one has to wear protective goggles.

The second part of the assembly we were allowed to see was the final assembly of the car and its initial testing. What is significant here is the way all the options are presented to the operator in the right order to coincide with the production line itself. Obviously in this area there are less robots but they are still very essential in the assembly as a whole. Particular robotic aspects were the introduction of the engine unit to the body and also the insertion of the windscreens and windows.

A good demonstration of the success of the assembly line was the fallout of non starters at the end of the line. It was noted that very very few fell into this category.

We are limited by the hosts on these occasions as to how many folk can go. In this case we were overwhelmed by the interest and so several people could not go. The committee could run this again say in a couple of years. Please let us know of your interest.