HRH The Duke of Edinburgh's
Study Conference
Oxford 1956

ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS
48 Bryanston Square London W 1
TELEPHONE: AMbassador 2404-9
TELEGRAMS: CONCOMEMP WESDO LONDON
CABLES: CONCOMEMP LONDON

/KK

27th April, 1956

Dear Mr. Guinness,

Welcome to the great experiment. This is no ordinary Conference. It is not intended to put across any particular idea and it is not intended to consider any resolutions. It is simply intended, as its name implies, to study the human problems of industrial communities in the Commonwealth and Empire to pool experience and to listen to views and opinions.

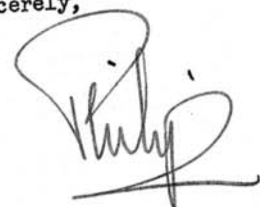
You have been asked because you have some individual and practical knowledge of industry and the time you spend at the Conference should allow you to compare your experience and ideas with people from other parts of the world who are facing similar problems.

It is not much good wondering what is going to happen at this Conference because something like this has not been attempted before. Nobody quite knows what is going to emerge as a result. We trust that the clash of experiences with theories and with the study of practical problems will produce a better understanding in your mind of the many stresses and strains which are inherent in an industrial community. A better understanding of these problems may ultimately produce better and wiser solutions.

You will find together with this letter a group of papers contributed from various parts of the world and from various points of view. The writers and the subjects were selected to try to show the enormous scope of the human problems which are brought about by industry. They are designed to act as kindling, so to speak, for the main bonfire which we hope you will set alight at Oxford.

Naturally, we hope that the proceedings at Oxford and during the study tours will be interesting and instructive, but we also hope that you will enjoy yourself as much as possible during these rather hectic three weeks.

Yours sincerely,



C. E. Guinness, Esq.,
A. Guinness Son & Co., Ltd.,
Park Royal Brewery,
London, N.W.10

CHAPTER ONE

AN IDEA IS BORN

"The ultimate results of the Conference are difficult to assess but one hopes that in future right decisions will be made and wrong decisions avoided because the man or woman who makes them once spent three weeks at this Conference"

– H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, 1957

It had been a great success, the Duke of Edinburgh knew, as he stood in the rain on the platform at Oxford Station early the morning of July 27, 1956. Waving goodbye to many of the 300 people who had taken part in the first Commonwealth Study Conference, *his* Conference, the Duke could only have felt proud, elated, and, certainly, relieved. For as a central participant in the creation and organization of the Conference, he knew first-hand its remarkable success over the past 18 days, but also how close this bold enterprise had come to collapse.

The Duke of Edinburgh opens 1956 Conference at Oxford

Indeed, he was to write the following year that, in his opening address to the Conference on July 9, he had spoken "with a confidence I did not altogether feel. Too many people had told me that the whole thing might end in failure for my mind to be entirely easy about the next few weeks. I had to remind myself fairly frequently that if the outcome were certain, there would be no adventure, and that this very uncertainty might produce great success or great failure. I devoutly hoped for the former."

The young Duke – he had turned 35 a month before the Conference opened – could have assuaged his fears with the thought that many of history's greatest achievements were the unlikely result of a series of coincidences and misunderstandings, tempered with bouts of myopia and petty-mindedness, but always drawing profit from somebody's far-sightedness and high-mindedness. The one constant has always been a fortuitous succession of keen, energetic individuals in the right place at the right time, ready to take up the call. That is certainly the story of *His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference on the Human Problems of Industrial Communities within the Commonwealth and Empire*.

Although planning of that first Conference began at the end of 1952, with tension progressively mounting as the opening date drew nearer, the real foundations were established more than 30 years earlier. It was at the end of the Great War in 1918 that an energetic young vicar from London's East End founded the Boys' Welfare Society to "save young boys from degeneration." The Reverend Robert Hyde, appalled by what he had seen inside Britain's factories, sought to improve working conditions for the boys and young men employed in munitions plants. It was Reverend Hyde's strong belief that benign employers and industrial harmony could create as much wealth as harsh taskmasters and conflict. Radical for its day and decades ahead of its time, the thinking was that a happy worker is a productive worker. At the same time, Reverend Hyde argued, poverty led people into temptation; deliver them from poverty with a living wage and you get good Christians as well as prosperous and happy citizens.

In 1919, the organization was renamed The Industrial Welfare Society, a title it was to keep until 1965, when it became The Industrial Society (the name changed again, in 2002, to The Work Foundation). In its early days, the Society defined its mission as one of campaigning among employers "on questions affecting the welfare of male persons engaged in industry." As Barbara Gunnell wrote in *The New Statesman* in 2000, "women and girls presumably looked elsewhere for moral rescue."

Much of the Society's work in the 1920s and 1930s involved the struggle for what we now consider the basics, such as employer-provided lunchrooms and lavatories. The Society also

1956 Conference
Theme: *The Human Problems of Industrial Communities within the Commonwealth and Empire*
Dates: July 9-27, 1956
300 members from 30 countries and territories.

The U.K. in 1956
Population: 51.4 million
Prime Minister: Anthony Eden
Retail Price Index increase: 2.0%
No. 1 Song as Conference Opens: *No Other Love* (Ronnie Hilton)
First major nuclear power plant designed for peaceful purposes opens, producing 4.2 megawatts of electricity.

The World in 1956
Population: 2.883 billion
Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal; U.K. and France launch military response sparking Suez Crisis.
Hungarian Revolution crushed by Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact troops.
Fidel Castro and supporters land on Cuba.
Nelson Mandela faces his first charge of high treason; charge is later dropped.
Elvis Presley enters the music charts for the first time, with 'Heartbreak Hotel'.

The Duke of Edinburgh and John Marsh

organized healthy camping holidays in the countryside for young workers. Along the way, Reverend Hyde attracted royal patronage when Prince Albert, later Duke of York, became honourary president. It was Prince Albert who, at the suggestion of the Reverend, endorsed the idea of camping holidays where boys from factories could mix with their public-school counterparts. The abdication crisis of 1936 drew the Prince's energies away from the Society and to more pressing matters, although he did stay involved; a section of the procession route for his coronation as King George VI on May 12, 1937, was reserved for several hundred of his camp boys. George VI remained honorary patron of the Society until his death in 1952. Reverend Hyde continued as head of the Society until his retirement in 1949.

The Reverend's replacement was John Marsh, who had survived forced marches and labour camps on the Thai-Burma railroad as a Japanese prisoner of war five years earlier. With typical energy and purpose, Marsh set about transforming the Society into a modern organization devoted to the study of management-labour relations. His appointment as Director set the stage for another initiative that, in its own way, was to prove decades ahead of its time.

Peter Parker went to work for Marsh as head of the Society's Overseas Department in 1953. He described his new employer as someone whose wartime survival "astonished and inspired him for the rest of his life." Marsh, wrote Parker, was "permanently urgent, hustling and bustling with things, people, ideas … he was always starting something."

John Marsh decided to start something big. Shortly after the death of King George VI on February 6, 1952, Marsh invited Prince Philip to take over as patron of the Society. Parker recalled that the Duke's acceptance, "in crisp monosyllabic naval style, was yes but what could he do that was of use?"

Marsh came up with the idea in May 1952 of re-engineering Reverend Hyde's camping holidays into something rather more ambitious. In a December 9, 1952, note to Buckingham Palace – the earliest existing reference – Marsh proposed a five-day Conference for 1954, Prince Philip presiding, that would bring together "about 300 young men between 20 and 30 years of age who have completed a recognized apprenticeship or University degree course with up to five years' experience in industry or commerce, and who have, or are likely to have, responsibility for the work of others."

A note in Prince Philip's hand on Marsh's proposal says it all: "I think this needs a bit of discussion." In February 1953, Marsh was invited to Buckingham Palace to discuss the idea further. There, Prince Philip suggested the Conference should have a more "practical nature" and include visits to workplaces to study "what makes a factory tick."

In a memo the following month, Marsh fleshed out his idea further. The Conference would still be held in 1954 and draw 300 young people who had or were likely to have responsibility for the work of others. They would still need to have university degrees or apprenticeships. But Marsh raised the minimum age to 23, and he included women. The Conference was to run seven days instead of five and he stipulated that "one-quarter of the delegates would be from Commonwealth countries," effectively proposing that three-quarters of Conference places should be reserved for British delegates. He was mute on the question of participation by the trade unions but he wrote that "the cost of the Conference would be met by the companies nominating delegates to attend." Marsh suggested a seminar approach in which students would be divided into groups of 20 under the leadership of a tutor, and he included a draft agenda for the Conference.

While Marsh did not know it, his timing was perfect. Prince Philip's recent travels had taken him into places that, he noted in 2001, were "new communities where each of the various interests – the unions, civil servants and business leaders – all had a part to play in developing what was a completely new community structure." The visits planted in the Duke's mind the seed of the study tour concept, where emerging young leaders could study the role that each sector plays in community development – and what makes them all "tick."

The Duke tossed the Marsh proposal around and offered his own version of an agenda, one which reflected his view, based on his own experiences, that the enterprise should be broadened to focus on the community rather than simply on the workplace. There was little more progress until a month after the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953.

That July, Prince Philip sought advice about the Conference – now tentatively called *The Duke of Edinburgh's Conference on Industrial Responsibility in the Commonwealth* – from Sir Walter Monckton, the Minister of Labour. Monckton endorsed the idea and the Duke said in a note to his private secretary: "I think this clinches it. Tell Marsh to go ahead. He can call it the D of E's Conference on 'The Responsibility of Industry in the Commonwealth'. Keep your fingers crossed!"

Sir Reginald Verdon Smith and Sir Harold Hartley

A notice appeared in the Commonwealth and Empire Press in September 1953 announcing that plans were being made for such a Conference. With this announcement, Sir Harold Hartley was to write later, "The project had really passed the point of no return."

Sir Harold Hartley, a key figure in the creation and continuation of the Conferences, was a stalwart support for the Duke in his journey through these uncharted waters. The two made an unlikely pair; Sir Harold was an active 75 and Prince Philip a dashing 32, when they began their collaboration on the Conference.

A chemist and mineralogist by training, Sir Harold taught at Balliol College, Oxford, until the outbreak of the First World War. Serving with distinction, he rose to the rank of Brigadier-General by war's end and returned to teaching until 1930, when he entered industry.

Sir Harold (he was knighted in 1928), was President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science for 1950 and first became involved with Prince Philip in 1951 when the prince was nominated to succeed him. At the time, Prince Philip was serving as a naval officer in the Mediterranean in command of *H.M.S Magpie*. He sought advice on his presidential address from his predecessor and Sir Harold submitted materials from himself and his colleagues in the worlds of technology and science. The Duke eagerly absorbed the older man's advice and worked on his speech in his ship's cabin over several months. The address would be his first major speech, and it impressed more than just the press. Sir Harold quickly understood that the young Duke, though he had no university training, possessed a remarkably quick and agile mind. For his part, the Duke came to admire and trust Sir Harold, and it was to him that he would turn in 1953 as work began in earnest on the first Conference.

Prince Philip held firm views on the kind of Conference he wanted. "It was suggested to me," he recalled in a 2005 interview, "that this should be the Commonwealth Labour Relations Conference. I replied: No way – I don't want anything to do with labour relations, certainly not at that time," he said in an evocation of the postwar industrial strife that had pitted old-school industrialists against a workforce of men back from the war and

no longer willing to accept the old class structures. “But I said that there was probably more value in looking at the development of industrial communities because, in the end, it wasn’t the relations between the employers and the workers that was the problem, it was the relationship between the *community as a whole and the industry as a whole*.”

That was the *what*. There were also questions about the *who*. Should the Conference be kept to the usual crowd, the captains of industry and other establishment leaders? What about the trade union leaders who were emerging as an important component of the post-war economy in Britain and the world? Again, the Duke had strong ideas of his own.

John Marsh and Peter Parker

“I suggested that it might be valuable for people who are in the process of moving up in responsibilities, through the unions and through administration and through management, to look at these issues *before* they became responsible for heading their organizations, before having made decisions which they had to defend,” he said in 2005.

“That was the general idea, that it shouldn’t be people who were heads of anything because they’re already a head, they’ve already made decisions and are therefore committed to their decisions. Whereas, if you get people on the way up that haven’t made any decisions, they’re relatively open-minded, or could be open-minded, and could be influenced if they could see the evidence of the relationship between industrial communities and industry.”

From there, the Duke recounts the story of the Conference with modesty, making it sound more like an agreeable Sunday outing than the arduous odyssey it turned out to be.

“We got a Council together and the idea of exposing the young or younger generation to what was going on was accepted. Out of that grew the idea of having a few briefing sessions at the beginning by people who had special knowledge. And then the idea was to divide everybody up into study groups and send them off to look at examples. The basic idea of the study groups was to show a declining industry and the developing industry, so that they could contrast the two.”

It sounds straightforward today – organize a Conference to bring together promising young leaders from industry and labour to learn and to build trust together. Scarcely novel now, the idea was nothing less than radical in 1953 as Britain thrashed about in the throes of a post-war battle for its soul and suspicion abounded on every side.

It may well be that Marsh’s “urgent hustling and bustling” was just the ticket at a tumultuous time such as this; the Employment Minister Monckton had certainly thought so. But as Sir Peter Parker was to recall, “The bandwagon began to roll too fast, and the press were on to it. There was an editorial in the *Evening News*. Prince Philip was committed publicly. Yet the precise aim, programme, membership, funding and organization were still dangerously undefined.”

The very idea of a Conference aroused suspicion and hostility on both sides of the industrial divide. Trade unions decried what they regarded as the unprecedented intervention of royalty in labour negotiations; Arthur Deakin, the powerful head of the Transport and General Workers’ Union, said any such Conference would be the greatest tragedy in the history of industrial relations in Britain. Soon afterwards, however, he softened his rhetoric and agreed to join the organizing Council.

Management was no less adamant, originally. Sir Peter Parker’s unsuccessful run for Labour in the 1951 General Elections was to haunt the Conference enterprise in 1953, when Marsh hired him to work on planning. Within two days of his start, a national newspaper accused Prince Philip of “hiring a socialist.” Concerned that this might undermine the Conference, Parker tendered his resignation, remarking to his wife that he did so with great sadness because he greatly admired the purpose of the venture. To his relief, his superiors refused to accept the resignation and ordered him back to his post.

Management’s suspicions burst into the open at the first organizing meeting with Prince Philip, held July 19, 1954, at Buckingham Palace. Attending were 44 of the U.K.’s top business and labour leaders. A senior business representative laced into the Conference’s draft programme, entitled *The Social Responsibility of Industry* and written by the “socialist” Peter Parker. The title, he argued, implied a criticism of industry. As for “social responsibility,” was that anything like being “socialist”?

Prince Philip has been credited in two separate accounts with saving the Conference that day. Sir Harold had a rather genteel recollection of it in an essay he wrote afterwards: “This (July 19) meeting was decisive. All those who were present were so much impressed by the Duke’s masterly handling of some of the difficult issues we discussed that they felt the project could go safely forward under his leadership.”

Sir Peter Parker, true to form, furnished a pithier recollection in his memoirs. According to this account, the Duke sat patiently through the business leader’s angry speech, then looked down the long conference table at the speaker, and said in a relaxed and apologetic tone: “I am sorry, I must have missed something, I couldn’t altogether follow that. Do you mind saying it again?”

Sir Peter recalled that “the next time ‘round, the case did not sound good at all.” In the end, the title would be changed but the programme survived intact. And more than that, it was clear to everyone in the room – Sir Harold and Sir Peter agree on this – that (in Sir Peter’s words) – the Prince “was taking on a big, new venture, and also the grip the idea of the Conference was taking on him. He wanted to do this.”

The minutes of that meeting do not record the drama of the Duke’s masterful intervention, beyond a euphemistic reference to a “full discussion.” But they do reveal the Duke’s careful maneuvering around the landmines littering the landscape of conflicting interests. Seeking to assuage tensions, Prince Philip told the meeting that the draft programme was intended as “a basis for discussion only.” While it would be “valuable to hold a Conference of this nature,” the Duke said there was “a need to be completely certain of the widest support for this idea.”

He invited the Council members to discuss agenda items “as individuals and not as representing any organization to which they might belong … frankly and without any reservations.”

Following their “full discussion,” the participants approved the general aim of the Conference: “To bring together representatives from the Commonwealth and Empire in order that they might pool their knowledge and experience of the human problems of industry in their own countries.”

The minutes also show agreement that the Conference would “deal with the human factors in industrialization as a whole… (and) would not consider the formal relationships between employers and trade unions, covering wages, conciliation and arbitration machinery.” As the Duke was to put it, “We are not out to teach people their business.” As for the title, that contentious decision would be deferred until the next meeting.

Group Chairmen with Sir Reginald Verdon Smith, Sir Philip Morris and members of the 1956 staff

This consensus pushed the Conference in the direction of what was, at the time, the novel study of the relationship of industry and the community. As Sir Peter was to recall, "Neutrality was to be found in the domain of the unexplored. Here royalty would not be in danger of interfering; here being neutral would be positively useful; here we would talk not of bargaining relations but of human relations – and on challenging scales."

There was ample evidence that despite the rhetoric, trade unionist leaders were willing to listen, at least to the Duke. Two key moves would dispel the suspicions entirely and ensure the active and full participation of organized labour.

The first came in the July 1954 meeting at Buckingham Palace, where Sir Harold was unanimously chosen as chairman of the Steering Committee. As Sir Harold was to note later, neither he nor the Steering Committee were connected with the Industrial Welfare Society, which union leaders viewed as an employer organization. The minutes record the pieces falling into place as "it was further agreed that one trade unionist, or possibly two, would serve on this committee. The recommendation of the trade unionist members of the meeting were to be submitted after they had had time to consult one another."

The move cemented the role of the unions in the Conference, as did the decision to allow them to withdraw and discuss among themselves who would join the Steering Committee. Labour also would be ceded the authority to choose its own Conference members. In the end, Thomas Williamson, the General Secretary of the Municipal and General Workers' Union and a central figure in Britain's labour landscape, was elected to the Steering Committee and would chair the crucial Study Tours Committee.

If it is intended primarily to benefit those taking part I think you ought to consider a title which starts something like this "A conference to study the problem of ...." This ought to avoid the implication that it ought to produce its findings as resolutions or suggestions.
I must be off now
Yours ever
[signature]

The second step towards guaranteeing labour's good will came as the organizers dealt with a major concern of the unions: the costs involved in underwriting the attendance of their members. Sir Harold was able to report to the Duke that this issue had been resolved with the Council's decision to require only a "token" Conference fee from participants while meeting its expenses through fundraising in the corporate and trade union sectors.

"They [trade unionists] are now happy about the lines on which things are developing … they are now taking a constructive interest in the Conference," Sir Harold later wrote the Duke.

By the close of the July 19 meeting, Prince Philip had what he needed: the ironclad agreement by both sides of the industrial divide to co-operate; management and labour were committed to a Conference, one which would not consider the relationships between employers and unions but, rather, the relationships between workers, industry, and the communities they shared. And he had an agreed date: July 9 to July 27, 1956.

Then, at the conclusion of the meeting, in an act that burned everyone's bridges, Prince Philip read to participants their joint "statement for the Press," effectively locking in the Council along with the representatives of industry and labour and preventing future reluctance after the fact.

Prince Philip remained on edge, however. On July 24 he wrote Hartley wishing him luck with Council activity, and reminding him of the importance of keeping politics out of the Conference, "if I am not to be hauled over the coals." He concluded with the phrasing that would guide the Conference for the next 50 years:

"If it is intended primarily to benefit those taking part I think you ought to consider a title which starts something like this: 'A conference to study the problem of...' This ought to avoid the implication that it ought to produce its findings as resolutions or suggestions."

Final meeting of the Council on board H.Q.S. Wellington, April 11, 1956

(Left to right, Sir Reginald Verdon Smith, Sir Thomas Williamson, Mr. Parker, Sir Harold Hartley, H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, Sir John Hanbury-Williams, Lieutenant Commander Michael Parker, Sir Miles Thomas)

Over the summer, Hartley undertook what could only be described as missionary activity, meeting a large number of the Council members individually and hearing out their concerns and suggestions. Hartley's detailed notes from these meetings show his strong desire to maintain the confidence of the key trade union leaders. For their part, Hartley noted, the union leaders praised Prince Philip's handling of the July 19 Council meeting and provided useful opinions on a range of issues – including the insistence of Alfred Roberts and Thomas Williamson that there be no colour barrier on members nominated from "the Colonies".

By December 1954, the organizers had transformed their Steering Committee into a Conference Council whose sole purpose, Sir Harold wrote, was "sponsoring, as an enterprise independent of any body or institution, *H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference on the Human Problems of Industrial Communities within the Commonwealth and Empire*."

The Duke agreed to assume the presidency of the Conference Council. The Industrial Welfare Society, which had been responsible for the planning and secretariat work up to now, handed the entire responsibility over to the new Conference Council. The Society made available office space to the Council at its Bryanston Square headquarters in London. John Marsh was appointed Honorary Administrator while Peter Parker was seconded by the Society as Conference Secretary, a post that came later to be known as Executive Director. Sir Harold was chairman of the Steering Committee, whose other members now included Britain's top executives, such as Sir Alexander Fleck of ICI and Sir Frederick James of Tata (Conference Members Committee); Sir John Hanbury-Williams of Courtaulds and C.J. Geddes of the Union of Post Office Workers (Finance Committee); Sir Reginald Verdon Smith of Bristol Aerospace and J.M. Campbell of Booker Bros. (Programme and Documents Committee); Sir Miles Thomas of BOAC and Sir Greville Maginness of Churchill Machine Tool (Public Relations Committee); and Thomas Williamson of the Municipal and General Workers and General Sir Brian Robertson of the British Transportation Commission (Study Tours Committee). Now preparations moved into high gear.

Minutes of the April 26, 1955, Council meeting at Buckingham Palace show how rapidly the design of the Conference had evolved. Sir Reginald Verdon Smith reported that his key committee "was conscious of the danger of trying to overcrowd the programme with too many subjects and had tried to keep its arrangements flexible … this was to be a Study Conference and its success would depend on the frankness and spontaneity with which the Conference members work in their discussion groups."

At the same meeting, the Conference Members Committee "agreed that the term 'industry' was to be given a wide interpretation; it should include mining, industrially organized agriculture, ordnance factories, nationalized enterprises and, in very special cases, even large-scale trading and commercial organizations might be considered." This decision was far-reaching; it allowed the Conference to draw from a broad pool of people, each with diverse experience and outlook, and avoid the trap of focusing on the needs and interests of a single sector of the economy.

The Council also adopted commitments to equal representation from trade unions and employers for its UK members, and, at the specific request of the trade union leaders, expanded the age guideline to promising individuals between 25 and 45.

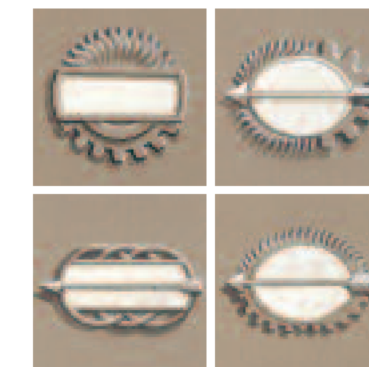
THE CONFERENCE LOGO

Peter Parker determined in late 1955 that the first Conference should have special "badge" that also could be used, if "really successful", on various documents and printed signs. Together with Sir Colin Anderson, Chair of the Public Relations committee, Parker approached Lynton Lamb proffering a budget of 75 pounds.

Lamb (1907-1977) was a prodigious British illustrator, artist, teacher and author, whose *Influences on Design and Materials and Methods of Painting* are still available.

Parker's creative brief for the designer is not recorded, but Sir Colin, ship owner and noted patron of the arts, weighed in with a letter to Lamb in which he struggled to describe the new conference. Its purpose, he wrote, is "to provide an educative rubbing-together of the minds of a wide-spreading choice of future leaders of the community… (I)t is possible that a torch (denoting youth) with the body of an arrow to give it a sense of speeding into the future might provide the basis for a symbol. There is also the possible use of the interlinking of sections of a chain, but that is not very easy to dissociate from nautical or penal implications."

Lamb took the brief and set out in his own direction. Four designs were submitted within six weeks to Sir Colin and Peter Parker. It was the sun and gear wheel crossed by an arrow that immediately grabbed attention (with subsequent change to accentuate teh circles and reverse the arrow's direction). In Lamb's words, his design was meant to symbolize "the advance through industry to the enjoyment of natural resources."



Canadian members of 1956 Conference

A key concern during this phase was money. As Sir Harold was to recall, "The cost of a Study Conference on the lines we had envisaged would be considerable." The problem was partly alleviated with a creative cost-sharing arrangement that called for the Conference to cover the accommodation costs for all members while those organizations sponsoring the members – the companies and trade unions – would pay travel costs. But even those accommodation costs were substantial. The Conference Council launched a private appeal to what Sir Harold called "a wide circle of those with an interest in the field of work of the Study Conference." That appeal met with what Sir Harold described as "a generous response" and a "general wish that the subscribers should remain anonymous." Their names were known only to the Treasurer, Sir John Hanbury-Williams, Chairman of Courtaulds.

Sir John did a superb job, one that finally dissipated all financial concerns about the Conference, including the commitment to help underwrite the participation of the trade unionists. At the April 26, 1955, meeting, the treasurer reported, there was £79,250 in subscriptions received or "definitely promised," well over the estimate of £75,000 needed to mount the Conference.

At the same meeting, a key part of Marsh's original proposal had also been dramatically revisited; the Council decided to aim for about 300 participants, to be called members: 90 or so from the United Kingdom, another 140 from the major countries of the Commonwealth, and 50 from the colonial territories, effectively reversing Marsh's original proportions. (In the end, the planning proved spot-on, with 101 members from the UK, 133 for the other Commonwealth countries, and 53 from the colonial territories).

Sir Harold, playing cautiously to the Conference President, wrote a delicately phrased proposal to the effect that Prince Philip had the option of assuming a more ceremonial role at the Conference. In his April, 1955, memo to Buckingham Palace, Sir Harold expressed the hope that "it would be possible for Prince Philip to pay a short visit to the working groups, preferably when they have returned from their tours, as they would then have things of interest to tell him." He proposed an equally circumspect role for the Duke at the Conference close, suggesting that "on the last day, when there will be some summing up talks, possibly he could arrange to be present and preside over the final dinner, at which he would be thanked and would have the opportunity of summing up in his reply."

There is little doubt that such cautious advice arose from Sir Harold's genuine desire to shield the young Duke in the event of an adverse outcome. But his caution turned out to be unnecessary. Having thrown himself wholeheartedly into planning the Conference, Prince Philip had become unstoppable. He would be a central player in the Conference itself rather than a figurehead.

In a visit with the Conference organizers in December 1955, Prince Philip reviewed plans in detail. Presented with a summary of the study tours, the minutes show that he "recalled that one of the purposes of the programme was to examine the experience of the United Kingdom, not all of which had been good; he appreciated the difficulty in examining 'bad examples' but suggested that, for instance, slums should be examined and their origins, and a thorough consideration should be made of how and why these slums appeared."

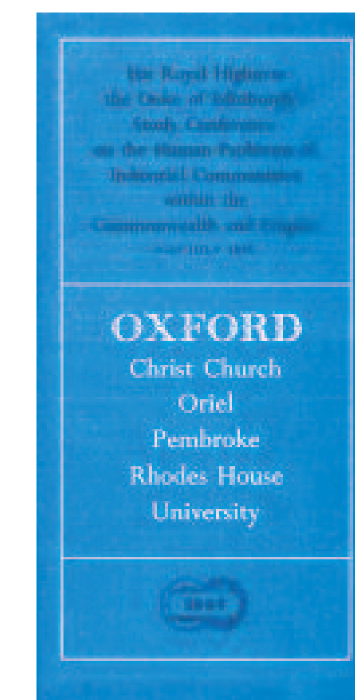
The 300 Conference members were selected mainly by committees of business associations, unions and government leaders in various countries. Responsibility for the final decision rested with the Council, whose membership committee wrestled with the anticipated colonial problems. In November 1955, the committee reported that Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) had suggested "the managerial side should be represented by three Europeans from the plantation industry, but they had been asked to reconsider this decision."

Lunch in Christ Church hall during plenary sessions at Oxford

On April 27, 1956, Prince Philip sent each chosen member a personally signed letter of invitation to the Conference. One can imagine the arrival of this Royal correspondence and how each member would be jarred by the Duke's dramatic first sentence – "Welcome to the great experiment" – and then would be drawn into his description of the impending adventure:

> "This is no ordinary Conference," Prince Philip wrote. "It is not intended to put across any particular idea and it is not intended to consider any resolutions. It is simply intended, as its name implies, to study the human problems of industrial communities in the Commonwealth and Empire to pool experience and to listen to views and opinions.
>
> "It is not much good wondering what is going to happen at this Conference because something like this has not been attempted before. Nobody quite knows what is going to emerge as a result. We trust that the clash of experiences with theories and with the study of practical problems will produce a better understanding in your mind of the many stresses and strains which are inherent in an industrial community. A better understanding of these problems may ultimately produce better and wiser solutions."

The official opening of the Conference was set for Monday, July 9, 1956. But those who were there agree it really opened the day before, with the arrival at Oxford of many members Sunday afternoon aboard a special train from Paddington Station. It was on that train that Conference participants met each other for the first time. On arrival at Oxford, they were met by their group chairmen – Marsh's original idea of tutors had been abandoned in favour of chairs who were also Conference members – and shortly thereafter, they broke up into their assigned study groups of 20, meeting in rooms at Peckwater Quad in Christ Church, Oxford's largest college. Thus began their first encounter with the people from 29 countries who would share their lives for the next three weeks.



James Kinley, a Canadian destined to become Lieutenant Governor of his province of Nova Scotia, recalled how he shared his quarters with Joseph Mamo, a member from Malta. "We occupied a suite, which was unique in many ways, one of which was that we were under the guidance and advice of an elderly gentleman referred to in the College as a Scout, an historic position of the College. We had our meals in the Great Hall, which we were advised had been used as a gathering place for many important historic events over the centuries. It was a great place to meet and discuss the information and ideas which we heard at the lectures and compare opinions which all members brought with them from their homes in different parts of the Commonwealth."

Milton Morris, then a member of the New South Wales Parliament in Australia, recorded in his diary that "each group had a cross section of people at the various levels and from as widely scattered parts of the Commonwealth as possible." Indeed, this has become

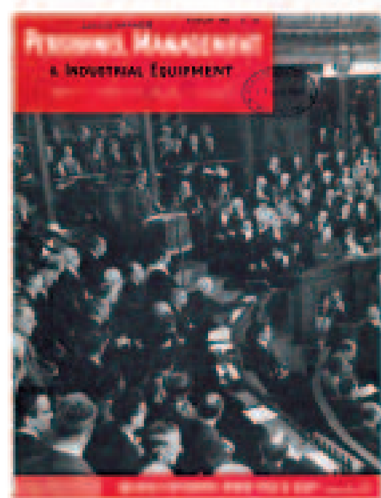
The Duke and Lord Halifax arrive at the Sheldonian Theatre, July 9, 1956

the central feature of all subsequent Conferences. The following day, the study groups convened again at 11 a.m., amid good-natured grumbling about the spartan accommodations experienced by most. "I would not say the digs at Oxford had all the modern conveniences," laughed Abraham Abrahamson in 2005. "But the army had been worse and we got used to that. But it was really a surprise."

Prince Philip arrived by train from Scotland for the opening ceremonies at the impressive Sheldonian Theatre. Technicians from the British Broadcasting Corporation had worked through the weekend getting ready for the television broadcast of the proceedings.

More than 1,100 people attended the opening session, with many Conference members from Africa and Asia in traditional formal dress. Sir Harold wrote this description:

"The opening meeting in the Sheldonian Theatre was a memorable scene which no one who was there will ever forget. The members were seated in their groups on the floor of the house. The semicircle and galleries were filled by the Council, the Rhodes Trustees, and by those who had helped in one way or another with the preparations, and by members of the University and City, whose robes gave a touch of colour to the gathering. As 3 o'clock struck the great West Doors of the Theatre opened and many members had their first sight of their President [the Duke], accompanied by the Chancellor of the University, Lord Halifax, and the Mayor of Oxford."


Personnel Management
& Industrial Equipment

In his 40 minute opening address, the Duke gently acknowledged the "monastic" quality of undergraduate accommodations pressed into service for Conference members. "The University has – I was going to say 'gone out of its way' – but I don't think that is a very apt expression. Part of the strength and charm of this famous place is that it has never 'gone out of its way'." After the laughter died down, he quickly added: "But on this occasion, my Lord Chancellor, we have received every possible assistance, co-operation, and encouragement, and you have, Sir, our sincere thanks."

In a more serious vein, Prince Philip made it clear that he had been paying attention to his recent tours of factories, mines and farms across the Commonwealth with the new Queen. "I came to realize that a mine is a mine, a factory is a factory, and a steelworks is a steelworks, whatever part of the world it is in. The only noticeable difference is the atmosphere: some are obviously happy places, others are depressing places to visit. The real and most striking difference was outside the works. Each works is manned from communities of an infinite variety."

The Duke observed that industrialized countries tend to be more affluent and it is consequently "very easy to get into the habit of thinking of industry as an end in itself. It is, of course, only a means to an end. The community, in fact, is more important than the industry. It may not be very easy to decide quite what we are aiming at in this modern world of ours, but whatever the target we must take into account that all people are primarily citizens and not just workers with a bit of private life. I see no advantage in a prosperous and powerful state if it is to be achieved at the expense of human freedom and happiness."

Prince Philip also repeated the message he had preached tirelessly since the Conference was first conceived at the end of 1952: that this was *not* a glorified time-and-motion study aiming to improve productivity. "In fact, the whole success of the Conference depends, not on what you decide, but what you talk about, and the opinions, however provocative, which are aired. The Conference will have achieved its object if each one

Study Group I arrives in Dundee, Scotland

of you goes home just that much more aware of what industry does to people, and with perhaps a feeling that you are better equipped, when and if your turn comes, to smooth out the difficulties of industrialization."

After a round of opening day speeches, members were presented to the Duke – at 35, he was younger than many of the Conference participants – at afternoon tea on the lawns of Rhodes House. The following morning, the *Oxford Mail*, reported on the proceedings over several pages, including the headline: "People Primarily Citizens – Not Just Workers, Says Duke."

The remaining three days at Oxford were turned over to what Sir Harold called "a most stimulating series of addresses from a number of outstanding personalities in different walks of industry with an equal balance between management and trade unions." These included Dame Florence Hancock, chief woman officer of the Transport and General Workers' Union, and Sir Harry Pilkington, chairman of Pilkington Brothers Ltd., on the subject of "Everyday Relations of Industry and the Community Around It."

The list of topics was bold and ambitious, and included such questions as "Why Does Man Work?", "How is Management Developing?" and "The Two Partnerships – Man with Man and Man with Nature."

Sir Harold wrote that "the only complaint of the Conference was that members had not sufficient time to discuss them," a lament destined to become a fixture at future Conferences.

After Oxford, all 20 study groups reconvened in London, where Milton Morris recalled that "the study tours commenced on a high note for every member received a special invitation to Her Majesty's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace."

Fifty years later, so much of the thinking behind the Conference seems obvious: mix it up, allow young up-and-comers to create networks of their own that would serve them for decades, put them in the same room as their opposite numbers in the unions or management, and make them break bread together. The results were striking.

In his book, *The Challenge of Change*, journalist Laurence Thompson gives a taste of the atmosphere a week into the first Conference. Thompson published an account that he opened with cheeky playfulness that captured the mood, the atmosphere and even the eclectic makeup of the individual study groups. It is significant that his first words on the achievement of that first Conference have to do with a group of men at the back of a tour bus, men who a week earlier had been strangers and who were now singing *Nellie Dean* together "very lugubriously through their noses."

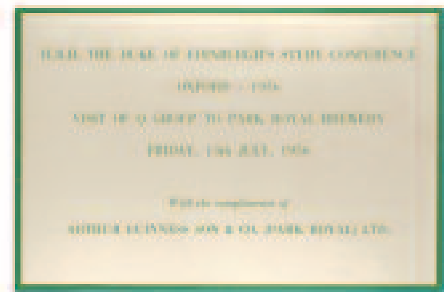
"Because they sounded so mournful," Thompson wrote, "one knew they were happy. There were six of them at the back, singing away: Ben Petersen, six feet something tall, carrying about with him a whiff of check shirts, riding-breeches and frontiers, general secretary of the Northern Rhodesia European Mineworkers' Union; Horace Campbell,

IRENE CALVERT

There were only six women at the first Conference. But what they lacked in numbers, they made up in achievement. One was Irene Calvert of Belfast, who also was the only woman to Chair a Study Group (CHECK). Born in 1909, she moved successfully from social work, to politics (sitting as an Independent MP at the Stormont Parliament) and into senior positions in industry. In 1956, she was a Director of the Ulster Weaving Company, which she would subsequently lead. She also served President of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and was a noted art collector. Described by colleagues as "formidable", she quickly grasped the importance of the Conference and became a energetic advocate among the 1956 alumni in the UK and internationally for continuing them.

Group T visiting Hem Health Colliery, Staffordshire

round spectacles, round milk-chocolate face, respectable light-grey homburg hat (now discarded) symbolical of his justiceship of the peace in Jamaica, where he is a sugar-estate manager; 'Jaggi' Jaggia, a managing director from India; Art Mash, a British post office counter clerk, the foursquare and solid embodiment of common-sense British trade unionism; Len Waywell, Lancashire and proud of it, from A.V. Roe's Middleton aircraft works; John Hornibrook, production manager with Canadian DuPont, who, coming from French Canada, specialized in an 'Alouette' so splendidly hoarse that it might have been by the maestro himself, Louis Armstrong."



While it may not have been fully understood at the time, Sir Harold's decision to use his former university, Oxford, as the starting point turned out to be a good one. Oxford, later analysis determined, was neutral ground which held no fear or favour for either the management or trade union members. And it was just far enough from London, home to so many of their superiors, that everyone could breathe – or even sing, as the case may be – easier.

It was drilled into everyone, UK member Edward Guinness recalled, "really hammered into you, that you are representative of no one except yourself."

In a 2005 interview, Abraham Abrahamson, then a young Member of Parliament from Southern Rhodesia, acknowledged that the planners' efforts to ensure that no one be made to feel out of place at the 1956 Conference had paid off.

"I always held what is called a 'liberal' view in the southern African sense," said Abrahamson, now chairman of the General Optical Company of Johannesburg. "But I didn't feel that I was being regarded with suspicion, coming from a white-controlled country like Southern Rhodesia."

Abrahamson, who went on to serve in the Southern Rhodesia cabinet from 1958 to 1964 as Minister of Labour, Social Welfare and Housing, said the other Africans at the Conference did not shut him out. His fellow African members included a future Prime Minister of Tanzania, Rashidi Mfaume Kawawa. "What was quite significant is that there was open company and open conversations. There was no getting off into corners and sort of looking at other people up and down," Abrahamson recalled.

The Conference narrowly avoided impaling itself on the African conflicts of the day in one other important respect. One of the speakers scheduled to address the members during the round of opening speeches at Oxford was H.F. Oppenheimer, then MP for the South African riding of Kimberley City and Deputy Chairman of the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa.

A rumour had broken out that the members from Northern Rhodesia would walk out as soon as Oppenheimer began to deliver his paper, entitled *Industrial Relations in a Multi-Racial Society*. "But they did not," Guinness, later a Conference trustee, was to recall. "They stayed in their seats and listened. This made one feel early that the conference was indeed working."

What the Northern Rhodesians, and everybody else at the Conference, heard Oppenheimer describe was the "proper objective of policy in South Africa.

"It is," he said in words that still resonate today, "to secure the economic, cultural and social development of all the races concerned to the full extent of their capabilities in a manner which will not adversely affect the high standards already established for the Europeans. This objective can only be attained by co-operation between the races in all spheres of the national life."

Group discussion

Africa also provided a spot of humorous relief. Guinness recalled seeing another member, an African trade unionist, boarding the train for Oxford after saying goodbye to his three wives. "And you knew then," Guinness was to recall, "that you were into something a little bit different from anything one had experienced before."

Given the technology of the day, some members' journeys to Oxford could only be described as quaint. Consider Milton Morris, the Australian Parliamentarian. In his diary, he records the odyssey that took him to Oxford for the July 9 opening plenary:

- Monday, July 2 (evening) left Sydney for Darwin.
- Tuesday, July 3 (5:30 a.m.) arrived Darwin. Left 8:00 a.m. for Jakarta, arrived 12:30 p.m. Left for Singapore, arrived 4:00 p.m. Sightseeing.
- Wednesday, July 4 (noon) left for Bangkok; Left for Calcutta, arrived 3:20 p.m. Left for Karachi, arrived 9:30 p.m.
- Thursday, July 5 (2:30 a.m.) left for Cairo, arrived 8:20 a.m. Left for Rome 9:30 a.m. Left for Frankfurt, arrived 7:15 p.m. Left for London, arrived 10:30 p.m.

Morris's diary does not say if he was a member of the *Nellie Dean* chorale. However, he does recall that at the end of the Conference, "the Duke of Edinburgh farewelled us at Oxford Station … and we sang 14 verses of *Lloyd George* before the train pulled out and his Royal Highness sang with us most lustily."

Morris recalled that as the special train left Oxford for London, "the Duke of Edinburgh walked up and down the rainswept platform of Oxford on this particular morning waving and being waved goodbye.

"Without the Duke, there would have been no Conference," Morris wrote later in his diary. "He alone had the prestige to bring it about, and the necessary tact, skill and patience to make a reality of an idea. He established the right to lead the Conference on his qualities alone."

After Oxford, members spent four days in London and then another four days spreading out across England, Scotland and Wales in study groups. As Prince Philip was to recall, "These groups were sent off to visit factories and cities all over the United Kingdom. Wherever they went they subjected the place to an inquisition which had an impact like a bomb going off. Many of the places they visited are still wondering what hit them."

Each Study Group comprised 20 individuals, including a group chair from the UK, and each boasted a diverse make-up – one for example, included a journeyman bookbinder and officer of the bookbinders' union, a South African mining company executive, the personnel manager of a Kenya tobacco company, the president of a large Indian textile company, and an assistant coal mine manager from Australia. Long days in these unlikely configurations led to what Guinness later called an *esprit de groupe*. Decades later, most alumni writing in to share their experiences inevitably began by identifying themselves and then giving the name of their group, usually a letter of the alphabet.

Lloyd Hemsworth's group toured Nottinghamshire, visiting coal mines, textile factories, and an ironworks. "Besides these industrial visits," Hemsworth said in a speech in Montreal three months later, "tours and discussions included the University of Nottingham, a day

1956 members, Executive and Staff

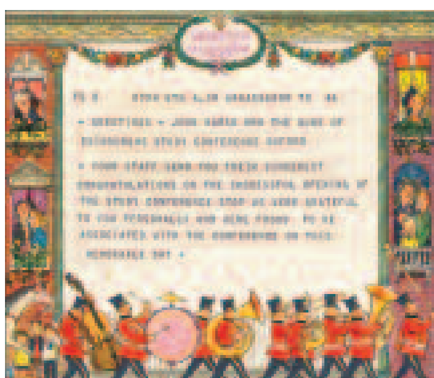
The H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh and Sir Harold Hartley saying 'Good-bye' to members on Oxford railway station

nursery, a large housing estate, secondary schools, a children's home, a hospital for the aged, a community centre, a training college for the disabled and a Guildhall. Each evening was devoted to discussions with the local authorities, the directors and managers of local industries, trade union officials, educationalists and welfare officers and the clergy."

Writing about Group I's Scottish study tour, Edward Guinness noted in his diary: "Monday found us at Dundee, firstly among the jute mills, then to Valentines, famous for post-cards, and on to the new factory of the National Cash Register Company which was in striking contrast to the very much older jute mills." At the break of dawn the following morning, Group I visited a nursery attached to a local mill. "There were women bringing children, toddlers, in at half past six, and they were in the nursery until they came off shift," Guinness recalled in 2005. "We had a member from India and another from Ceylon and they were appalled this could happen, that these children would be brought through the cold streets of Dundee and left there. So we were beginning to see these extraordinary differences in philosophical approach to particular problems."

Guinness further recalls how barriers were breaking down as the groups re-assembled in Oxford after a week on study tour. "One night a group of us were out. Sandy Torrance had been in the Coldstream Guards and was a personnel manager in the copper mines at Mufulira in Northern Rhodesia (today's Zambia). We came out of the Mitre pub and there was another chap who had a fairly leading role in the copper mines and he was arms' around each other's shoulders with a chap called (L.C.) Katilungu (President of the Northern Rhodesia African Mineworkers). And Sandy says, 'If I had a camera here and a photo got back to Northern Rhodesia, it would finish the careers of them both.' That was an extraordinary manifestation of what the Conference was doing."

John Garnett, a future head of the Industrial Society, was a member in 1956. In a speech 30 years later, he recalled how "the first lesson we learnt was that the quality of management means more than the nature of the work… (W)e saw the staff in the Savoy Hotel and the workers in the London sewers. Morale in the sewers was 10 times higher than the morale in the Savoy Hotel. The difference was that the Savoy management couldn't care less what happened behind the doors separating the staff accommodation from the public part of the hotel; the sewer management went in there with the lads. The most important thing was not the working conditions but who was in charge and whether they cared. "



Milton Morris described Group F's agenda in his diary entry for Saturday, July 14: "We inspected the slum clearance problem and the bombed out areas of Southampton. Inspected different units and flats occupied by old age pensioners and married couples. Also saw a private house scheme and sports centre. The Lord Mayor then tendered a reception in her parlour at 6:30 pm and I was then taken by the Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union to Salisbury Cathedral and to his home where I was billeted. We had a most interesting discussion that evening."

The members returned to Oxford a week later, the afternoon of July 21, to hear addresses from Commonwealth industrialists and for the groups to frame short reports to the closing plenary. In a radio address in Canada a year later, Prince Philip was to recall with undoubted satisfaction that these closing reports "were very much to the point; cherished ideas went overboard; managers criticized management; unionists criticized unions; in fact it was like a breath of fresh air. They turned a sharp practical light onto the half-understood problems of human relationships in industry."

In fact, these short statements – which had not been a central element of conference planning – were to become the heart of the conference experience: the closing-day report-backs to the Duke on what each Group had learned. As Prince Philip wrote in 2006, "At the end of the Oxford Conference, each Group put up a speaker, who simply read out their report to the other conference members. At later Conferences, each Group devised some sort of 'presentation' involving all the members of the Group. Some were very perceptive and some were very funny."

Essential to these report-backs was group unanimity on the report itself. And motivating each group – from 1956 onwards – was the overwhelming desire to give a memorable or, at least, credible performance before the Duke and the assembled members. For his part, Prince Philip began the tradition of responding to each presentation at Oxford, keeping his remarks "straight and to the point", members recalled.

Prince Philip stated flatly at the outset of the Oxford Conference that the value of the conferences would be intangible and personal and "will not lie in the report of the speeches and discussions. Its value will depend on what the members make of what they see and hear." It was left to Sir Philip Morris, vice-chancellor of the University of Bristol, to recognize and address the question of Prince Philip's role in his summing up on the final day.

Sir Philip quoted the Latin *maxim quod principi placuit habet legis vigorem* (the pleasure of a prince is unto others a law) and then went straight into it. "Your particular 'law'," he said to the Duke, "was one which commends itself to all of us because it re-emphasized that we all of us here represent what I would call open, as opposed to closed, societies and that we all represent societies which are determined to remain open societies."

Warming to his theme, and recognizing then what everyone knows now, Sir Philip added that "if this Conference has done nothing else, it has, I think, confirmed in all our minds that it is better to be a poorer society and open, than to be a closed society and rich.

"His Royal Highness signified his pleasure in words something like these: 'Have a mind and speak it.' He could have added, perhaps he did, that 'the heterodoxy of today is the orthodoxy of tomorrow', and that the new idea of today becomes the truism of 20 years hence."

Sir Philip was correct. Even if there had been no more Conferences, 1956 would have stood out as a meeting where "the heterodoxy of today" did, indeed, become the "orthodoxy of tomorrow." But there were to be more Conferences, and more new ground to be broken. Within nine months of Prince Philip's farewell to members at rain-swept Oxford Station, the 20 Group Chairs from 1956 had met with Hartley, Parker and other organizers and issued to the Duke their commitment "to find ways and means of keeping the spirit of the Conference alive."