

## **Neville Billington – Founder Member of REHVA**

Father figure of the building services industry who achieved great technical advancement through education and research

Neville Billington, who died on 17 May 2009 aged 93, was once described as 'The all-time industry icon', such was his unsurpassed contribution to the development of the technology related to heating, ventilating and air-conditioning of buildings.

After gaining a first class degree in Physics and an MSc in X-ray Crystallography, Billington's career in industry started in 1937 when he joined the UK government funded Building Research Station, where his work on the heating and ventilation of dwellings became the basis of approved application in the UK. In 1950 Billington was appointed as the Head of the National College for Heating, Ventilating, Refrigeration and Fan Engineering in South London. When he was appointed the College was just one year old and during the 9 years of his headship it grew in size and scope, making a crucial impact on the technical status of the industry at that time. In 1958 Billington became the first full-time Director of the Heating and Ventilating Research Council which the following year became the Heating and Ventilating Research Association (HVRA) established in purpose-built premises in Bracknell. He remained Director until he retired in 1975, in the year that the Association became the Building Services Research and Information Association (BSRIA), itself a reflection of the expanding scope and impact that the organisation had developed under his leadership.

Not only did Billington lead an expanding research organisation in the service of its industrial sponsors, he also led impressive technological developments that facilitated the growth of the building services industry as a whole. Under his leadership, the Association became a world-renowned source and depository of technical information; he steered it into the development of appliance test methods and facilities, into research on construction site practices and into the pioneering use of computers for both research and application in industry.

He was technically brilliant himself and was able to research, write and lecture on a very wide range of subjects – including radiator testing, thermal insulation, productivity in artificial environments, air quality, ventilation of dwellings, air-conditioning of hospital wards, operating theatres and swimming pools, and energy efficiency.

While Billington's priority was the welfare and development of the Research Association, he extended his influence to other research, professional and industry bodies in this country and overseas. As a result he acquired a very high reputation not only here but abroad as well. He played an active part in the Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers (IHVE, now CIBSE) making a huge contribution to its technical publications and Guides produced at that time. He was honoured to become its President in 1970, and was awarded the Institution's Gold Medal in 1976.

Another of Billington's pioneering involvements was in the setting up of the Federation of European HVAC Associations (REHVA). He represented IHVE on its Management Board and served as its President from 1976 to 1978. He presented technical papers at REHVA's international conferences and at many other prestigious events in this country and overseas. To the list of key organisations in which he was actively involved one could add the British Standards Institution, International Council for Building Research, International Institute of Refrigeration, the Committee of Directors of Research Associations, the Rumford Club (of which he was Secretary for many years and Chairman in 1965) and more!.

Throughout his career Billington made an outstanding contribution to the building services industry and this was recognised in the award of an OBE in 1966. In France he also received in 1969 the gold medal of the Sciences des Climats Artificiel.

Neville Billington exuded enthusiasm for the research and technology in which he excelled. In addition to his superb technical abilities, he showed great wisdom and integrity without any hint of pretension. Not only did he make an enormous impact on the industry himself but he also mentored and stimulated others to reach their full potential. For example, he encouraged his colleagues both to gain experience and to share knowledge by establishing and maintaining links with other experts in other organisations in the UK and abroad.

Neville Billington was a true gentleman, a professional of the highest order, who played a colossal part in the technical development of our industry and in inspiring others who work in it.