

REPORT ON CONFERENCE 2006

The 2006 Conference was held on 15 September and was attended by approx 50 delegates. The conference dinner was on the previous evening at Grange Park Golf Course and was attended by the family of Jim Wright. The Jim Wright Trophy was presented to the winner of the Golf Day by Janet Wright. The dinner was a success and enjoyed by all.

The standard of papers at the conference was high. The Fibretech Prize for the best paper was awarded to Herr B Kull of RHI for his paper on "Changes in refractories consumption worldwide from the point of view of the leading refractories manufacturer" which detailed changes in our industry and how the challenges are being faced by RHI.

R McNally gave a paper explaining how Saint Gobain had achieved considerable success in selling refractories into China, against the general flow of material by a combination of technical benefits and local presence. J Hartenstein of LWB's paper on dolomite refractories presented the current status of this material in steelmaking and cement and presented some developments in dolomite continuous casting refractories.

Chris Windle of DSF described the properties of refractories applied in glassmaking furnaces and explained why operators are again choosing high alumina materials. The AGM and lunch were followed by Gary Jubb's presentation on development in insulating fibre materials which have been developed in response to health concerns with more traditional products. The final paper was on experiences in refractory construction in different markets indicating some of issues involved in working successfully in varying local conditions.

The conference provided an excellent opportunity to meet and renew acquaintances.

At the end of the conference, there was an open session on the future of the IRE. The comments made are summarised below, and although the session did not offer any definite conclusions, the ideas expressed are important were considered by Council at the October meeting and will assist in helping the IRE understand the requirements of the membership.

Several ideas on recruitment were mentioned, such as increasing opportunities for overseas members to pay in local currency, considering corporate membership, positively selling the benefits of membership, recruiting via an enlarged website, using training and information to recruit.

The question as to whether the institute should concentrate on UK membership or look overseas was raised, with different speakers taking both views. What the institute should be doing was raised, with suggestions for a role in training via seminars. The changing institute membership over the years from a 'hands on' to a more technical body was raised, the changes in attendance at Branch functions was also raised.

Thanks to all those who contributed by speaking or by the questionnaire at the conference.

SAF