

50th Anniversary Event 7 September 2022

Background

The Board of Trustees would like to thank all those who attended our special event held on 7th September 2022 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the [Douglas Bomford Trust](#) . Our 70+ guests represented all parts of the agricultural engineering sector, from research and education, to machinery manufacturers and users (ie farmers), together with a number of ex-Trustees, current and past recipients of funding and others with who the Trust has worked with over the past 50 years.

This gave us all a unique opportunity not only to reflect on the Trust's achievements but to look forward and share our intentions to enhance the support provided by The Trust for students and others - usually at an early stage of their career in agricultural engineering.

The event was kindly hosted by **Jonathan Bomford**, the long-serving representative of the Bomford Family on the Board of Trustees, in the attractive Springhill Barn at his home farm in Pershore, Worcestershire. He was accompanied by members of the Bomford family and others associated with Douglas Bomford, who heard from various speakers how this focus continues to reflect Douglas' principles in his own life and business enterprises, as an innovative designer and manufacturer of equipment widely used on farms and associated sectors.



Another 'VIP' guest was our Emeritus Trustee, **John Fox**. Now in his 90s, John has been involved with the Trust since its inception, having suggested to Douglas' wife Betty that a Trust fund would be a suitable way to commemorate Douglas. John joined Bomford and Evershed in 1957 and as a notable innovator himself was the inspiration behind one of Bomford's signature products, the 'Superflow' cultivator. John went on to become the long serving managing director and chairman of the company.

Background

The history and activities supported by the Trust are described more fully in a new [leaflet](#) launched at the event. This review explains the rationale behind the event and its outcomes, expanding upon articles already published.

These include the [summary article](#) '*In Bomford We Trust*' [ADD LINK] published in the autumn issue of Landwards, the quarterly journal of The Institution of Agricultural Engineers (IAgrE). The Trust

would also like to thank **Chris Biddle**, for recording the event and producing an excellent 'edited highlights' [podcast](#), available via his [Agri-Turf Agenda](#) website , which includes the key points made by the seven speakers. Chris also produced a brief [report](#) for the 'Service Dealer' e-bulletin.

Presentations

Speakers were invited to take us through 'The Bomford Story' - coincidentally, the title of the book about Douglas Bomford written by Theo Sherwen, mentioned by **Jonathan Bomford** as he set the scene. Jonathan outlined the history, scope and resources of the Trust, and gave a personal perspective on the relevance of Douglas Bomford's upbringing and experiences on the family farm, as well as his practical development of innovative ideas and evolution of his company. ADD PHOTO

Jonathan explained how the independent charity with funds currently exceeding £5 million, allocates around £150,000 annually, mostly to support individuals' research into design, production and innovation of agricultural and horticultural machinery, equipment, buildings and production systems, within the broad aims of the Trust, ie *"To help advance the application of engineering and technology to achieve sustainable agricultural, food and biological systems for the benefit of the environment and mankind"*.

Jonathan thanked and congratulated all Trustees and officers - past and present - for their sound financial management, technical advice and support over the past 5 decades.

The Chair of the Trust, **Nick August** (an Oxfordshire farmer and keen advocate of precision agriculture), then highlighted some of the Trust's achievements and how it operates. Typically co-sponsoring around ten PhDs at any time, as well as awarding numerous scholarships, travel grants and prizes to promising students and others wishing to enhance their studies and skills.

Nick also highlighted other ways the Trust helps students, not least through the benefits of Trustee sharing their expertise through Mentoring. It is well worth listening to the recorded [testimonials](#) and reading the messages on our event page, sent by recipients spanning back to the '70's, to express their heartfelt thanks to the Trust for their sponsorship. It was good to see so many at our event and we look forward to working with them again as they progress in their career. The Trust also awards scholarships to four A-level students/year through the Arkwright Scheme, which aims to encourage young students to consider engineering as a career. [See Barney Pickford's [testimonial](#).]

Furthermore, all students on courses related to agricultural engineering or undertaking relevant research benefit from the Trust's support – through sponsoring student membership of the Institution of Agricultural Engineers (IAgrE).

During the 'Noughties', Dr Dan Mitchell (ex-IAgrE President and ex-Trustee) carried out a Student Recruitment Project. Dan's [report](#) on this project, published in Landwards (Spring 2010, pp22-23) described how over 2000 students were encouraged to join IAgrE during the first decade and in his article, Dan acknowledged and thanked the Trust for its support throughout this initiative. It is pleasing to note that numbers have been maintained since and the Trust continues to work closely with IAgrE to maximise the benefits of student membership, seeking to retain their membership after graduating, and also sponsors IAgrE conferences and prizes. [See [testimonials](#) from several other recent students.]

Personal reflections

In addition to the testimonials received, the next three speakers were chosen to reflect the wider impact of the range of financial and other support provided by the Trust and its Trustees.

Dr Nick Tillett described the pump-priming effect of the Trust's 'Centenary Fellowship' awarded to his now-business partner, Tony Hague, thirty years ago. This commemorated what would have been Douglas Bomford's 100th birthday and was used to fund Tony's early research, taking 'new-fangled' computer vision into the field. The Trust also sponsored a 'Millenium' project carried out for them by **Matt Home**, which contributed to the development of their unique auto-guided weeding machines and precision guidance systems that are now used by companies around the world. **Matt's [testimonial](#)** is enlightening, and amusing.

These projects were pivotal in the successful development of their company Tillet and Hague Technology Ltd, set up following the closure of Silsoe Research Institute. So much so, they made a very generous donation at the event, sufficient to support a PhD student's research for 3 years. Further details about this 'DBT Jubilee Project' will be announced in due course.

Like Nick Tillett, **Professor Jane Rickson** looked back on the 'early years' of the National College of Agricultural Engineering (NCAE, latterly Silsoe College). Douglas Bomford was instrumental in establishing NCAE, and the Trust funded a new Language Laboratory, before the College was absorbed into Cranfield University. [The plaque commemorating the opening of this invaluable facility was rescued before the College was eventually demolished, and is now displayed as a memento on the wall of Jonathan's Springhill Barn!]

Jane described the range of PhD projects supported by the Trust at Cranfield, particularly those related to research on soils, her own specialism. Many come from overseas and Jane also highlighted the Trust's support and encouragement for Women in (Agricultural) Engineering, through projects and travel sponsorship not just at Cranfield, but also at Harper Adams and other Universities – several being in the room too. She observed that the Trust's support helps build students' confidence and employability with alumni going on to play important roles in a wide range of companies, government departments, industry organisations and academic and research establishments, in UK and internationally.

These included **Dr Paula Misiewicz** who continued to explore Jane's themes – from the perspective of a recipient of Trust funding for her own PhD on cultivations at Cranfield, and supervising 4 PhD students over the past decade (including 3 women), as part of HAU's long-term 'Traction and Tillage' research.

Paula also referred to the wide range of support given to her colleagues at HAU over the years, including the substantial contribution the Trust made towards a new agricultural engineering building which has provided a base for research and teaching at HAU over the past decade.

Paula ended by musing on what she might be doing had she not been funded by the Trust. She concluded that she 'wouldn't have the best job in the world'. A fitting tribute, indeed.

New Patron

To mark the 50th Anniversary, the Trust announced the appointment of its first Patron, Dr David Llewellyn. The former Vice-Chancellor of Harper Adams University until he retired in July 2021, David was awarded the CBE for his services to education in the 2022 New Year Honours List and also became an Honorary Fellow of IAgrE in 2022, so the Trust is honoured that David accepted.



Trust Chair Nick August presented a commemorative plaque to David, who then shared his own vision for the future and the challenges faced by the industry. Not least the environment and climate change, sustainability and continuity of food supply (also in the face of ongoing conflicts), and the need to address the shortage of labour.

Donations

Finally a plea from our Patron: David emphasised the important contribution of the Trust and agricultural engineers more widely to alleviate all of these, and invited further donations to enable the Trust to continue to support relevant research and other activities in the face of increasing costs and the difficult world economy.

Further information

The event [webpage](#) provides links to all relevant documents referred to above, and the event [programme](#) provides direct links to each of the presentations.

Further photographs taken at the event will be available on our [Gallery](#) webpage. Thanks to Chris Biddle, Landwards and others for the photographs.

The Trust also thank the Bomford Turner company for sponsoring our new leaflet, including designing the new graphic on the front page (also used on a new pop-up banner), to illustrate the range of the Trust's activities.

For further information, please look on our [website](#) or contact the Secretary, via enquiries@dbt.org.uk.

Please follow **@BomfordTrust** on Twitter or LinkedIn.