

The Society of Light and Lighting

Presidential Address 2016

Jeff Shaw MSL



I am honoured and excited to take on the position of President of The Society of Light and Lighting. Thank you for joining me here today to mark my first day in this role.

Some of the circumstances today feel particularly relevant to me and make this occasion even more meaningful. This building I helped design, so it is of course satisfying to be standing in one of my early projects – I like to think that the daylighting of this chamber is crucial to the day-to-day governing of London! The date today is also important for me – it is my late mother's birthday – had she lived she would turn 80 today. I think she would have been quietly pleased and proud to join in the celebrations today and I think of her as I reflect on why light is so pivotal in our lives.

My mother was from Estonia and she left there as a child refugee at the end of the second world war. I have a photograph of my mother on the refugee ship that took her from Estonia to Sweden as they escaped the Soviet invasion. It is amazing that through this, 70 years on, I can see her standing in the boat and almost imagine what it must have been like for her then. It is of course light that makes photography possible.

2015 has been a great year for our industry. As you will all know, 2015 was the UNESCO International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies. This has been a brilliant opportunity to promote our industry. The International Year of Light ended with a closing ceremony in February in Mexico – unfortunately, even as President Elect, I didn't make the guest list! I have however been looking for similar inspiration (and opportunities to go to Mexico) for 2016.

The UN has declared 2016 to be the International Year of Pulses. At first glance this seems a great choice – laser pulses, pulsed light, optical physics... But no, it is all about dried seeds that are a subgroup of the legume family. Little inspiration to be gained here although I have learnt some interesting facts about pulses which I can share with you if time allows.

Instead I look to this room for inspiration. We have all come to lighting from widely varied backgrounds – engineers, architects, interior designers, theatre, fine arts, product designers – I know there are people from all these backgrounds in the room today. We probably all have one thing in common – we came into the industry by accident, not knowing that lighting was

what we wanted to do when we first set out. We recognised our interest in light later, during our careers or training.

I think back to my childhood, and I now realise that I was always interested in light – I just didn't know it. As an example – I watched lots of TV as a child, and was a regular viewer of American cop show 'CHiPs'. I don't really remember a single episode of that show, save one – for some reason, to this day, I still vividly remember watching an episode where there was no bad guy; it turned out that traffic accidents were being caused at a certain time of day by glare from the reflection of sunlight in the metallic surface of the side of a delivery van. Even aged eight, it seems I was more interested in cops discovering the effects of disability glare from sunlight than in them catching actual bad guys...

I remember lots of other things that could have helped point me to lighting – I used to persuade my parents to buy me coloured light bulbs (as I called them back then) to play about with different effects in my bedroom; I was passionate about photography; at school I was keen in both art and science, right up to A-Level; and I have always been a film buff – captivated by the stories, the ideas, the cinematography and, of course, the play of light and shadows – I used to daydream about being a film director.

My point is this: I was a budding lighting designer, but what I didn't know as a child was that I could have a career in lighting. Or that *anyone* had a career in lighting.

Film directing seemed a little tough to get into, and I did also have an interest in buildings. At eighteen I saw two options for working on the design of buildings - studying structural engineering or architecture. I followed a path of largely avoiding making a decision between these two – I did a degree called Architectural Engineering – and this eventually led to my discovery that there are a host other professions working in the built environment. When I first studied Lighting during my degree, it immediately inspired me – and now, over 20 years later, I am standing before you all as the new President of the Society.

I want to inspire a different experience for children growing up today and in the future. I want to inspire the lighting designers and the engineers of tomorrow; to let their parents know that a respectable (well, fairly respectable) career lies ahead for those who want to join our industry. I want to help to create a lasting legacy of engagement and interaction between the lighting community, the construction industry and the public. I want to develop in these groups an appreciation of what encompasses quality lighting and demonstrate how lighting can impact on the world we live in.

This is why I have brought you all to this venue – the seat of London's government. We need to get the message out – to all – to our industry, to the press, to the government, to the public and to our children. Lighting plays a huge part in all of our lives. Quality lighting is key to our experience of a space and to our health and well-being. Responsible lighting design is key to a sustainable future.

I believe there has never been a better time to promote the lighting industry and lighting quality – the International Year of Light has provided a tremendous starting point; events such as the award-winning Night of Heritage Light last year helped capture the public imagination – when else has an SLL event been on national television?

The public is hungry for knowledge. You may notice the slide on the screen now is gradually turning to a warmer hue... It is getting late in the evening and I don't want to keep you all up tonight with too much blue light. Apple are kindly leading the way on this by making all their devices do this for you too. But does this really help? I don't know.

People are talking about lighting. I used Google to search *dailymail.co.uk* for the words "light" and "health". All the (hundreds of) articles that came up seemed rather negative. The second result, for example, was "**Do 'environmentally friendly' LED lights cause BLINDNESS?**" People need to know that they don't – they need to understand the technology more.

The public need to know how to choose an LED retrofit lamp in a shop that's actually appropriate for them. The press need to know how to navigate a research document without telling us that LEDs will kill us all. And the professionals in our industry need to know what is genuinely beneficial to us in terms of so-called 'circadian lighting' and what might just be a sales trick with no scientific basis. We need to provide robust guidance for the industry, and assist and educate the public.

As part of this, I want to encourage more research into the influence of lighting on health, well-being and human behaviour, with a view to the SLL preparing robust guidance and advising on standards in this currently poorly understood area. In advance of a well-researched lighting guide on so-called 'human-centric' lighting, which I think we need, we need to urgently issue a Fact File to outline what we do know in this area, and what we don't know, to help demystify this. We need to outline what are the known knowns and the known unknowns, to quote Donald Rumsfeld.

At the same time, I think we should continue to engage more with the public ourselves. We could do this in a number of ways. We could help the public make informed choices about their own domestic Lighting – the SLL and partners should publish advice for consumers – for example, why not a poster to go up in their local DIY store next to the lighting? I am sure that the stores would embrace something like this. It serves also to promote quality lighting and develops our industry further.

Additionally, we should continue to create events that capture the imagination like the Night of Heritage Light (a possible 2016 version is under development!) and extend the junior version of Ready Steady Light for schools. These events aim to continue to inspire the public and promote lighting to them.

We need to engage young people and develop their interest in science, design and engineering – and lighting. Light can be a great educational tool – what else so well encompasses creative

design, science, maths and practical engineering skills, and also architecture and visual arts? The context of light can be used to inspire young people, and teach them valuable skills. And, if along the way we show them what we do for a living and build recognition of lighting as a career, all the better.

Until recently, I was the chairman of the SLL Education and Membership committee, and along with partners in the ILP, IALD and LIA, we together launched a project to develop structured advice and tools for lighting-related STEM Ambassadors. This project has somewhat stalled of late, but I plan to work together with our partners to reinvigorate it, to have tangible tools for lighting professionals wanting to be STEM Ambassadors in place by the start of the 2016/17 academic year.

STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, and a STEM Ambassador is a professional in any related industry who volunteers their time to contribute to activities in schools, to inspire young people, and to support teachers in the classroom by explaining current applications of STEM in industry or research. This can be for all ages, from 5-18, from fun practical exercises to career advice.

We want to support and encourage the Lighting community in delivering STEM to their local schools and colleges. We plan to produce sample presentations, workshops and 'kits' (with equipment supplied by sponsors, I hope) as well as guidance for STEM Ambassadors and how to become one. We'll cover STEM topics appropriate for all age groups. We'll make the material available to be used by any lighting professional who wants to become a STEM Ambassador. We want to make that process easy for them, lowering the hurdles for entry.

The STEM Ambassador logo already says "Illuminating Futures" and has a picture of a prism – our marketing is already in place!

Our outgoing President Liz Peck has set a high bar for me and I need to continue the enthusiasm she has orchestrated over the last year. I want to say thank you to Liz for all her hard work - Liz, you have been key in raising the awareness of our industry and in building new and strong links between us and many other like-minded groups, such the Institute of Physics and the RIBA, amongst others.

Liz has been highly effective as our President over the last year. As an industry we had a tremendous International Year of Light. I am very excited to take on the role from Liz at this time, if a little daunted by her achievements - she has given me a very tough act to follow.

With Liz's Presidency and the successful International Year of Light we have generated positive momentum. This is a great platform to build on.

The SLL's collective vision for the future is to promote **lighting quality** from the home to the workplace and everywhere in between, and to **get the message out** of the impact of lighting on our lives, the importance of quality lighting and to educate all in what we in the industry do.

We need to promote this message and do this with public engagement and effective partnerships throughout our industry. I am looking forward to my part in developing this vision for the Society with the initiatives that I have outlined today, but I can't complete the vision in just one year. In the audience today, we have the President Elect, Richard Caple, who will take over from me this time next year, and the three Vice Presidents of the Society – Iain Carlile, Simon Fisher and Bob Bohannon – perhaps they could all stand up? We are committed together to take our shared vision of improving lighting quality and the promotion of the industry forward, beyond my tenure as President.

I look forward to working closely with CIBSE, its Societies and Groups in the coming year – without CIBSE's support, the SLL would find it much harder to achieve our goals.

And I look forward to you all joining me on my journey this year and thank you for this opportunity. Do come and speak to me and let me know your ideas and suggestions. I have today outlined my personal thoughts and reflections on lighting and my hopes to influence particularly the younger generation. I hope to convince them to consider the importance of lighting and thus promote lighting as a career possibility and as a key element of the design of the built environment.

I wish you all a very good evening. Thank you for listening.