



**Materials  
Processing  
Institute**

# **BESSEMER LECTURE VOTE OF THANKS FOR JON BOLTON**

Speech given at the Science Museum, London.

11th July 2019



## BESSEMER LECTURE VOTE OF THANKS FOR JON BOLTON



Ladies and gentlemen, it is with great personal pleasure that I take this opportunity, to offer a vote of thanks to Jon Bolton, for his Bessemer Lecture. But first may I start by thanking the sponsors for this evening: Liberty, Harsco and Primetals, as well as the organising team at the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining, without whom this event would not be possible.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Dr Don Spenceley, who is here this evening having this year been presented with an outstanding achievement award by the Institute, recognising his lifetime of commitment to the industry. In a real sense of circularity, Don was responsible for giving Jon his first taste of the steel industry as a 14 year old lad, at what was then the British Steel research laboratories and what is now the Materials Processing Institute.

Jon has given this lecture as the 2019 Bessemer Laureate, having received the highest accolade that can be bestowed by the Institute of Materials Minerals and Mining, on behalf of the UK Steel Industry. The medal was established in 1874 and is named in honour of Sir Henry Bessemer, one of our greatest innovators and industrialists, who's Bessemer furnaces, an example of which you can see in this very building, provided the ultimate foundation of the industrial revolution. Past recipients of the medal include Sir William Siemens, Lord Armstrong and Andrew Carnegie, a clutch of monarchs and several people in who's honour further awards have been endowed.

It is true that Jon now takes his place in this long line of leaders in the steel industry, but we must acknowledge that Jon's leadership has gone far beyond most. Whilst many previous laureates have been rightly recognised for their contribution and service to their company and the wider community, uniquely, Jon has fought hard and successfully to rebuild awareness of the central importance of steel in the national consciousness. We heard tonight of Jon's strength of argument in this regard. The comparison between Germany and the USA being particularly stark.

We have seen that Jon is not only a successful commercial leader, but he has had to contend with a uniquely British problem whereby the fundamental importance of steel in our society and economy is not widely recognised. As a long serving chairman of UK Steel, Jon was crucial in guiding the industry through one of its most difficult times and led the establishment of the national Steel Council, which he jointly chaired with the Secretary of State.

Jon's lecture this evening was in the greatest tradition of Sir Henry Bessemer. Bessemer said that his success was predicated on not being constrained by what had gone before.

In the steel industry, where capital is invested for a lifetime and it is all too easy to form an emotional attachment to the manufacturing processes, it can be difficult for players in the industry to contemplate radical change, but when change happens it is hugely disruptive.

Jon highlighted in his lecture the immense capability for change in the industry including a fivefold increase in productivity in the UK and the mini-mill revolution in the USA. Jon made clear the opportunity for steel in the UK and the path that needs to be followed to achieve this: disruptive technology, competitive industry, investment in skills, a fresh approach to business and a positive political environment, to serve local markets with local raw materials, lessons that created the success of the iron and steel industry 150 years ago.

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In closing I would like to turn to why it is that Jon has received the Bessemer Gold Medal.

Jon has held many senior positions of responsibility within the steel industry, both in the United Kingdom and on a global stage. Yet the reason he is held in such high regard and why he is such a popular recipient of the Bessemer Medal this evening, is less for these career achievements, great as they are, and more for his qualities as a man; his integrity, hard work and generosity with his time, and above all his empathy for and commitment, to his workers and colleagues. The bottom line is, Jon treats people well.

Jon has shown, by achieving success in the UK, the USA, France and beyond, that these attributes, inseparable as they are from his personal character, are universally recognised as the hallmark of good leadership.

It is for this reason, for the strength of his character, that Jon as a leader is able to inspire people to follow him, through the good times and the bad, be they managers, directors, or trade union leaders; clients, suppliers and public officials. But most of all Jon's leadership qualities inspire a loyalty and dedication in his workforce, who place their trust in him.

Such leadership is not easy, it can be an enormous burden and it can come at a great personal cost. Yet at a time when our industry, and indeed our country, needs capable leadership more than ever, we could all benefit from more leaders like Jon.

It is for this reason, that there can be no more worthy recipient of the Bessemer Gold Medal, particularly in this, the 150th anniversary year of the Institute. In the decades and centuries to come, as the Institute celebrates its 200th and then 300th anniversary, people will recall the names of those Bessemer Laureates in significant years such as this and future winners will be proud to have their name added to a list which counts Jon Bolton amongst its number.

Jon, on behalf of this assembly, the Iron and Steel Society, the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining, your friends and colleagues in the industry and with my greatest, personal acclamation, I would like to congratulate you on your receipt of the Bessemer Gold Medal and thank you for the delivery of the Bessemer Lecture this evening.

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**Chris McDonald** is the Chief Executive Officer of the Materials Processing Institute. The Institute carries out industrial research and innovation in advanced materials, low carbon energy, digital technologies and the circular economy supporting the materials, processing and energy sectors for over 75 years. Chris led the divestment and return to independent, not-for-profit ownership of the Institute in 2014.

Chris's background is in industrial research and manufacturing, where he has worked internationally. A graduate of Cambridge University, Chris is a Fellow the Institute of Chemical Engineers and of the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining. He sits on industrial advisory boards at a number of universities, including Oxford and Sheffield.

Chris has an interest in innovation management and industry dynamics and in addition to leading the Institute, he provides expert opinion and consultancy support to companies, institutes, Governments and public bodies in innovation and technology strategy and management. He also advises on the technical due diligence aspects of mergers and acquisitions.

Chris is prominent in the development of public policy, around innovation, steel, SMEs, where he works to support growth and inward investment. Chris is the policy chair for Innovation and Enterprise for the Federation of Small Businesses, a member of the CBI Regional Council and Shadow Monetary Policy Committee for the North East, the Chair of the UK Metals Council and a member of the Steel Advisory Board for UK Steel (EEF).

Chris is often called to commentate in the media on innovation leadership and the steel industry.

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**Chris McDonald**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Materials Processing Institute

## Materials Processing Institute

**The Materials Processing Institute is an independent, open access and not-for-profit technology and innovation centre working with industry, government and academia worldwide. Support ranges from small scale, site based investigations, through to long term collaborative research programmes.**

The Materials Processing Institute is expert in advanced materials, low carbon energy and the circular economy, specialising in challenging processes, particularly those involving high specification materials, high temperatures and difficult operating conditions.

The Institute has over 70 years' experience as a leading UK technology provider. Extensive materials processing knowledge is supported by state-of-the-art facilities with a broad range of equipment, from laboratories through to demonstration, scale-up and production plant.

Scientists and engineers work with industry and apply their expertise to develop and implement robust solutions to research and development and improvements for products and processes.

**Expertise is spread across a wide range of disciplines, including:**

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- > Specialist Melting and Steel / Alloy Production
- > Engineering / Asset Management
- > Materials Handling
- > Minerals and Ores

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- > Nuclear
- > Oil & Gas
- > Energy
- > Aerospace and Defence
- > Mining and Quarrying









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