

The Society of Light and Lighting

Presidential Address 2015

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A True Society: The Lighting Family



Past Presidents, members, distinguished guests; it truly is a great honour and privilege to serve as president, the 93rd president of the Society in all its incarnations.

I had no idea back in 1999 when Ciaran Kiely advised me to ring Concord Lighting about a job in customer service, that I'd fall in love with lighting, let alone that I'd be standing here as our Society's president and, what's more, in the UNESCO International Year of Light.

Some years ago when the Society conducted a member survey, some of the feedback was that we were perceived as a bunch of men in suits. Although we still have many fine gentlemen who wear a suit, the more astute of you will observe I am neither male, nor wearing a suit! Over the course of the last year, I was asked on more than one occasion as to whether I would become the Society's first female president but many of you will have known my two predecessors in the role: Margaret Halstead, who served in 1984 and Lorna Jean Heap in 1995; it saddens me greatly that I never got to know either of them before they passed away.

Margaret Halstead in her inaugural Address, commented that she wished for there to be more women involved, that the number totalled just eleven in 1984. That represented just 0.6% of the total members. Now, in 2015, our representation is closer to 10%, a figure surely too low still given the high percentage of women in lighting these days, but the last two years has seen a 30% increase and we have a high female representation on all SLL committees and Council. It may come as little surprise, therefore, that later in 2015, we will see women holding the presidency, not just of SLL, but simultaneously of IALD, ILP, CIE and the RIBA. A tour de force for lighting, without question.

It's been an interesting journey since those days working in an office above a factory and it's thanks in no small part to Mike Simpson. I wasn't a complete lighting dunce when I arrived in Feltham asking to join his lighting design team, but the sum total of my expertise was reading a cone diagram and knowing the Concord catalogue inside out; I suspect the latter was a more redeeming feature at the time of the Concord-Marlin merger!

My career with Mike continued at Philips and although my first day at Croydon was met with a "Police: Murder" sign, Philips also ultimately brought the SLL within my grasp. I had some doubts when Mike first suggested attending a three-day lighting conference, as much of my time was focussed on the conclusion of my MSc at the Bartlett. He then mentioned it was in Dublin, so being a good Irish girl, I signed up immediately! What I discovered there was a group of highly intelligent and knowledgeable people who were also engaging and social. In fact the social side directly resulted in agreeing to Mark Ayers' suggestion that I join the Society's Newsletter committee. At that time the Newsletter was under the leadership of Richard Forster and he guided us through many meetings discussing ideas for content alongside the ever-present Jonathan David and Samantha Caplan. Jonathan then colluded with Mike and got me to join the newly-formed CIBSE Grades, Benefits and Subscriptions Task Force. Now as someone with no engineering background and ineligible for higher CIBSE membership, this seemed a perplexing choice to me but Mike assured me that my principal role was that of lead troublemaker! Despite - or because of - that, I then served on CIBSE Council before switching to SLL Council, my more natural home.

Throughout all of my dealings with CIBSE - and especially the Society - the one thing that emerges absolutely strongest of all, is the people; that same intelligent, knowledgeable, engaging and social collection of people that I first met in Dublin. The Society simply wouldn't exist without people and our diverse membership is what make our Society so special.

This led me to consider the very definition of a Society. Society can be: i) the situation of being in the company of other people; ii) the social act of assembling for some common purpose; iii) those with whom one has companionship. It is that companionship which I believe is the very foundation of our Society.

In 1909, Leon Gaster said,

"In advocating the formation of such a society, we have no desire to do more than provide a common platform where all those interested in illumination may be able to express their views in a free and informal manner."

"For this reason, the society has been termed the Illuminating Engineering Society and not the Society of Illuminating Engineers."

This last sentence is absolutely crucial to our ongoing success; we are the society of light, and lighting. We are open to anyone with an interest in lighting and we welcome all those interested in any aspect of the world of light, lighting and its application.

In addition to the more obvious lighting occupations, therefore, whether your interest is in photonics, astronomy, physics, product design, architecture, interior design, medicine, photography or ophthalmology, this society is open to you: you are all welcome.

This year represents a unique opportunity to show how light and lighting technology has changed the world in which we live. Some of you will be aware that 2015 is the year to which Marty McFly travelled forward in time in the *Back to the Future* film, so although perhaps our most immediate thought is of the until-now, elusive hover board, many of the apparently crazy inventions dreamed of in 1985 when the film was made, have come to life: hybrid cars, hands-free computer games, video-conferencing, flying cameras, self-lacing boots, 3D movies, and yes, even LEDs in clothing.

Most of these have come to fruition principally through the application of light and lighting technologies. Crucially, they've all been borne out of collaboration of expertise to make the ridiculous, not just possible, but a way of life. We've got five months before Marty arrives to crack the hover board properly - without the need for a giant magnetic floor.

2015 is, of course, the UNESCO International Year of Light and this is singularly appropriate for the realm of anniversaries that are celebrated this year. In March, we hosted the Fresnel Lecture at the Royal Institution of Great Britain. In addition, a year celebrating light and lighting technology is also appropriate because our lives really are now a 24-hour day of light.

We can be woken by a biodynamic alarm clock, designed to mimic sunrise in winter; we check our mobile phones (in my case for messages, emails, social media, news and

weather), before heading to work. Here, we are guided by illuminated dashboards and GPS aided by street lights and traffic signals while we see the day come to life as shops and offices switch on their lights. All being well, we work in well-lit offices, children attend well-lit schools and lives are saved in well-lit hospitals, often saved through the use of lighting technologies. At work, fibre-optic broadband enables us to communicate across the globe through the internet and email, quite apart from the multitude of uses for our once simple mobile phones. The vast majority of us shop online in some form and half of us bank online. When they get home from school, children play games, not just with their school friends, but with others across the world through online gaming. The art of conversation can be lost as families gather for a meal, all intrinsically attached to their smart phone, so although we know they should probably not be used late at night, they often are. Of course, while many of us are settling down to a calming artificial sunset on our alarm clocks, the night still needs light and the night shift begins.

All of this is realised only through the application of light, lighting technology and yet more collaboration of expertise.

Collaboration was, in fact, a key area of focus for Leon Gaster,

"Apart from the benefits which the engineers connected with different systems of illumination would derive from free intercourse with each other, they would learn much by hearing the views of... .. among others, oculists, architects and physiologists, whom an illuminating engineering society might bring together".

"Only good can follow from a free exchange of the opinions of these different experts".

On the matter of collaboration with architects, this again is nothing new. The Society has had three architects serve as president: Derek Phillips, James Bell and Malcolm Parry; In 1908, Percy J Waldram wrote an article in *The Illuminating Engineer*,

"What architects really need is the work of engineers, who are skilful, experienced and well abreast of the times.

There is plenty of work for these men if the architect only knew where to find them, and... the author advocates the collaboration of societies devoted to the engineering and architectural professions."

Collaboration goes much further than architecture, of course. I have a vision for the Society: I want the Society to be a tree, a lighting family tree. The RIBA is a significant branch but so too are the branches of the designers, engineers and physicists; disciplines such as photography, ophthalmology and acoustics along with many others are equally important. Organisations such as the Carbon Trust, Energy Saving Trust, Building Research Establishment and Public Health England, who are conducting the Society's LED research, are also key; we should ensure they do not fall from our tree like autumn leaves.

The SLL is of course, just one tree in the lighting forest and as Geoff Cook highlighted in his Presidential Address, our relationships with many of our sister lighting organisations are already healthy. Those relationships can always be strengthened of course and I believe my lighting family tree is for the greater good of lighting, so those organisations will benefit too. The lighting family tree will be strong because the SLL is at the root of it and it is our rich diversity of members from all aspects of light and lighting who will give it that strength.

The RIBA, in fact, has already recognised the benefit of reaching out, introducing "Friends of Architecture" last year. I am a Friend and I hope others will join me. I should make it clear, though, that my lighting family tree is not about growing the membership of SLL, aside from those who wish to - and of course, are most welcome - it is only to ensure that our contemporaries in related disciplines, whatever their particular expertise, have the opportunity to become a friend of lighting. Our bi-monthly newsletter is available free online; our events around the country are open to everyone. And our members are some of the most approachable and amiable people you could want to meet.

Some of you will be familiar with the comedy sketch with the Two Ronnies and John Cleese, describing the class system and people knowing their place within it. It pleases me greatly that SLL is unlike that in any respect and it was something I learned early in my time with the Society. You will recall that my first encounter with the Society was in Dublin. One morning, I was quietly enjoying my breakfast when a gentleman asked if he could join me at my table. As he took a seat, I realised he was "famous" Professor Peter Boyce, the very same Peter Boyce whose books I'd been reading for my Masters degree. However, he had no desire to talk of his books or his distinguished work in the USA, he

wanted only to know about me, what I was working on, whether I was enjoying the conference. This unassuming nature I have since found to be prevalent throughout the Society, so while we do have different member grades to reflect levels of professional recognition, there's no class system to be found in our gatherings, we are essentially a diverse group of friends.

Of course, being a learned Society, that group of friends is also responsible for delivering guidance for lighting in the built environment, having produced the Code for Lighting since 1936, in addition to numerous application guides and in *Lighting Research and Technology*, we have what is widely regarded as the premier lighting research journal in the world.

This time last year, John Aston asked us all to recruit additional members; with so many benefits, this was easy and our membership is now close to 3,000. My challenge to you all this year, is, I think, even easier. It's simply to reach out to the people I have described and talk to them about the wonder of light and lighting. Every time I am asked what I do for a living, the response draws interest and enthusiasm. So harness that interest and enthusiasm and encourage someone you know to come to one of our many events around the country.

The Executive will work on building and strengthening our relationships with the respective organisations that I hope will become part of our lighting family, but the reality is that most of these organisations, like the SLL, are driven by their people. In the UNESCO International Year of Light, there's no better time to spread the word about how fantastic light and lighting truly is. So whether it's *Back to the Future* inventions, your 24-hour day of light, or sharing the colour of a magnificent sunrise. Remember that *only good can follow from a free exchange of the opinions of different experts*.

Finally,

"It was decided at an informal dinner, held at the Criterion restaurant on February 9th [1909], to inaugurate an Illuminating Engineering Society in this country.

At the gathering, representatives of the engineering, medical, architectural and other interested parties, were present".

At this gathering here tonight, at the headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects, representatives of the engineering, medical, architectural and other interested parties are again present. And most welcome.

So, in the spirit of Leon Gaster, and our shared vision for the Society, I warmly welcome you all. especially our guests, to this evening's reception.

A True Society. Our Society. The Lighting Family.

