



**Presidential Address 2021**

**RUTH KELLY WASKETT**

I'd like to start by saying that I am extremely honoured to be taking up this post, and I want to thank you all for joining me this afternoon. I sincerely wish that we were all in a beautiful room together, with the promise of celebration afterwards, but one of the good things about doing this online is that we are able to welcome people to join us from all of our regions and beyond. So I want to extend a very warm welcome to those of you who would not normally be able to attend the AGM in person. It is my hope that in the years to come we can maintain the ability for people in geographically disparate places to be able to join us whilst at the same time being able to enjoy getting together in person.

Bob, I know you don't believe me but you have achieved a lot during the past year, especially considering what a year it has been. Against a backdrop of constant uncertainty and with everything online, you still managed to make significant progress with the Circular Economy Assessment Method and Cat A, as well as all the other work you did and continue to do for the Society. I'd like everyone on the panel and at home to join me in thanking Bob (applause).

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Juliet, Brendan and all the staff at CIBSE. It's thanks to them that we have been able to provide a programme of fantastic events, all of which have been delivered seamlessly and professionally. Through being involved in webinars delivered by other organisations I really came to appreciate just how well run the SLL events are. Our social media following has also gone from strength to strength, with 6637 Twitter and 5741 LinkedIn followers, and we also have 1450 Instagram followers now too. Despite, and perhaps because of, the pandemic, we are reaching more people than ever before. I really want us to harness this as we move forward, hopefully, out of the pandemic.

I am really looking forward to working closely with CIBSE during the coming year to build on our common goals and develop some new ones. As well as taking up the role of SLL President, I have also taken a position as co-opted member of the CIBSE Board, and through this role I will learn more about how CIBSE works and find opportunities to strengthen our collective voice. I am especially looking forward to working closely with CIBSE this year, because this year, Kevin Kelly has taken up the role of CIBSE President. As many of you know Kevin, was President of SLL in 2013. Now, before you ask, Kevin and I are not, to the best of our knowledge anyhow, related! However we are both Dubliners, and we both have links with TU Dublin; me as a graduate in 1999 and Kevin as Emeritus Professor, having had a long and distinguished career there.

I'd like to tell you about a place that is very special to me and which sparked my love of light.



Society of Light  
and Lighting

This is Newgrange, a UNESCO world heritage site, located in the Boyne Valley, north west of Dublin, where I'm from. It is believed to have been built by Neolithic farmers in around 3,200 BC, so older than Stonehenge and the Pyramids at Giza by several thousand years.

Inside the mound of earth that you can see from the outside is a long passageway that leads to an inner chamber. There is something really special about the geometry of this building...

On mornings around the winter solstice a beam of light penetrates an opening above the main entrance (called the roof-box) and travels up the 19 metre passage and into the inner chamber. As the sun rises higher, the beam widens so that the whole chamber is dramatically illuminated. I went there on a school visit in the 1990s. It wasn't the winter solstice (and it wasn't even sunny), but they have installed a lamp that simulates the winter solstice very effectively. Standing in the cold dark tomb, and seeing the first beam of light enter and gradually extend along the tomb and widen, I could both see and feel the tomb getting brighter and warmer. It was a profound experience for me and I have been fascinated by Newgrange ever since and have been back several times.

It is rich with symbolism: The shortest day of the year gives way to such beauty and warmth, death giving way to new life, and the fertility of the land for these Neolithic farmers.

Something clicked with me that day that made me want to know more about the power of daylight in buildings. Today, I am a lighting designer and daylight specialist.

And this is why we're here. We recognise the transformational power of light, that is why we choose to work with light, and why so many of us see our job as much more than just a job. And as the Society of Light and Lighting, we are a collection of people that work with light and are interested in the application of light for the benefit of people. The Society therefore has a very important role, to be the place that we can all get together, to share ideas, to formulate standards, and to harness that passion that so many of us have, to benefit people everywhere.

One of the great things about SLL is that it represents a very broad range of people who work with light: lighting designers, engineers, manufacturers and those in academic roles. One thing that is particularly special to me, is that this includes those with a focus on daylighting. This ties into one of my core beliefs about lighting, which is that if you work with light, you need to embrace it in all its forms.

The fact is, daylight cannot really be commodified in the way that artificial lighting can. That is why there needs to be a voice for daylight, and the impartiality of SLL is one of its biggest strengths here. One of the key roles that SLL has is to ensure that the importance of daylight in buildings is kept high on the agenda of any lighting guidance. The SLL is in a unique position as a professional institution to be able to talk about daylight and lighting as part of the same continuum.

In Liz Peck's presidential address in 2015, she spoke about the SLL as a lighting family tree, made up of people from a range of backgrounds and professional roles. Liz recognised that the strength of the SLL lies in this diversity. I would like to honour my friend by carrying forward her wish that the SLL should be truly representative of all who work with light and lighting.



Society of Light  
and Lighting

Let's have a look at the gender breakdown of our members. You can see from this data that our membership is more than three quarters male. Even if it turned out that all the members with no data were female, it is still overwhelmingly male. And this doesn't reflect the lighting industry.

In 2019 Light Collective carried out a survey of people working in lighting internationally, called the Lighting Family Tree. The data from this survey suggests that we actually have a pretty balanced gender split in our industry, and I would guess that the UK alone reflects a similar trend.

More data to follow from Carmela's UK Lighting Facts survey – TBC

This graph is taken from Lighting Family Tree results. It shows gender split by age group and you can see a clear distinction between the age groups above and below 40. What this data is telling us that the future is female! So if we want to represent all who work in lighting, we need to address the gender imbalance in our membership.

One of the first things we need to do is connect with the wider industry, to increase our visibility to all who work in lighting. The Women in Lighting platform is a hugely successful project that has increased the visibility of women in the industry across the world. One of its main aims has been to work with lighting event and conference organisers to ensure that there is a 50/50 gender balance among speakers and panellists. This is something that we ourselves need to follow if we want to help women working in the industry to see people like themselves speaking and participating in events. Thanks to the Women in Lighting initiative, I have seen a huge improvement in the gender balance of speakers at events over the past two years, but we need to keep going.

I would like to use my presidential platform to highlight to women across the industry that SLL membership could be for them, too.

The wonderful team behind Women in Lighting are supporting us in this aim by publishing interviews of several women from SLL on the Women in Lighting website. These have gone live (date – check with Sharon), accompanied by a social media campaign to highlight this with a compilation of short video clips about being a women in lighting who is also a member of SLL.

This is not about getting more members. This is about ensuring that our make-up reflects the industry that we represent.

A final subject that I'd like to talk about is spreading the message about light and health.

Our understanding of the role of light in human health has grown significantly over the past 10 years alone, and we have now reached a point where we can make recommendations about what light people need and at what time, in order to stay healthy.

Just earlier this month we had a fantastic webinar presented by some of the authors of the new recommendations for healthy light exposure. It really is a very exciting moment to be in lighting!

I firmly believe that it is our job, as the SLL, to spread this message! We have been talking amongst ourselves about this for long enough, now we need to engage with the wider



Society of Light  
and Lighting

construction industry and even the general public. In order to do this we need to disseminate digestible and useful information. This is difficult, as it results in a need to simplify what is quite complicated science. However, if we don't do it, who will? There are few commercial drivers for this, it is about public benefit. We need to help people make healthy choices with light, in the same way that the food industry has made many changes in order to help consumers to make informed choices about what to eat.

Over the past year and more, several initiatives have emerged in response to this need. As SLL we are in direct contact with most of the people behind these initiatives and are supporting them to some degree, whether formally or otherwise. But what is important is that, whether or not we agree with all of these approaches, THIS IS HAPPENING. And as the touchstone for lighting knowledge, we need to be at the forefront of this, and not running to keep up. As President, one of the things I would like to do is to look at ways we can push out some basic, easily digestible information that people beyond the lighting industry can engage with.

This kind of exercise often invariably necessitates simplifying what is complex science. But other health initiatives such as 5-a-day and 10,000 steps-a-day also grappled with this issue. Despite the fact that 5-a-day and 10,000-steps-a-day are gross over-simplifications of the science, they have been hugely successful at increasing awareness of the need to eat fruit & veg and the need to move as much as possible. This is about raising awareness above all, and signposting people to where they can find more detailed information.

You may have seen the article Three Principles of Healthy Living with Light & Lighting in ARC magazine last month. I co-authored this piece with Karolina Zeilinska-Dabkowska, who feels just as strongly that we have an obligation as an industry to spread the message about how to feed yourself a healthy light diet. We intend to build on this so that we can push this message beyond our industry to the people that really need to hear it.

So, to finish up I would like to reflect on where we are now, as people and as lighters.

We have endured the most challenging period of our generation, and those of us who are lucky enough to have come out the other side are now trying to look forward to a loosening of restrictions, allowing us to return to something akin to the world we had before the pandemic. My wish is that we, the Society of Light & Lighting, are a source of hope for the industry and for our members. During the past year, we have provided an unparalleled programme of online events, which has been hugely enriching to our members and the wider industry. It is more important than ever that we go forward with the same spirit, providing events and initiatives that are a source of stimulation and inspiration to those who attend them. We can be The Light at the end of the Tunnel.