

Awards, Education and New Members' Day

Students joined with new members and invited guests for the BHI's annual Awards, Education and New Members' Day at the end of October.

BHI President Dr Kenneth Lloyd-Jones welcomed guests, and BHI Chairman Richard Thomas MBHI outlined the day's programme.

David Poole FBHI, gave a talk on 'The Future of the Syllabus and Expected Standards in Examinations' which was very well received. He explained that due to new government arrangements there will be changes in the EAL/BHI examinations for clock and watchmaking. The revised qualifications are not yet accredited and details will be available for candidates as soon as they are available. He added that the units required for both of the existing qualifications will be available unchanged in May 2011. The final date for candidates to register with the Institute for the current qualifications is 11th March 2011. The new qualifications will be phased in, commencing in May 2012. As far as possible, arrangements will be made within the new structure of qualifications to enable candidates who have commenced the current awards to complete their qualification or transfer to the new examinations.

Tom Keegan, from the British School of Watchmaking, followed with a fascinating watchmaking demonstration on mounting a hairspring onto a collet, before Chris McKay MBHI gave a highly entertaining account of 'The Big Ben Story; How Personalities, Politics and Power-plays Produced Precision in Public Timekeeping'.

After a superb lunch provided by LIZZY, Upton Hall's on-site catering facility, the Awards Ceremony got under way, with Jonathan Betts FSA FBHI FIIC giving the address.

Horology – an amazingly rewarding occupation

Congratulating the students on achieving their awards and on choosing horology as a subject for study, Jonathan said: 'If you haven't already realised it, you will find if you broaden your horological studies that this subject will be an amazingly rewarding occupation.'

He described himself as 'the dumbo' of his family, alongside his four brothers and sisters. 'I had a real problem with formal learning, took no higher level studies and I have no academic qualifications at all. When I did my BHI training, many years ago, I expected to simply learn about watches and clocks and nothing more; I had no idea where it would lead. I quickly discovered, however, that learning about horology is in fact a way in to learning about a whole lot of other things in life too. For example, the simple physics and maths that I'd struggled with at school all began to make sense once I saw them applied to practical things. Then again, when studying and repairing old pocket watches I began to realise that I knew things about antique jewellery and metal work because the subjects have so much in common. Similarly, when learning about old clocks, I began to realise that I knew a bit about antique furniture as the case styles, woods and mouldings fixings are usually common to clocks and furniture.'

Jonathan said that most people are interested in precision timekeeping, as the subject runs like a thread through just about every branch of science, history and many other walks of life, from navigation at sea to practical astronomy, from warfare to time and motion studies, from the sat nav in your car to the mobile phone in your pocket.

He added that by far the single most important thing career-wise is reputation, and if you have a good one you will always have work. Stating the obvious, your watchword should be that old saying 'if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well'. Of course, I hear you say, we do, we do. But I'm not talking about those easy days when everything's going smoothly, I'm thinking of the dark days, which we all have, when, for example, we've spent many hours making a part for a watch or clock, only to find it's now undersized and we can't face the prospect of making it again... can it be stretched, can we adapt the watch to fit the part, can



we fudge it in some way to fit... it's at times like these that you need courage, and believe me we've all been there. It's especially tempting when you need that cheque and the customers are getting impatient. It is vital at those times to resist cutting corners because 'sod's law' guarantees that of the 50 pieces of work you do well, it is the one bad one that people will see and will talk about.'

'The same applies if you get involved in Antiquarian Horology or horological journalism. Take that extra bit of care to ensure you get it right... if you are a perfectionist in this way you may find you are sometimes accused of being pedantic and unnecessarily picky, but you will gain professional respect and



by Jayne Hall



your reputation will grow. It means hard work and, I have to say, horology is unlikely to make you a multi-millionaire, but in my experience if you take the subject seriously you'll find the rewards amply repay the effort.'

Students then received their awards and certificates (see *HJ September 2010* for full details).

Dr Lloyd-Jones presented Council's Special Award 'in recognition of outstanding or exemplary personal service to the Institute' to Robert Egan FBHI.

Robert began working in horology at the Timex Corporation in 1969, where he was involved in laboratory work and the development of new manufacturing



techniques. After the Timex plant closed, he ran his own repair business for three years before becoming Horological Instructor at Finchale Training College near Durham. In 1997 he established his own, well respected, Clockman Horological Services business in Washington Village, Tyne and Wear. He has been involved with the Institute throughout his career, and over the years has, on several occasions, been a member of Council, serving for a while as Education Director and spending much time beginning a revision of the Distance Learning Course. Since 1997, he has been a regular and popular seminar tutor at Upton Hall.

Receiving his award, Robert said: 'I really do appreciate this but I've not finished yet – I've still got plenty to do, and I still want to be involved. It has been a fantastic experience and I want to thank the team I have worked with over the years.'

The BHI's Silver Medal, which is awarded for 'outstanding developments or achievement in any field of horology or related to horology', was presented by Dr Lloyd-Jones to Robert Bray FBHI.

In 1995, almost on a whim, Robert Bray, a precision engineer working for a company making specialised gearboxes, acquired the formerly prestigious but by then almost defunct company of Sinclair Harding in Cheltenham, for as he reasoned 'a clock is only a gearbox running backwards'. Founded in 1967, Sinclair Harding had a reputation for making fine and innovative clocks, and the former owner, Michael Harding, was himself awarded the BHI Barrett Silver Medal in 1996.

Reputation for Design & Development

Robert's first task was to complete a commission for a complex public clock for the Oval cricket ground, and over the years he has transformed the company by investing in precision machine tools and computer controlled design and equipment, with meticulous attention to finish. In 1997 the company was making some 25 clocks in a year, but by 2009 this had risen to 63. Some are bespoke custom designs, but many are from the now greatly expanded range of standard clocks, though each with individual finish and decoration. All the parts are currently made in house except for fusee chains and mainsprings, though experimental springs for prototypes are often made in the factory. The company's reputation for design and prototype development has led to an increasing volume of work for other companies, and the workshop area has been expanded. Despite this, Sinclair Harding remains a true 'family firm' for, among the total workforce of nine, are Robert Bray's wife, two sons, his brother, his brother-in-law and now his daughter-in-law.

Robert Bray is a Fellow of the Institute, and in 1995 he was accepted as a full Member of AHCI, the prestigious Swiss-based association dedicated to independent artistry and craftsmanship in horology.

In receiving the award, Robert thanked his team for doing a fantastic job, especially his wife Caron, for being there. He said he still tries to learn something new every day.

'In the early days, I would often pick up the phone, not know the answer, put the receiver down, read a book, and then ring back – whereas today I simply have to re-learn what I forgot yesterday.'

A champagne toast to the students' success, kindly sponsored by Director Hugh Barnes, was followed by Jonathan Betts' engaging and humorous talk entitled 'An Obsession with Horology: The Cautionary Tale of Rupert Gould'.

During the day, visitors also had the chance to tour the Hall with Curator Alan Middleton and learn more about the BHI.

Pictured top: Students with their certificates.

Far Left: Bob Bray, who received the BHI Silver Medal, with his wife Caron.

Centre: Back row, BHI Chairman Richard Thomas MBHI, Jonathan Betts FBHI, and Dr Kenneth Lloyd-Jones, with Robert Bray FBHI and Robert Egan FBHI.

Left: Robert Egan FBHI, with the BHI Council's Special Award.