

## Member Lecture – 19 November 2020

The life and work of Nikola Tesla  
David Hughes

Questions not taken during lecture and answered post-lecture.

### **Q1 Why is there a model of a Tesla Coil decorating the top of Charles Holden's Southgate Underground station in London?**

I think it's an item of decoration, intended to impart some kind of futurist feel. Some say that the same decoration inspired the Dalek's Eye (from Doctor Who) and a similar structure on Star Trek's USS Enterprise. I can't find any reference to Tesla having spent any time near Southgate.

### **Q2 How historically accurate is the film The Current War? If there are any major inaccuracies, what are they?**

As far as I can tell, the film makers only made one or two mistakes in the making of the film. At the conclusion of the film, Edison is shown working on inventing movies, which is an obvious fallacy - motion pictures had been around for a decade by then.

As far as we know, George Westinghouse and Thomas Edison never actually met in person. There's nothing in their correspondence to suggest that they did although absence of evidence is no proof.

Omissions? There were a few. The scene where William Kemmler is executed in the Electric chair wasn't shown because it was too gruesome, even for modern audiences. In truth, Kemmler's execution was horribly botched.

On or two commentators have said that Nicholas Hoult's portrayal of Tesla - as a slightly goofy version of Sheldon Cooper - was inaccurate. Most sources agree that Tesla was an intense genius who was, in the main, highly agreeable and socially aware.

### **Q3 It seemed to be like the wild west in the science world at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Are there any comparisons with the frantic pace of science now?**

Science, the field, is relatively slow and pedestrian. It's the derivation of products from scientific research that garners comparison to the Wild West, competition for market share in particular. I

do not know of many researchers who wear a ten gallon hat or carry a six shooter although some perhaps should when one considers their rather whimsical approach to evaluating end-of-term papers. Not addressing anyone in particular. Just sayin'...

## Books

### **The Man who invented the Twentieth century**

(By Robert Lomas)

### **My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla**

(By Tesla)