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Enhancing Technological Advancement Through Collaboration

September 2018 saw, amongst other things, the 2018 SURCON Centenary Conference held at The University of Leeds, UK. Judged by the feedback that the Conference Organising Committee has received, it is clear that the conference has been a great success. I was fortunate enough to listen to the lectures. Even without being biased (I know it is not easy for a member of an organising committee to avoid the vulnerability of being biased in his/her views), I have to say that I was very impressed by the high quality of many of the papers presented at the conference. Indeed, at least one of my colleagues commented that the keynote talk by Professor Stuart Clarke alone was worth the full registration fees.

Readers of SCI may be aware that by mandate, OCCA's primary objects are "To further the development of the science and technology of the coatings and allied industries and to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas thereon." Even through my relatively short period of involvement with OCCA over the last three decades, I have seen OCCA's great strive to achieve such objects through activities that are well aligned with the twenty ancillaries to the primary objects as described in the Memorandum and Articles of Association when OCCA was incorporated in January 1963. It is encouraging to see OCCA's intensified refocus on facilitation of knowledge exchange between coatings and allied industries and universities, which still host a few groups of accomplished scientists that proactively conduct surface coatings and related research. One example of such an effort of refocus is the design of the programme and selection of the venue for the 2018 SURCON Centenary Conference. Many delegates will have little difficulty in agreeing with me that the conference showcased a few examples of brilliance of academic research that may benefit surface coatings and allied industries.

The fact that the conference was hosted at the Department of Colour Science at Leeds has origins connecting the department and OCCA through a close association spanning more than half a century. The original Department of Colour and Tinctorial Chemistry was established in 1879, and soon became

internationally known as a centre of excellence in teaching and research in the chemistry of colourants. In his opening speech Sir Alan Langlands, the Vice Chancellor of the university of Leeds, commented on the close association between the OCCA and the university, and particularly the Department of Colour Science, through the Perkin family. Remarkably, perhaps not co-incidentally, both the department and OCCA have strong associations with the Perkin family. Professor Arthur George Perkin FRS, the colour chemist son of Sir William Henry Perkin FRS (who synthesised the first man-made dye, the Mauveine dye widely known as the Perkin's Mauve, and went on to become the pioneer of British chemical industry), studied at the then Department of Tinctorial Chemistry and Dyeing at Leeds as a Clothworkers' Scholar between 1881 and 1884, and was later appointed the Professor of Colour Chemistry in 1916 at the Department. Frederick Mollwo Perkin, another chemist son of Sir William Henry Perkin, became the first President of OCCA in 1918.

There is no doubt that both surface coatings and allied industries and academia can survive without collaboration with each other, and technological innovation within the industries and applied research at universities have no problem following their own separate courses. In fact, many do! However, it is also true that engagement and collaboration between the industries and universities help create opportunities to enhance technological advancement. Indeed, there are many examples where industry-academia collaboration culminates in technological step-changes as a result of ground-breaking applied research. Through my contacts with surface coatings and allied industries in the UK, I get a strong sense that most are not striving to become world-leading suppliers. Whilst I understand the challenges that industries face as a result of significant changes in the business environment due to globalisation and the emergence of new economies, I find it frustrating that industries believe that they have only themselves to rely upon to survive. Speaking as an academic myself, I can assure industries that they have willing friends in academia who have enough expertise to help them become world-leading if they have the courage and stamina required.

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