

The Society of Light and Lighting

Presidential Address 2012

'Communicating a future Society'

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Past Presidents, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to become President of the Society of Light and Lighting in the same year as the Queen celebrates her Diamond Jubilee, the royal family of course has been active in the UK for many centuries, the SLL for just over one century. There can of course be no comparison between our roles, but suffice to say I hope she continues for many years yet.

In either role there is a lot to learn before you have what could be considered the relevant experience but we should remember that learning and light have been a longer partnership. Learning started long before man made light, perhaps not by words, but by gesture, sound, dance.

As time passed man learned to tame fire, tame energy, and with it came the control of a light source, protection from the dark. Long before language perhaps fire enabled the telling of stories through the use of pictures to portray messages, pictures that say I am here, I belong and then to either stories of great hunting, or to tell of the migration of food sources. The use of flame lights allowed man to enter dark caves where the messages could be saved for future use, for future generations. Recorded learning had begun.

Over millennia, these messages become more complex, adding words to the pictures, the learning is passed on, the subjects covered are no longer just about food, our knowledge grows, the world becomes more complex but smaller, and all the time it is light that allows us to engage, educate, learn and to record it all.

However, we now learn at an incredible rate, communication has become so much more open, literally at the speed of light; our beliefs are under greater strain as more than ever before, media and business shape messages, not always based on the whole truth, but with information that moves society. It is easy to believe what you can see and hear on Twitter, Facebook or television, less so to believe the slower written stories of old which take time to read, understand and digest. And yet so much of the old way of doing things remain valid today; we have always known for instance that looking at a bright light source is uncomfortable, new technology does not change that fact, the eye doesn't evolve that fast.

We now need to pass on our knowledge in a world where printed text is less important than blogging, video and sound bites; new media essentially is taking the world forward at a stupendous pace. I'm not sure the SLL will ever have more followers on Twitter than celebrities of the day but I would hope we can have more to say, in a professional and interesting way, on the subject of lighting.

My point is that we have developed from stories that made life possible, the vital information of day to day existence, to stories that provoke interest and debate. Where information is concerned, we've evolved as a society into those who learn, who seek knowledge to the betterment of the quality of life and those who simply apply the knowledge and information that they can find easily and use it to get the job done. Those who love light in all its forms and those who just use it perhaps?

As our thirst for knowledge grows these two parts of society need to work together, one can not live without the other, the knowledge seekers are needed to do the research, to write the information down, pass it around, provide the education, perhaps to make sure those who just apply information do so in the right way and this of course requires expertise.

If we want to perpetuate the knowledge within today's global culture we need specialists, a community of experts in lighting and that of course is our society, the Society of Light & Lighting.

But, just as technology is changing the world it will change this society, not in its fundamental reason for existence, but in the way it engages with the community, the way it communicates, the way it publishes and perhaps the way it makes money.

Traditionally, membership and publications make up the Society's income; the amount of money the society receives depends so much on these that we need to plan financially for the changes we could face.

The CIBSE Knowledge Portal certainly offers huge member benefits, but it does show the start of a change that will ultimately lead to more electronic publication, to a wider and more international audience and to challenges of digital content and its associated demands. We have a clear timetable for the coming years of what needs to be written and by when. This year we have to set the strategy over how to publish and when one format takes over from another.

The Knowledge Portal is one example of new thinking in media; if we asked Leon Gaster, he would encourage us to embrace this change. However, it will impact on our membership levels and on publication income. Going back to the knowledge seekers and users, we must embrace the move to widen access to information, but we have to work out how to protect its value.

In the same way that music and video are sought as free commodities by vast numbers of the population, so is lighting knowledge. The mind set is growing that it doesn't hurt to steal intellectual rights, designs, words and product. But there is an intrinsic value in a brand and information that

comes from that brand still carries weight. The credentials of an organisation like the SLL mean its members are seen as knowledgeable, expert, a good source of information. Lighting experts will always have a value.

An example of this is the past year where behind the scenes key members of the society, working with other lighting groups, took hold of the debate around the revision of Part L in England & Wales and turned opinion to a point where a future based on energy use is a likely outcome for Part L rather than simple efficacy. Personally I would like to thank all those members who influenced the very positive debate and outcome. It demonstrated clearly to those involved that expertise in lighting, not just energy, is vital to the debate.

We need to continue emphasising why lighting is important in the eyes of legislators. As the pressure builds, from government, to become more efficient it will fall to our members to make the case for performance and comfort too.

David Fisk, the new CIBSE president suggests we face a challenge: whilst the artists and decorative designers amongst our society may be able to use concepts, flowery language and play to others appreciation of the aesthetic, those of us who deal with engineering the built environment need to be clear. To quote David "If engineering institutions fail to comprehend that good engineering requires tight language not diffuse ideas, we are in trouble." And so, as part of CIBSE the SLL has to face up to this challenge too.

Our guides, such as the Code for Lighting are the leading publications on lighting, but in a global market, where standards move closer; our guides need to attract a wider audience, become more international in focus whilst still distilling the practice of the art and science of lighting.

This is no easy task, not just generating the information, but protecting its value and exploiting our members' expertise to share the information. We are reminded that SLL as a learned society exists as an organisation where people who work with light can meet, socialise and exchange information. To reflect this global audience, we need to embrace all media sources to get our message across. The video you have seen tonight is perhaps just the start of new ways SLL will be communicating in the future.

Utilising younger members to get our message out through social and professional media will be key to success. My invitation to these members is come in, be part of the society, get involved, play a part, help the society change with the times.

We also have to attract new members in a time when money is tight, in a time when information is free, in a time where our industry has shrunk considerably. We have to attract the very people who need to learn from our experience, the very people that will be the practitioners, influencers and

experts of the future, but those who also bring with them an understanding of the new media and technology that we may lack.

After all, this should remain a society where life long learning is possible and as a learned body, most of our existing members recognise that we all have something to learn and should be willing to demonstrate this.

Our strategy for younger members is clear, with the free student membership scheme, we have attracted new members; now we need to engage with them and keep them, to encourage at least some to become recognised within the society and to use their competence to further public debate on light. In return we need to improve their experience, their expertise and standing in the lighting world. We must learn from them in addition to offering them learning that they can't get elsewhere.

As well as attracting new members, we still have to make the Society attractive for existing members to renew, to remain active, so the marketing of the society and of its publications, its mission, the reasons for joining us and the reasons our members are qualified or competent is potentially our biggest challenge.

Our members will seek more from the society in terms of professional recognition and rightly so. Providing members education, experience and skills and ways of proving competence is also something our team will need to work on over the next few years, especially if we want to increase our standing amongst the wider, international, lighting community. Our society has to build upon its reputation in providing guidance, in doing so we have to be evident to all as the leading source of professional knowledge.

Of course, the sharing of knowledge doesn't just come from reading publications and our excellent newsletter; CPD comes in all forms and our first-rate events programme is a testament to that.

We have seen great success in the well established Masterclass series, this year we had interest from more sponsors, and in a difficult year numbers of those attending the series continue to be good. In a way, it's disappointing more of the audience are not members, but the non members are also exactly the people the SLL needs to educate, so I think the Masterclass sets a good standard and builds in reputation each year.

We have bigger and better London events and I'm sure our success here will grow, but we have to get to a wider audience, more convincingly, to get to non-members too and let them see us as the society to come to, to listen to, to learn from and I hope to join. To do this will take new volunteers as one of our existing events team steps down and another I hope continues the good work. But to make these events even better I put a call out to the new members, to bring some publicity to these events, to attend, get involved, ask those burning questions, and learn from the great speakers we have at each event.

Events such as Young Lighter of the Year also continue to grow in standing. We all know young lighters that have gone on the great careers in the lighting, and we continue to attract interest from outside the UK. This year the final moves to a new venue and we hope to see a bigger and better event at Lux Live, a bigger audience and I hope another superb winner. And young lighter by the very fact it attracts entries worldwide demonstrates interest in what we have to offer. In itself it is also a great marketing opportunity for us.

Ready Steady Light, this year completed its first decade, an event that I took part in some years ago, it's one which really teaches the importance of creativity, detail, limitations and design, plus a good dose of teamwork and fun. It continues to be a great opportunity for the SLL, for Rose Bruford College and for all those involved. Many happy returns RSL.

But time and society change and so must its leaders, whether royal, religious, political or organisational. We will have to be better at management; our volunteer structure is more stretched than ever before, with many members giving significant time and effort in times when they themselves are already stretched at work. So our management has to be more focused, less entrenched, faster with accurate information from the committees and regions and with clear decision making, with more committed volunteers, stimulating more action perhaps with fewer clearer priorities. It's a road we started along at the centenary and should drive our media, publications, events and membership.

In a decade when information, technology and controls will change our industry, our designs, our working environments and our energy use; we as a society will have to embrace this change, study and realise the implications before others apply the technology poorly. We will have to change the way our society engages with our membership and the wider lighting community, how we share information and how we use our influence.

So we continue to be focused on membership, marketing, money and importantly management as you would expect, but I challenge the Society to become better still at imparting of knowledge, the provision of learning, of being heard outside of our own boundaries.

Remember we started with the story telling around the camp fire, the development of society and education, we need to continue that direction. If we were in Shakespeare's era, how many societies would have admitted him to their ranks? He left school at 14, missing university, devoid of many of the qualifications he would need to seek a profession, but he had experienced drama, acting out in Latin or Greek a tragedy or two.

Today most professional bodies would look down on that lack of qualification, that interest outside the norm and struggle to welcome such talent. Leon Gaster envisioned a Society based on informality and free speech, a Society that embraced innovation, a Society that was passionate about new ways of thinking. It is with pride I am a member of an organisation that would embrace Shakespeare, that would welcome him to Ready Steady Light for instance where he would have learned some of the skills necessary to light a scene in one of his future plays.

The SLL should continue to welcome people from all elements of the art and engineering of lighting. It should use our modern media, just as Shakespeare used the media of his time, we should engage members and the importantly the outside world and remain a true society as Gaster envisaged, a real learned society of lighters.

If we do this correctly, and it will need commitment from existing and new members within and outside of committees, young and old, professional and student, then the society formed over 100 years ago will continue to be a place to meet, a family to be proud of, a place to learn and to help others learn for the betterment of our society through all things in lighting. It will continue to provide leadership in the world of light and to grow the respect it deserves.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you the Society of Light & Lighting.

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