



The 110th Annual SLTC conference 2007

The 110th annual conference of the Society of Leather Technologists and Chemists was held in Chester UK on Saturday 29 September 2007, the event being attended by 77 people from the leather and associated industries. In total eight technical papers were presented, followed by the Annual General meeting of the Society, then in the evening by the annual dinner dance.

The Atkin Memorial lecture was presented by John Basford, and was entitled "The beamhouse, foundation for leather making—experience during 50 years." In this presentation John gave an overview of the step by step advances that have taken manufacture from a labour intensive craft based industry to the present concept of low labour/fast throughput. The increase in size of processing vessels suitably positioned and supported by services and facilities of appropriate size was viewed as central to both a reduction in both labour costs and in the time required for throughput. Although the quality of chemicals, water supplies and control were improved, and the product became more uniform, the outcome was often a decrease in quality. This was because the high capital cost could only be supported by an exceptionally high throughput. A low was reached when processing times from the raw hide to wet blue were reduced to 24-hours, with the concept in some parts of the hide-processing business of "if it is wet an blue—it will do". However, the need to add value moderated these production extremes, so that it is possible with the range of products and auxiliaries now available, that more traditional raw to wet blue process can be successfully achieved in a two-day cycle, while still retaining quality.

It was observed, however, that the quality that was achieved when beam house through-put times were up to eight-days are often not met by today's faster production times. The longer processing times not only provided unique aesthetic properties, but in a better use of chemical products. Today's technology can be consistent and cost effective, but the time is insufficient

for the maximum uptake of chemicals. Finally, it was observed that the legislation in the form of REACH as probably set a limit to the development of new chemical products for use in the beamhouse. It was considered that developments in the future would be based on better use of technologies that exist today.

All of the papers were of an exceptional standard and included the "The future of tanning: a leather science perspective", where Professor Tony Covington from the British School of Leather Technology set down clearly the latest concepts regarding the tanning process which question the traditional view of the tanning mechanism in his Link-Lock theory. It is now viewed that stabilisation can be readily achieved by linking a wide range of products to collagen (the Link stage), but that high stability requires a second linkage— not necessarily covalent—that raises the shrinkage temperature of wet leathers above 100°C (the Lock stage).

Other practical papers included an overview of the potential of specialised milling drums and equipment by Antonio Galiotto from Errete Spa, and "Upholstery Leathers: types, performance, testing customer expectations and aftercare" being based on procedures and practices spanning many years as experienced by SATRA Technology Centre.

One paper raised many issues that relate to leather manufacture, but also to many other industries that intend to thrive in a strongly competitive environment. Entitled "Lean Manufacture—The first steps", Simon Phillips of Bridge of Weir Leather Company described a study that the company had made where each stage of manufacture was studied in detail to assess its value in the established manufacturing sequence. The possibilities of elimination of process stages could then be evaluated against the final value of the product. The project is seen to have considerable scope in raising competitiveness and reducing cost, but the issue is very complex and further studies are pending.



John Basford (right) receiving the award for his presentation of the Atkins Memorial Lecture from John Avery, President of SLTC



Yijun Wang, University of Northampton, presenting her paper entitled "An investigation into the relationship between objective and subjective assessment of leather handle"



Dr. Wolfram Scholz, of the environmental company W2O presenting his paper on "Tannery effluent treatment using reedbeds and nanofiltration technology"