

Danish Engineers and Contractors and their achievements abroad 1910-1940 – the golden years

The story of Asger Ostenfeld's pioneering efforts in the development of statics - his polytechnic graduates, the companies they created and the fantastic projects they realized

A small handful of Danish companies - Christiani & Nielsen, Kampsax, Højgaard & Schultz among the most prominent - carried out a number of remarkable construction projects far from Denmark in the interwar years, which to this day stand as monuments to sharp engineering and project management. The Trans-Iranian railway, Jørgen Saxild's and Kampsax' incredible construction achievements in the 1930s, sparkle above them all.

The driving forces behind these contracting companies and construction work - Rudolf Christiani, Knud Højgaard, Jørgen Saxild, Per Kampmann, etc. - had all taken their engineering education at the Polytechnic University of Copenhagen, where the renowned Asger S. Ostenfeld for forty years - from 1891 to 1930 - introduced his students to the building materials of the new era, iron and reinforced concrete, and the bold constructions that they made possible.

The inspiring study environment that emerged here left a lasting mark on his students, who also included his son Christen Ostenfeld (who later founded COWI), Ove Arup, Peter Lind and Olaf Kier, who each founded significant companies in Great Britain under their own names.

As a professor of the subject of Technical Mechanics - and with his insight and understanding of applied mathematics and physics - Asger Ostenfeld came to play a key role in the development of the engineering discipline that established the computational basis for using the new materials and methods in building structures, bridges and hydraulic engineering.

The aim of this project is to humbly investigate and uncover a significant chapter in Danish engineering history, which - among many other things - also forms the basis for the establishment of the company that eventually became COWI. The result will be published in a book that aims to tell the story to a wider audience.

The project will be carried out by journalist and author, Poul Høegh Østergaard, who has spent a lifelong career primarily dealing with the world of architects, engineers and contractors. In 2013, he published the biography 'Søren's Saga - the entrepreneur Søren Langvad and the drama of Pihl' by the publishing house Gyldendal Business.