

Professional: The Douglas Bomford Trust



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Zoom and the new normal

Alan Plom, Secretary to the Douglas Bomford Trust, ponders on the 'new normal' and the role of the Trust in encouraging students into 'agricultural engineering'.

Zoomed Out?

This article is very different to our usual review of recent events and successful projects. In the last issue we looked forward to the future, but none of us anticipated the profound changes to our lives and ways of working that were about to hit us. Our days now revolve around Zoom meetings and webinars (other on-line meeting platforms are available) and

this enforced glimpse of the future is likely to become the new norm.

Our Trustees and I have obviously been unable to attend meetings or carry out project reviews and mentoring face-to-face. However, we have kept in touch on-line. Even our half-yearly Board meeting due to be hosted by Trustee Keith Hawken at the AEA in April was held 'virtually' for

the first time in 48 years.

More significantly, the worldwide lockdown and social distancing has had a major impact on many of our funded students' research projects and developmental opportunities in ways we could not have foreseen. With research and teaching facilities closed and international events and conferences cancelled or postponed, many planned activities cannot be

completed. However, universities have risen to the challenge to help students achieve their academic goals and enable them to graduate, eg by communicating, working remotely and extending deadlines (at zero cost), but the position on use of our travel grants is less certain.

Coincidentally, over recent weeks we have been working 'closely' (via Webex) with a group of Cranfield MSc students who have been 'horizon scanning' for us. They have developed a tool to help identify and prioritise emerging issues and technologies for projects that should attract funding over the next 5-15 years. Instead of holding a workshop the team had to interview a wide

range of selected experts in academia and industry by telephone and we thank the many IAgRE members who shared their knowledge and vision of the future.

On a personal level, we applaud all of our sponsored students and their supervisors for their fortitude, positivity, continued commitment and pragmatic response to get done whatever they can. Many come from around the world and for those far from home and separated from their families and friends (internationally and locally) it is a very worrying and stressful time. We hope to be able to congratulate them all at their Graduation Ceremonies later in the year, face-to-face (and within two metres).

Zooming Forward (and Back)

It is the Trust's 50th anniversary in 2022 and we are planning a special event to reflect on what our sponsorship and support has achieved over the past five decades, in terms of helping to develop and promote agricultural engineering as well as the many individuals who have gone on to play a leading part in the industry worldwide and those who will undoubtedly influence it in the future. If you would like to be involved, or are an alumni of the Trust, please contact me via enquiries@dbt.org.uk. [Due to GDPR we hold no past records and people have moved on anyway.]

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Meet a trustee...

John V Fox (Hon FIAgrE)

Douglas Bomford himself (then President of IAgRE) invited John to work with him in 1957 and during his long career with Bomford & Evershed (later to become Bomford Turner Ltd), John served as Technical and Production Manager, Managing Director and Chairman (from 1982-91). Like Douglas Bomford, he is also dedicated to the industry and a strong advocate of education and training, he served on IAgRE's Council for many years and became President and Honorary Fellow.

The Trust was set up in 1972 after Douglas died in 1969, and John joined our Board in 1977 as the Company's representative when he was MD. John has been involved continuously since and has served as Chair and Vice Chair. John was given the unique status of Emeritus Trustee when he formally 'retired' from the Board in 2011 and he is still keeping an eye on us and providing sound advice at 88!

As an innovator with a keen understanding of commercial reality and having developed many market leading-machines, John has been well-placed to assess projects. More than 20,000 of Bomford's signature product - the 'Superflow' cultivator - were sold over 25 years of production. John is also particularly proud of his 'Dynadrive' design, and a string of other innovative products led to the company receiving the Royal Agricultural Society's Gold Medal for outstanding contribution to agriculture in 1976. After John retired in 1991, he continued to work as a consultant for another 25 years or so, advising a wide range of clients in agriculture, manufacturing and the legal profession, including acting as an expert witness.

Dr Geoffrey Davies

We were saddened to hear about the death of ex-Trustee, Geoffrey Davies, in December aged 71. A past-President of the AEA, Geoffrey was Vice President of the Alamo Group when he joined our Board of Trustees. His portfolio of businesses included agricultural engineering components that operated across the globe. He also promoted education and entrepreneurship through the wider community and his formidable business expertise combined well with his commitment to enhance the capability and success of others. His experience was therefore invaluable to the Trust and, by a strange

coincidence, the Bomford company became part of the Alamo Group.

Zooming In - on students and IAgRE

The Trust endeavours to encourage 'new blood' into the profession and supports IAgRE by sponsoring the annual membership of around 300 students studying a relevant course or carrying out research within scope of our objectives. Some of these are not from an agricultural engineering background (and hadn't considered themselves as such) but we hope that by encouraging them to join IAgRE whilst students, they will remain affiliated long after graduation.

Zooming off

We have increased the maximum funding limit for 'Minor' projects to £5,000. This will allow more applications to be fast-tracked, rather than wait for the six monthly Trustees' meetings. New guidance and check lists have also been agreed for initial assessment and monitoring progress of projects. The guidance on our website has been updated to reflect this and it is emphasised that applicants are expected to identify clear deliverables in their submissions. We also regularly review the case studies posted on our website and new 'drop-down' menus will help searching the content.



Our Trustees are keen to maintain a cross-section of experience, expertise (and contacts) on the Board and are always willing to receive expressions of interest (and a CV) at any time. Please contact the Secretary or any Trustee for further information.