

End of an era for building control

With the recent death of George Barnett MBE FRICS PPIBC (pictured right), the building control profession has lost one of its most respected individuals



Born in Charlton in 1912, George Henry Edwin Barnett began his career in the building trade as a carpenter and went on to become a general foreman and clerk of works before joining Lewisham Borough Council as a building surveyor.

During the Second World War, George was first posted to Mombassa, Kenya, and after a period as Staff/Sgt. Military Foreman of Works, he was commissioned and joined the Royal Engineers – he left the forces in 1946 as Captain Adjutant having served in both East and North Africa.

He returned to Lewisham Borough Council for a short period before he became Chief Building Inspector at Mitcham Borough Council. He then became Sutton and Cheam Borough Council's Chief Building Inspector and following the reorganisation of local authorities in London, the Chief Building Control Officer at London Borough of Sutton.

However, it was George's determination to elevate the status of the building control professional that earned him most respect from his peers and the title, 'founder of modern building control'.

In the 60s, as a member and Chair of the Guild of Municipal Building Inspectors, which was then under the control of the Institute of Municipal Engineers (IMunE), George was instrumental in persuading the IMunE Council to approve the Guild's change of name and rules – this eventually led to the formation of the Institute of Building

Control Officers Ltd, which subsequently became the Institute of Building Control.

Former LABC Services Director, Roger Rudkin, explained: "From the moment I entered local government in 1966 as an indentured trainee building inspector I knew George by repute, as did most people within the building control community at the time, through regular reports of his tireless efforts negotiating with the IMunE, seeking to obtain some membership recognition for those of us who were members of the Guild of Municipal Building Inspectors.

"The eventual outcome of these battles saw George, with the able assistance of a small group of likeminded peers, oversee the inauguration of an early manifestation of the Institute of Building Control, independent of IMunE."

Roger recalls his first meeting with George: "I eventually met George in the early 70s, whilst a quivering wreck, when he interviewed me for a junior position on his staff. I was offered the post but turned it down for a more lucrative job elsewhere – my only excuse is that I needed the money to get married!

"On the many subsequent occasions we both attended IBC activities, George always took the trouble to seek me out and enquire into my career progression, perhaps ultimately relieved at my decision!

"In the early 80s, my wife and I visited British Columbia investigating emigration prospects and George generously agreed to furnish me with IBC bonafides; to facilitate a meeting with the

"I WILL REMEMBER GEORGE AS A KINDLY UNASSUMING PERSON, NEVER TOO BUSY TO HELP NEWCOMERS TO OUR PROFESSION, WITH A PASSION FOR BUILDING CONTROL SECOND TO NONE"

Director at Vancouver City Council responsible for Building Codes.

"The Director in question turned out to be Roger Hebert, subsequently a personal family friend for many years, who advised that he was the Secretary Elect of the embryonic World Organisation of Building Officials (WOBO).

"He wanted to know why the UK had not sought to be involved in the organisation's planning process having been extended an invitation, to nominate representatives, addressed to our Privy Council. The rest is history as they say. A new invitation was despatched to IBC and George's 'baby' was catapulted onto the world stage as a founding member of WOBO!"

George was awarded the MBE in 1975 in recognition of his tireless efforts to establish the Institute of Building Control. He was elected President of the organisation in 1981 and made its first Life Member in 1986.

Roger added finally: "I will remember George as a kindly unassuming person, never too busy to help newcomers to our profession, with a passion for building control second to none. To me, and others of my generation, he was undisputedly 'the man'."