



A history of the Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers

by Bernard Hodges OBE



1899 IHVE Council Meeting



IHVE's new London offices in the 1950s

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The following is an edited version of an unpublished paper on the earliest days of CIBSE, written in 1996 by Bernard Hodges OBE, who served as IHVE/CIBS/CIBSE Secretary from 1956 to 1985:

Author's foreword

I have attempted in this account to set down facts and figures obtained from CIBSE's early minute books, supplemented by letters, documents and conversations with early presidents and members, whom I was able to meet in the 1950s. I would make particular mention of AB Potterton, President 1936, AA Jones, President 1925, and George Crispin, President 1905. Mr Potterton gave me a number of documents, including a copy of the first Prospectus and a letter from Mr Mayner (see below). These papers are now in the Institution's archives. Regrettably, papers held by Mr Jones were destroyed within days of his death in service as the long-serving editor of the Institution's Journal.

The early years



Mr Potterton contacted Mr EW Mayner, who was generally regarded as the 'Father of the Institution', to ascertain the names of the ten members who in 1898 advanced money to purchase the interest of Mr Luwee Harris in the Institution. Amongst the documents provided by Mr Mayner was a copy of the first Prospectus and copies of letters. His covering letter concluded:

'Upon looking back 40 years to the spadework put into the formation of the Institution, and the magnitude to which it has grown one does not regret the many hours and energy expended. I was not the first President, but I was one of the first members, and the first Chairman'.

Pictured: EW Mayner, aged 76, at the IHVE Summer Meeting 1938

He went on:

'... the idea was formulated by Mr J Kemsley in 1896, when this gentleman was Secretary of the Institute of Sanitary Engineers. I was a member, and was elected to the Council (of ISanE) in 1896. It was at one of the Council meetings that Kemsley unfolded his plans, and being more interested in heating than sanitation at that time, I offered my assistance. Being often in London I attended the office of Mr Luwee Harris, and spent much time suggesting the names of gentlemen who would probably become members. I spent many afternoons and evenings with Mr Kemsley and Mr Harris, there were many letters written, and a very small proportion of replies.

I received a letter requesting the most suitable day I could attend meetings, and was elected onto the Board of Directors. It was always spoken of as 'The Institute', but it was really a business undertaking, in other words a Company having a Board of Directors.

Mr Walter Jones was of invaluable assistance in the further formation, and between us we were successful in getting the Board of Directors changed to a Council. About this time Mr Palmer joined up, and I had several consultations with him as to the general workings of the Institution.

The question of making alterations and adding to the Council arose when it was discovered that the office of Secretary was permanent, at a fixed salary for at least twenty years. A special committee was formed to obtain the cancellation of this agreement, with the result that the then Secretary accepted a sum of money, I believe £100, and retired; Mr Kemsley having cancelled his agreement previously. I cannot remember all the names of the subscribers to this fund, but I remember Mr W Jones, Mr L Pearson, Mr T Potterton, Mr Ed Taylor, Mr Palmer and myself.'

Among the papers shown to me by Mr Potterton were four letters from Luwee Harris, the first Secretary of the Institution as it was incorporated in December 1897 under the Companies Acts of the post-Victorian era. They throw no more than a sidelight on the preliminary steps, but the copy of the first prospectus is a curious and most interesting document in which it is set forth, above the 'Memorandum of Association', and in a modified form within it, a record that:

'The only Agreement to be entered into is one between the Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers of the one part and Jesse Kemsley of the other part, and also another Agreement made between the Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers of the one part and Luwee Harris of the other part, each Agreement being dated 2 November 1897.'

Why, how and when these two agreements were set aside and cancelled lay behind Mr Potterton's enquiry of Mr Mayner. The aims of the promoters [as set down in the prospectus] were admirable.

The control was vested in a Board of Directors with a President and two Vice Presidents, who were to be advised and assisted by Mr Kemsley, as 'Registrar and Organising and Technical Director' and Mr Luwee Harris of 29 Ludgate Hill, London, as Secretary.



The first President was to be Mr John Grundy (Grundy Boilers) of City Road, London, with Mr Charles Kite of Euston Road, London, and Mr Walter Jones of Stourbridge as his Deputies. The four Directors were Ed. Wm Mayner of Redhill; Henry H Jennings of Olroyd and Sons, Leeds; Henry Snowball of London; T Ingram Luck of Shalford, Guildford. Both Kemsley and Luck were registered plumbers.

Pictured: John Grundy

It was further provided that *Domestic Engineering*, published at 29 New Bridge Street, London, and owned by JS Palmer and Henry Allen, was to be the official Journal of the new Institution, each member receiving a copy monthly free of charge.

It is hardly believable that not a single copy of this journal was kept by the Institution. By sheer luck, I discovered a pile of old magazines entitled *Domestic Engineering and Estate Engineer* in a second-hand bookshop in Glasgow when on a visit to the Scottish Branch. The effort of staggering home with these was more than rewarded when it was realised that they were indeed copies of the Institution's first official Journal. Several years of complete volumes were sorted and bound and have been presented to the Institution's archives.

From this point on the continuing story could best be researched through the early Minute Books (themselves in a sorry state of preservation).

The first entry, dated 5 June 1897, is written in a quite exceptional style of calligraphy, which continued until 15 January 1898.

A second meeting was held two weeks later at the same address, viz. 76 Queen's Road, Bayswater, with a Mr McColl in the Chair. Among the proposals and provisions minuted were plans to ensure for each of the promoters — Kemsley and Harris — a salary for 20 years and a deferred debenture to be

shared between them, while a third clause covered the payment of £2500 liquidated damages to them should the Institution be wound up before the expiration of 20 years.

One can only assume that the two promoters were confident that their project would succeed, and the debenture (for £1200) would be accumulated from entrance fees and subscriptions before it matured.

The entrance fee was set at one guinea (£1 1s 0d) and the annual subscription also one guinea. Associates' fees were half the members' fees.

The Secretary's salary was set at £250 per annum, and that of the Registrar at £150 p.a. Additionally, all expenses were to be paid to each, plus first-class travel and eight weeks leave. They were to be the self-appointed membership committee and Life Associates of the Institution.

The Honorary Directors, on the other hand, were to be allowed second-class travel and 1 shilling towards any cab fares.

The same meeting also elected the first 'fully paid Life Associates' — Luwee Harris, Jesse Kemsley, JG Grey, AH Dear, AD Macpherson, J Frost and C Humpherson.

At the third meeting on 26 August 1897, Grey and Humpherson resigned from the Board on the grounds that 'they were both distinctly informed that the Institution was registered with limited liability before they were connected with the Institution, and now finding that the liability was unlimited, they considered that a sufficient reason for resignation'.

Around 3 November 1897 Mayner appears to have assumed the office of Chairman of a committee responsible for the conduct of the business of the Institution, subject to confirmation of its decisions by the Directors in a general meeting. Incidentally, the other members of the 'committee of three' were Harris and Kemsley. Thus it is evident that Mayner, as Chairman, signed the minutes which contained the two agreements.

The minutes of meetings, held almost daily in November, record the election of JS Bridger of Thames Bank Ironwork Co., HH Jennings, Managing Director of Olroyd & Co., W Jones of Stourbridge, JS Palmer of *Domestic Engineering*, Louis F Pearson of Beeston, D M Nesbitt, Chairman of Ashwell and Nesbitt, and H Dowrie of the American Radiator Co.

By the end of the year the minutes indicate rising disquiet over the Harris/Kemsley agreements and, on 14 May 1898, the agreements were finally cancelled, though both promoters were retained under new terms. A copy of the cancellation is included in the minutes in which it states that Luwee Harris was of Le Hoek, Jersey, and described himself as a Civil Engineer, Architect and Surveyor.

It is evident that the master plumbers registered by the Worshipful Company of Plumbers were looked upon as the potential backbone of the Institution and 2250 copies of a new prospectus were issued, but later it was recorded as not being a success.

Latterly the Institution recognised that they needed people who owned/operated the larger 'ironmongers' with sound workshop departments. Nevertheless, the Institution continued to develop and Walter Jones made history by preparing, printing and circulating a paper entitled 'Heating and Ventilation', which he presented to a meeting of members in London on 12 October 1898.

The first Annual General Meeting was convened on 17 November 1898, but so much time was 'occupied in an endeavour to compromise the amount owing to the Secretary' that the meeting was 'dissolved without passing a resolution'.

At a subsequent meeting held on the same day a small number of the leading members got down to the problem. They ascertained that the accounts, since the date of incorporation, showed receipts of £144 7s 6d, and expenses of £144 3s 0d. On the strength of the credit balance of four shillings and sixpence, they offered Harris £100 in settlement of his claim, which he accepted.

When the members met on 24 January 1899 a draft of new rules was adopted and the meeting proceeded to the election of the Officers and Council, as follows — President: Walter Jones; Vice Presidents: DM Nesbit, J Nelson Russell; Council: LF Pearson, T Potterton, EW Mayner, JS Palmer, J Kitchen, C Mason, R E Atkinson, W R Maguire; Hon. Sec: E Taylor. From this point on the conduct of the business of the Institution was vested in the Council, not the Board of Directors.

In 1899 the President invited members to meet in his hometown of Stourbridge for their meeting in the summer, establishing the tradition of the Summer Meeting for which succeeding Presidents chose venues that became more and more ambitious as time went on.



The new century opened with a well-attended meeting at the Holborn Restaurant, the first of many at that hotel.

The first annual report was presented and mention made of four quarterly meetings.

Mr DM Nesbit of Ashwell & Nesbit, Leicester, was elected President.

Pictured: David Nesbit

Progress was made both in membership and outside influence. A start was made in tackling the problem of payment for competitive plans and, following a paper by Mr RE Atkinson (Ashwell & Nesbit) on the 'Standardisation of Flanges, Bolts and Pipes', a sub-committee was set up to consider standardisation of flanges and instructed to open negotiations with the Institution of Mechanical Engineers with a view to securing a national standard. These actions brought the Institution into connection with the British Standards Institution, which has remained close ever since.

Mr WR Maguire of Dublin succeeded Mr Nesbit for the year 1901 and the summer meeting was duly convened in Dublin, where the President gave his presidential address to a 'fine muster' of members assembled in the hall of the Institution of Civil Engineers of Ireland in Dawson Street, Dublin. At this summer meeting a social side was introduced and thereafter became tradition. The meeting was also marked by the election of the first Honorary Member, Professor WF Barrett FRS.

Mr J Nelson Russell (Rosser and Russell) was elected President in 1902. The January session was marked by the first paper on ventilation 'Mechanical Ventilation' by Walter Yates of Matthews and Yates. A further feature of this meeting was a promise on the part of Mr WJ Millington to exhibit a model of a patent 'air screen' at the April meeting but he had to excuse himself from this promise due to being debarred by pending litigation. Nothing further is recorded — a pity since this would have been the first reference to what became known as air conditioning.



A further change in procedure was made at the September meeting held in Birmingham, when Mr LF Pearson was nominated for President for the coming year. Mr (later Sir) Louis Pearson (Beeston Boilers) duly occupied the Presidential Chair in January 1903 and G Crispin and S Naylor were elected Vice Presidents. For the first time, a ballot was held for members of Council and William Nelson Haden was among the successful candidates. His record of work for the Institution lasted some forty years. This year, medals for papers were awarded for the first time.

Pictured: Louis F Pearson

The October 1903 meeting was notable in providing more evidence that the Institution was gaining influence outside its borders. The government of the day had called for 'a witness to give evidence before the Royal Commission on Coal Supplies' and WN Haden was chosen to do so. Another indication was the appointment, by request, of 'three arbitrators to settle trade disputes'.



Mr JS Palmer was nominated for President in 1904. In January it was reported that he had declined the office but following gentle pressure by the Council, he was in the Chair and signed the minutes of the previous meeting. Before the year came to a close another name of significance in the Institution's history appeared — that of AH Barker, who was to make great contributions to both the education and research activities of the Institution.

Pictured: JS Palmer and AH Barker

This concludes the account of the first seven years of the Institution based on the examination of Minute Book No. 1 and other papers referred to in the author's foreword.

Special Note 1

The original manuscript of the history of the IHVE was written by hand and subsequently typed onto stencils [for a duplicating machine] during the late 1950s in the hope that it might be of interest if '60 glorious years' were to be celebrated by the Institution. In the event only a dozen or so copies were made for the officers of the day.

Special Note 2

When reading the book produced by ASHRAE on the occasion of their own centenary in 1995, I was astonished by the account of the events leading up to the founding of that Society. A paraphrase of that account follows.

At a meeting of the National Association of Master Steam and Hot Water Fitters held in 1894, papers were presented by three authors: a Mr Edward Bates of Syracuse, Mr Arthur Walworth of Boston and an Englishman who had crossed the Atlantic specially to present a paper. The Englishman was Mr DM Nesbit.

The reception given to the papers disgusted many of those present and inspired one member, Hugh Barron, to write a critical article published in *Heating and Ventilating* (15 July 1894) in which he observed that engineers were in a minority in the membership of the National Association and that the great majority were more concerned about getting work and making money than about the art and science of heating. The Editor of *H&V*, Mr H Hart discussed the matter with Mr Barron and the suggestion was made that a society devoted to engineering matters be formed. An important figure in the industry, a Mr WM Mackay, was contacted by Mr Hart, the outcome of which was a letter sent to 25 engineers in New York to meet at the *H&V* offices to discuss the proposition. This resulted in the formation of a society in 1895 which established itself as the American Society of Heating and Ventilating Engineers (ASHVE) and latterly, after amalgamation with the American Society of Refrigeration Engineers (ASRE), became ASHRAE.

Surely it can be said that DM Nesbitt played a large part in the inspiration of ASHRAE as well as being a founder and second elected President of the IHVE.

Turning to the company Ashwell & Nesbit [which still exists as Ashwell Biomass Ltd., Leicester], if blue plaques were presented to companies that have made outstanding contributions to the development of their industries, this company would be the first in line.

Atkinson, a fellow Director of Nesbit and a Vice President of the IHVE, was the author and instigator of standardisation of pipes and fittings.

Hollinworth, Manager of the London Office of Ashwell & Nesbit, was recruited to become Secretary of the IHVE in 1914, and following a turbulent period with the plumbers, called together leading contractors in 1904 to form an association of heating and ventilating contractors — the HVCA [now the BESA] — to deal with commercial matters in which the Institution by its constitution could not be involved.

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