

Stay in touch



An example computational fluid dynamics pattern

Asix-year longing for a return to the tunnelling industry has come to an end as Karl Else joins ventilation and fire safety specialist Mosen in the role of engineering director. Specialising in computational fluid dynamics (CFD), he leaves the world of office space fit-outs and large data centres to come back into the industry fold and bring his 22 years of experience to bear on tunnel ventilation.

Else's career began with Mott MacDonald's Chunnel division in 1989. "As with a lot of things, my entry into the tunnelling industry was vaguely accidental. I finished my degree in Mechanical Engineering with a bit of an automotive bias," says Else. "The degree was traditional and there were lots of deals with companies like Jaguar and an overall obsession with radiator fins. I thought that's where I would end up as I was interested in all things oily. I even had a Perkins job offer, but the recruitment guy representing Mott MacDonald got in the week before. I had a friend in London, so I thought I would go to the pub the night before for a drink, head to the interview the next day, expense the whole thing and then head to Perkins.

"Things didn't go quite to plan. I showed up late and the guy didn't seem to be expecting me. He asked me if I had heard of CFD—fortunately I had read about it in a magazine advert, said yes, and the relief on

his face was phenomenal. I was bundled down the corridor to a couple of guys just setting up the business and they hadn't even got a computer yet, but next day I got the call offering me the job. I liked the idea of being in London so I accepted."

Despite what he thinks of as a terrible premise for a career, Else decided he liked the work and general tunnelling. "Although I feel like I'm on the periphery of the tunnelling industry, it's really satisfying to say 'I helped build that'—much more so than a barbed wire surrounded data centre. I'll have to get more involved with the industry now I'm back, I feel a bit guilty that I wasn't more so last time. I don't consider myself a tunneller, more an engineer pleased to be working in tunnels.

Else adds, "I've always been forced to 'lone wolf it', working alone as a specialist. With Mosen's expansion that may change, but that's how I am still at the moment. I worked temporarily with Hatch Mott in New York in 2000 before leaving Mott MacDonald for Faber Maunsell in 2002. There I was slowly moved away from the tunnelling Maunsell side to the more building service-oriented Faber side. After that I went to HurleyPalmerFlatt in 2005 where I became frustrated with building services and just moved to Mosen this November. I missed tunnels.

"It's hard to think of specific high points in my career. There's just a general level of

satisfaction in getting a practical solution to a job and getting it out the door. The Chunnel stands out as a big one. Even though it bankrupted people, from an engineering standpoint it is still an amazing achievement. I also helped determine that the pitch at the new Wembley Stadium would not be well ventilated while at Mott. This was just before the old Wembley was knocked down. People weren't sure why the pitch was so good and ventilation was one consideration."

Else adds, "One interesting experience I had was in a nuclear reactor basement at Trwysfynnd. I was at one point told 'don't stand just there, it's a bit dosey'."

To budding engineers Else says, "The biggest mistake I made was staying in one place too long. I was with Mott for 13 years and it didn't do them or me any favours to become part of the furniture. I would have learned more and quicker if I had moved around companies and sectors. Don't be promiscuous with jobs, but make sure you stretch yourself and keep things fresh.

"The other thing I would say is if you work in simulations in an office, for God's sake go out to the sites and look at the kit. Get out into the world and stay grounded, or risk getting out of touch.

"It is dangerous otherwise. Some things look great in theory but are utterly abstract and impractical. You get a much better understanding of what you do if you visit whenever possible." ■



Above: Else joined Mosen last month