

UK Project Management Round Up



*By Miles Shepherd
Executive Advisor & International Correspondent
Salisbury, England, UK*

INTRODUCTION

It's not only the height of the Silly Season but also high summer so this is a pretty lightweight edition of what is happening in the Project World in UK. The usual suspects, BREXIT, new nuclear and the like are still with us, but I see no reason to spoil what has turned out to be a splendid summer with gloomy tales so instead we will look at what the professional societies are up to. Before that, we can take a quick view of some new projects in the pipeline and reflect on some older ones

OLD PROJECTS

First up is Stonehenge – as the earliest British project is just a few miles up the road from me, I always take a close interest in developments. The current post project report indicates that we should be looking at a post program review (note spelling, we always used to use this form in the old days) as the Henge was apparently developed in a series of projects over a very long period. Enough of the hair splitting, the big news is that shortly after completion of the final phase (well, a few hundred years or so) there was a major population change. Despite the evidence in this picture (right) the Henge was not built in the 1920's, this particular project conserved the Henge in the mid-1950s and resolved some the unanswered questions arising from Colonel Hawley's excavations some 30 years earlier.

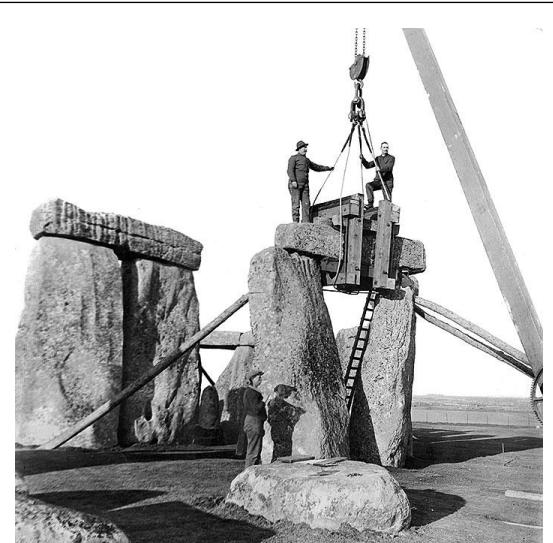


Photo: English Heritage

Latest reports on the ‘original’ project team inform us that they were Celts, or at least some were, as DNA analysis of cremated burials on the site indicate that some were from the region where the stones were quarried – some 200 miles away on the Pembroke, South Wales. The first major population shift in Britain happened very quickly, for reasons unconnected with BREXIT but no doubt was one of the factors that caused the resentment behind the vote to leave. The in-comers were lighter skinned and blue of eye, clearly identifiable as foreign!

Another ‘old’ project but not quite so ancient is the **TSB IT failure** that continues to attract adverse comment. Perhaps this is just a last grab before the summer break, but Members of Parliament have had a pop at TSB over the length of time its report into the cut over breakdown will take. TSB hired a law firm, one of the so-called “magic circle” to investigate. Not unnaturally, this firm will take some time, probably another year, to complete its investigation and compile a report, by which time many MPs will have forgotten the whole affair. Some might dismiss MP’s criticism as a case of the pot calling the kettle black given the poor progress and lack of decision making over the revamp of the Houses of Parliament but others may think that despite the need for an independent inquiry, it might have been sensible to call in professional project managers – and the Association for Project Management and British Computer Society could certainly help here. Losses attributed to the fiasco run to £176 million – so far, and that does not take account of reputation damage.

New Nuclear is never far from the headlines and the latest press reports centre on financial issues. The latest points to abandoning the project unless a buyer can be found. All this is a result of the bankruptcy of Westinghouse and the reluctance of South Korean firm Kepco to buy into the project. Like the Chinese, Kepco see the UK nuclear build as a way of validating their reactor design and thus improving the sales opportunities. Toshiba, the current project owners, have reputedly spent several hundred million £ on preliminary work.

ETHICAL ISSUES

We hear very little about ethics and projects so I want to segue from new nuclear to an ethical issue related to nuclear projects. A recent Freedom of Information report claims that a major conflict of interest exists with some consultancies advising the UK Government also acting on behalf of Japanese developer. The specific challenge relates to the Wylfa plant in north Wales where Arup PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) seem to be hunting with the hounds by advising the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and at the same time, running with the fox by acting for Horizon Nuclear Power, a subsidiary of Hitachi developing Wylfa.

While I carry no torch for the big consulting houses, there are not many of them and it is hard to find one with the right level of skills to do this kind of work so it will inevitably look like a stitch up to your average punter, a point not lost on Meg Hillier, chairwoman of the Public Accounts Committee. In the highly factional arena of new nuclear and large engineering projects, there is probably little that can be done in the short term and no one has actually accused these firms of any malfeasance. Now if there are other like-minded project management consultants out there, maybe we

could band together and offer OUR service – that would be a get out of jail card for all concerned!

Segueing from new nuclear to architecture brings us to another area of difficulty: the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has been sitting on top of a major project conflict. It has been reported in the Press that a significant amount of members' money is missing. The issue hit the headlines at the end of July when it was announced that the City of London Police fraud squad has begun an investigation after RIBA was accused of mislaying £1.1m of members' funds. This is money that cannot be accounted for in a controversial property deal in 2013 involving a substantial loan that was paid off by a sale of Institute assets. The current CEO reported that some £1.1 million could not be accounted for in a refurbishment project. **Alan Vallance**, RIBA's CEO stated that "*the way in which financial expenditure has been captured during the project...has been poor.*"

The matter has come to a head as one of the candidates in the election for President of RIBA, **Elsie Owusu** reported the matter. Ms Owusu is reported as saying "*I've decided to speak out now because if I win the election I'll be forced to sign some rolled-up trouser secrecy deal or if I lose, it will just be called sour grapes.*" Ms Owusu is no stranger to controversy as she raised the issue in April and claimed RIBA is "institutionally racist". The remarks, made in an interview with the Times, drew criticism from RIBA's Hon Secretary who accused her of a "*flagrant breach of confidentiality.*" Whatever the outcome of the police inquiry, this is not a matter that will just go away as past President **Owen Luder** stated that attempt to gag Ms Owusu offended principles of democracy and free speech while another past President, **Jack Pringle**, claimed that past officers and elected members have questions to answer about the financial stewardship of the institute. On the other hand, RIBA deny that any fraud has occurred, repeatedly claiming that "the trustee has declined to provide details to substantiate why she thinks this money to be 'missing'."

NEW PROJECTS

On a happier note comes news of two new projects. The first is one to build two new chemical plants in norther Europe. Costed at around £2.4 billion it will be Ineos largest investment. The plants will provide a "chemical cracker" and a propane dehydrogenation unit. The cracker will be the first new one to be built in Europe for more than 20 years. The firm claims it will be one of the most efficient plants of its type in the world. Its founder, Sir Jim Ratcliffe, stated that "will be a game changer for the industry." Locations have yet to be announced but are likely to be costal. A project team has been appointed to carry out a feasibility study and completion is expected within 4 years.

The second project is closer to home, and situated at Olympia, in west London. Olympia is a major exhibition venue that has housed everything from international horse shows and rock concerts as well as Crufts and a wide range of exhibitions. The project will enhance the exhibition space while preserving the framed domed window and 170 foot arched roof supported by ironwork. The listed building was

designed by Henry Edward Coe and completed in 1986. Its original purpose was to act as the National Agricultural Hall. Plans include the addition of two more acres of exhibition space and two hotels and several restaurants. Aarchitectural enhancement is in the hands of Heatherwick Studio, in collaboration with SPPARC Architects. Heatherwick is best known for the 2012 Olympic torch, Google's headquarters in Silicon Valley and less for the design of the abandoned Garden Bridge across the Thames.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES

And so to Professional Societies – first the Association for Project Management (APM). Despite the Silly Season being in full swing, APM has been quite active this last month. First of all, significant progress has been made on the revision of the Body of Knowledge. Moving from the 2012 version is very much a balancing act, trying to reconcile buzz words such as Agile with cross industry requirements so the announcement of the revised structure is important. The report on the structure is available from www.apm.org.uk/media/24069/bok7-whats-changed-akt11950-with-links.pdf. The editors, Dr Ruth Murry-Webster and Prof Darren Dalcher, have completed a consultation exercise using a collaboration platform. Further opportunities for comment will come in September but in the meantime, comment on the structure may be made through the APM website.

Extracting a major point from the structure report shows that the delivery conundrum, “the need to recognise the variety of delivery options available across all projects types – from more traditional, linear and deliberate life cycles to structures that are more iterative and adaptive. Often described as ‘agile v waterfall’” shows the significance of this aspect. “According to the report, there is strong support to avoid considering these as binary options, so the structure will also highlight the option of hybrid models of delivery.” I shall be very interested in how this is achieved as the result so far sound like they are doing just what they are trying to avoid. Publication of 7th edition is planned for Spring 2017.

Taking APM’s isolated announcements on changes engendered by the award of the Royal Charter individually diverts attention from the major work undertaken. The qualification system has been updated, harmonised and reoriented to reflect the needs of professionalism and the Charter. This has been a major achievement for the Head Office team coordinating work especially when the “business as usual” work levels are taken into account.

APM has 12 UK and one overseas branch (Hong Kong) to support its membership while 15 Specific Interest Groups provide for particular technical aspects. APM runs 4 major conferences annually, the next in September for Women in Project Management who are celebrating 25 years of support. There are too many subsidiary events annually to count but the total is in excess of 350 and vary from Branch and SIG meetings to site visits and on line activities such as blogs and webinars.

CLOSING REMARKS

The summer continues to be long and hot, rather as I remember from childhood but I am quite sure that this year is much hotter even than 1976 which was a major heatwave. Can we deny global warming? This raises the issue of what can and should project managers do about this threat?

About the Author



Miles Shepherd

Salisbury, UK



Miles Shepherd is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World Journal in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK and overseas Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He is currently a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is immediate past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He was involved in setting up APM's team developing guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk.