

OFFSHORE WIND POWER, SALLY LOCKWOOD

2.15 pm, Thursday 16 February

Once again a very large audience attended the recent meeting of Penrith and North Lakes U3A. Sally Lockwood, previously living in Penrith, gave a fascinating insight into the offshore wind industry. With a mechanical engineering degree, Sally initially worked in coal power industry but moved in 2006 to focus her career on the generation of offshore wind power. She was based on the Solway at Robin Rigg and in 2012 formed her own company, Generating Better, to offer advice on Operations and Management to other operators in the industry.

Sally's own 'hands on' experience of the practical issues of offshore power generation such as safety measures gave the audience a very real insight into the dangers and difficulties involved and enabled us to see how quickly and significantly improvements have been made since the inception of the industry. The size of the turbines keeps increasing; access to the turbines has also developed from the early reliance on ladders to the less dangerous installation of basic lifts. Similarly, getting out to the rigs is now much speedier with faster boats. Altogether, safety is preeminent but a little more comfort is now provided for the employees, too.



A further aspect of the industry was also outlined. In the vicinity of a wind farm, a plethora of jobs are required, significantly assisting the employment prospects of people living in towns such as Barrow Whitehaven and Workington near the Solway rigs and remote places such as Wick in Scotland, another area noted for its dearth of employment. Roles offered include planners, engineers, technicians, pilots, welders, blade repairers, medical technicians, marine co-ordinators and managers. Teamwork is vital so the workforce is mutually supportive in an industry with potentially significant risks.

On a global scale, it was fascinating to discover the worldwide attraction of offshore wind generation. Examples of countries now exploring or already developing offshore power include Brazil, Vietnam, the USA, Australia, China and Japan.

Sally's interesting talk prompted a range of questions. On a somewhat controversial topic, the negative aspects of the industry were examined including cost, efficiency, problems of storing such power and other rival clean energy generators such as tidal energy. The dangers of failing equipment and the risk of sabotage were also considered but so far the latter has not proved to be a major issue.

Altogether, the audience were very appreciative of the wide range of issues Sally had covered and applauded her warmly.