

Lichfield Science & Engineering Society

PATRON

Ian Dudson CBE

H.M. Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire

PRESIDENT

Professor Rik Bryan

MBChB PhD MRCS FAcadTM

Chairman's Christmas Newsletter 2022

Dear Member,

It does appear that the cautious optimism which I had in July has been justified. The Society seems to be nearly back to normal, whatever that was. Lectures in the Garrick, Dinner at Aston Wood and visits all over the place.

Only nearly though. Whilst the Dinner was well attended and visits are taken up as quickly as usual Members' attendance at lectures has been lower than pre-Covid. Fewer than a hundred! Still the envy of a lot of comparable organisations. My own view is that during the pandemic we lost the habit of going out; it's become an effort. (Getting a couple of years older might have something to do with it but I don't like to think too much about that.)

The September meeting, Chris Cogwill's talk on the effect of terrestrial magnetism upon climate change, attracted 99 Members. His theories were supported by an astonishing variety of data but after a lapse of 40,000 years since the last reversal even he didn't claim absolute proof.

In October Professor Phillip Withers covered the introduction and use of new materials since the Stone Age, pointed out that many of the raw materials we use today are in diminishing supply and emphasised the need not only for new materials but also that for conservation and reuse of existing ones. Only 71 Members though

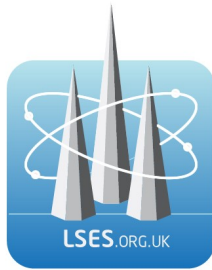
Sir Adrian Smith PRS gave the Darwin Memorial lecture in November on Artificial Intelligence. A Society first perhaps, I don't remember another one without slides. ("Certainly not, it's supposed to be a lecture.") Unfortunately he was reluctant to allow an audio recording but he made it clear that AI is here both to stay and to expand in all walks of life. Out of a total audience of over 300 only 114 were Members but encouragingly there were 30 students.

A good number of students again, almost as many as the 94 Members, heard Professor Greg Radick discuss the work of Grigor Mendel and, important though that was, the general failure to realise its place in the whole study of heredity.

Most of our lectures are archived in the Members' Area of the website. Useful if you had to miss it or didn't understand it first time but not intended as a replacement for being there.

The Annual Dinner in October was well attended and as enjoyable an evening out as usual. Corinne Brazier spoke about the West Midlands Police Force and its new museum in the old Lock-up in Steelhouse Lane, Birmingham. Worth a visit; these days the exit is as accessible as the entrance. Like us it's an example of a successful enterprise depending on volunteers

Alan Hooper's visits are well back on track and the booking form for the Spring ones is attached with the Newsletter. If you want to go on any of them please return the form to him, don't just send an e-mail and please don't send either to me.



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Sadly the trip to William Lennon was cancelled by the host owing to Covid but it has been rescheduled for later in the year.

A group of 15 members who visited Newby Foundries, Wednesbury on November 22nd was warmly welcomed by the Company's Chairman and LSES Member, Richard Newby. He gave a brief history of the Company, which was formed in the 1880s to make decorative castings including coffin fixtures. The company now specialises in intricate and highly cored iron castings for the automotive and pump sectors. We were given an excellent shop floor tour by two senior managers which included core and mould production, casting and finishing. Finally, we were shown two recent state of the art investments, a sand printer machine which produces 3-D models and a digital scanner which produces a 3-D image of a casting on a screen.

Another warm welcome, this time to Sandfields Pumping Station on August 19th when 21 members visited this gem of a renovation project in Lichfield. In the mid-19th century, whilst Lichfield benefitted from a dedicated supply of good quality water from Aldershaw, in the Black Country the rapidly expanding industrialisation was leading to many cholera epidemics, with thousands of deaths. A classic example of Victorian entrepreneurship, this pumping station was built to supply clean water from Lichfield to Walsall and beyond. The route of the pipework followed the railway line to Walsall, which is still visible. The key piece of equipment remaining at the Station is a Cornish Beam engine, with a cast iron beam weighing 20 tonnes and 36 feet in length, which was installed in 1871. During our visit, a team of enthusiastic volunteers was trying to release the main pump piston, which had not moved for over 50 years. There was still little movement come the conclusion of our very interesting visit, but we were assured that we would be kept informed of any developments.

I think that on the whole the Society has had a good Autumn. Membership remains steady after the renewals although as you may have noticed we're a little worried about the attendance at meetings. I hope that January will see a reversal in the trend. As always the Committee has put in a lot of work to find speakers; always interesting even if it's not your field of expertise.

Finally, to the Committee and to all our speakers my thanks and I wish to you and everyone else involved in making LSES the success that it is, a Happy Christmas and a good New Year.

Mike Beeson