

The Society of Light and Lighting

Presidential Address, 2008



'One Voice'

Eur Ing Patrick Baldrey FCIBSE FSL

Past Presidents, members, guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am deeply honoured and privileged being elected as your President in the Society of Light and Lighting's centenary year. Next February, we celebrate our 100th birthday with a party at ARC '09 at Earl's Court 2. This party will follow the 'Young Lighters of the Year Awards', so successful in February of this year. I know those present will enjoy a memorable evening, but for those unable to be there, the 12 months from 4 February will feature several special events, all with the theme of the centenary of this Society.

Issue 1. Fragmentation Versus Unification Of Our Profession

Not only am I privileged to be standing here today, as your new President, I am also favoured by taking up the position at an incredibly exciting moment when we are on the cusp of change. We are a dynamic, enthusiastic Society and, as the saying goes, nothing was ever achieved without enthusiasm. We hold in our hands the future of our profession. As I look forward to a bright future, I am mindful of our past and present. So let me start there. Where we are now. How we are perceived by the body politic.

Hitherto, our development has resulted in a fragmented profession; a profession with a common interest but one that has become a whole, divided into parts. We do not speak to the wider World with one voice. Indeed, the Society of Light and Lighting, despite its longevity and distinguished history, has at times not had a voice at all. Take, for example, the recent Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution – we, at the SLL, were not even consulted. Our voice was frozen into silence as though we had caught an interminable cold and had basically lost it, at a pivotal point.

The recent example of the Royal Commission is instructive as to how we are currently perceived and why we need to change and speak in unison, if not in unity.

In response to the Commission, I consulted a number of professional colleagues, one of whom spoke to the civil servant coordinating what they had hoped would be a coherent response to fundamental 'pinchpoints', to which we should have an answer (light pollution, crime, energy, environmental issues such as our impact on the night sky and wildlife). They commented that it had been difficult to achieve a consistent, lucid response on any issue, not least because there was no central point of communication. Besides the ILE and CIBSE, it was a case of contacting different manufacturers and even then there was no reliable, dependable response. Everyone contacted gave different modifications of an answer on the same theme. They also commented on how boring and verbose were some of the responses given and there was not one or two organizations that could be contacted for a proficient, coherent answer to basic issues. Their experience of contact with members of the lighting profession was described, for the most part, as tedious, lacklustre and uninspiring.

I am all too aware that, on the whole, this is the image we convey to those outside our profession (let alone within it). Yet we have, at the core of our common interest, issues that are of concern to the wider public and government: energy, pollution, public security, traffic safety, conservation and sustainability. Notwithstanding, we still manage to bore the pants off everyone.

We must embark on a mission to change this image and we will take a leap forward by improving our communication and speaking with one voice. We need to re-unite what the history of individual egos has harshly, albeit unintentionally, divided. As we stand, we are a crowd without wider company. We hang together or we shall hang separately.

Of course it matters what we say, but from now on, we should make a concerted effort to 'all say the same' from an agreed point of contact. At present we have the tendency to ride off, madly, in all directions.

One of my objectives is to discuss with you, and other related professional organizations, especially the ILE, PLDA, IALD and CIE, how to develop the appropriate mechanism to achieve the reality of communicating with one accord. I need your insight, acumen and understanding of our profession in order to achieve this. I will start with a request for suggestions in a forthcoming Newsletter.

A couple of weeks ago I came across the following quote from the Financial Times and it struck me as to how apt and applicable it is to current debates between the SLL, CIBSE and the ILE.

It's from Michel Izza, Chief Executive, Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. "For trust to exist between business and Government, both sides have to be prepared to listen and give ground where there is good reason to do so."

There is a real enthusiasm within CIBSE, today, to give far more support to the SLL than in the past, and I look forward to listening to and working with John Swaffield, CIBSE President, Mike Simpson, CIBSE President Elect and Stephen Matthews, Chief Executive, especially as we embark upon this exciting period of change. Our new Secretary, Liz Peck, has made a great start and I look forward to working with her, too.

Issue 2. Education and Youth

Turning now to what I regard as a key issue: education. This is inextricably intertwined with the importance of our young members. They are our future.

I see education as having two strands. The first is the sharing and dissemination of the knowledge we have, amongst ourselves. The second is formal education and tied to both is the vitality and inclusion of our young members.

Formal education will undoubtedly be improved by the proposed new BSc in Lighting. Hopefully, in time, this will furnish our profession with a highly qualified source of new members. In the meantime, we should be thinking of ways to engage with our young lighting engineers. I will, with your input, begin to consider ways of encouraging them to take a more active role in our Society. We should all encourage them to contribute articles to the Newsletter and/or the Lighting Journal. The talent is out there; we have to think of ways to make it more inclusive. Jeff Shaw and his committee are very active in encouraging young members.

I am also heartened in this endeavour by the fantastic success of the Young Lighters of the Year Awards, earlier this year. For the past decade, there have been times when we have struggled to get sufficient high quality papers to have a final. This year, there was an unprecedented number of exceptionally good papers. Rather than struggling to make up a decent cohort of finalists, we actually expanded the number of finalists who could present their contributions. The interest and verve is already present within our Society and the Profession as a whole, both here in the UK and further afield. As President, I regard it as an important aspect of my role to ensure that our Society's young engineers submit papers on what they see as burning issues. We should start immediately by publicizing and repeatedly promoting this event, as a way of

persuading our members to develop their self confidence, to apply and compete. Again, this can be done through the Newsletter and the Lighting Journal, but these written sources should also be augmented by mentoring from us old lags. I can speak for myself when I say that coming up to sixty is hard in many ways.

“I’m constantly being asked to do more and more things and I’m not yet decrepit enough to turn them down.”

Regional Provision

Some of our regions hold joint meetings with the equivalent region of the ILE. There is tremendous scope to pool resources and increase collaboration between the two Institutions, at a regional level. Together, Stephen Lisk and I will be launching a new initiative to encourage closer working relationships. This, in turn, should increase our understanding of each other and gradually contribute to the objective of speaking with one voice.

If education makes us what we are, then there is scope for improvement. Our recent survey of members’ needs highlighted a wish for more widespread regional services. I’m pleased that our Immediate Past President, Tony Ownsworth, who has done a great job over the past year, is going to oversee the Lighting Masterclasses, targeted at regional level, for the next two years. Together we are looking to increase their number. Obviously, we are grateful to our sponsors: Holophane, Philips and Thorn, who do a great job in ensuring the high quality of the technical content.

I’d like, at this stage, to acknowledge and thank our Sustaining Members. Thank you for your support which we much appreciate.

Environmental Issues

Environmental issues are becoming ever more important with energy top of the list. As lighters, we are energy users, not energy conservers. However, it is our duty to use that energy as effectively as possible. The current ‘Ban the Bulb’ debate is a wonderful opportunity for the SLL to put the case for quality in lighting and generally add to the knowledge of the public – and politicians.

So, what mechanism do we have for getting these points across? A recent APPLG luncheon at the House of Commons allowed representatives from the SLL, ILE and LIF the opportunity to speak with the Climate Change Minister, Joan Ruddock. We were able to speak with one voice. A unified voice. More of these APPLG luncheons are planned. The next will focus on street lighting, in June, and, with some local authorities turning lights out, we have another opportunity to speak with one voice with the campaign 'Invest to Save'.

Conclusion

We need to improve our communication within and without our Society. Speaking with one voice is essential. Nonetheless, we must avoid simply being a voice and nothing more. At a time when there is talk of working more closely together for the good of all, it seems to me implausible that the mutterings of factions or egos, for and against, this or that, should prevail against the voice of our future profession. By uniting, we will prevail; by maintaining unnecessary division, we will fail. Although divided duties and loyalties exist, open and honest discussion will enable us to build a stronger future and that is my role. At which point I will finish. Although if there is anyone here I have not insulted, then I do beg their pardon.

patrickb@urbislighting.com