

Dan Lister – Presidential Address

14 May 2024, Tiled Hall, Leeds Art Gallery



Introduction

Good evening and welcome, Past Presidents, Members, Honoured guests and Friends. I feel incredibly privileged to be here accepting the role of President of the Society of Light and Lighting.

There are so many people to thank who have helped me to reach this point, I simply don't know where to start. The Society owes an awful lot to the dedicated professionals behind us within CIBSE and the whole SLL family. Special thanks are due to Brendan Keely, the secretary of the SLL and Fiona Fanning our SLL Membership Executive. So, thank you Brendan and Fiona; without whom nothing would happen.

Also, a huge thank you to all of the presidents, past and future, for their amazing work and dedication to the Society. A special thank you to Helen for handing over the SLL in such good shape having worked tirelessly to achieve so much in what is a very short space of time.

Welcome to Yorkshire

Andrew set the precedent by taking the AGM on the road to Manchester in 2022, and I'm pleased so many of you have made the journey to join me here in Leeds today.

Many who know me are aware I'm a proud Yorkshire man. Born and raised in North Yorkshire, studied and now live in Sheffield and having worked throughout West Yorkshire and the East Riding – Leeds has been a constant and reliable node throughout my life.

It warms my heart to see you all gathered here today in the Leeds Art Gallery Tiled Hall, a space steeped in history. The Gallery, with its grandeur and elegance, has witnessed the evolution of art, culture, and innovation. And now, as we convene here, it is our shared passion for light that unites us.

Though it is moments like these that do make you reflect how on earth have I managed to land myself in this situation....

So please allow me the opportunity to indulge this urge and share my journey here, accompanied by some meandering images of past projects.

As with many in this room, becoming a lighting designer was not a conscious career path when leaving the school gate. Having grown up in a small rural North Yorkshire town and following years of summer jobs labouring on my uncle's farm, I travelled South to study electronic engineering in Sheffield.

My degree specialised in the design of computers, but as part of my studies I was required to undertake project work with an external industry partner. I was fortuitously allocated to a large multi-disciplinary engineering consultancy firm and while primarily motivated to avoid another summer on the farm, I approached them as to the possibility of a summer job.

Arup

My electrical engineering internship gave me my first glimpse of lighting design – working on the remodelling of a church to incorporate a community centre. The process of lighting design fascinated me; the balance between the theoretical engineering lead amenity of light, with the need to mentally visualise the impact of your choices, captivated me at first lumen calculation. I was fascinated how small considerations at design, like the offset of a downlight from a wall, could change the perception and success of a space – fusing engineering with aesthetics.

Twenty-five years later, I'm still within the same organisation, however my career path has been far from typical. What began as an interest in a small part of my job grew into enthusiasm to do more, demonstrating one project at a time the value of careful and considered design.

During those early years, local projects requesting specialist lighting designers were few and far between. This drew out an entrepreneurial spirit, developing skills across the broadest gamut of lighting related challenges. Projects ranged from road lighting to daylight, environmental impact assessment to place making, museums to universities and from local tennis courts to global sporting events.

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I am profoundly grateful for the privilege of working with a host of remarkable mentors and experienced colleagues who have nurtured my passion for lighting and fostered my development. I've had the honour of being part of a distinguished group that includes numerous stalwarts of the SLL, encompassing two former Presidents, several recipients of the President's Medal, more than a handful of past Young Lighters of the Year, and as we've witnessed tonight, an Honorary Fellow. Their generosity in sharing their time, wisdom, and experience has been unwavering. They have taught me to challenge the obvious, spurred creativity, and offered encouragement to venture beyond conventional limits. For this, I will forever be grateful.

SLL

The SLL, CIBSE and the importance of personal professional development has been a constant backdrop to my career progression, though my own involvement with the Society started much later.

It was in a venue similar to this following an SLL Masterclass in Sheffield's Cutlers Hall that the then president-elect John Ashton asked whether I would take on the role as the Yorkshire Regional Lighting Representative. Formally taking the position in spring 2014.

For me, sitting on the Regions Committee provided the opportunity to consider our industry beyond the boundaries of the county; engaging with others to better appreciate the challenges we all face and discuss possible solutions in an open and friendly forum.

The regional representative role also came with an invitation to sit on the Society's Council, where the strategic challenges SLL members face are debated as to what, as an industry, we could do to raise awareness and elevate standards across the board.

Over the years these discussions have covered a number of significant topics including definition of LED quality, embodied carbon, circular economy, circadian lighting, STEM engagement to enthuse the next generation of lighting designers, as well as significant topics such as the impact of the Grenfell tragedy and how we can improve standards and behaviours within our profession.

The outcome of each debate being actioned as an initiative, event, a lighting guide, fact file or in extreme cases writing a new Technical Memorandum... or two.

The common denominator is that each topic has a passionate professional willing to donate their time and champion the subject. Though our champions rarely work alone. Many of these allegiances are formed during regional CPD and social events, or post Council meeting debriefs with a beverage in hand – creating our rich community of lighting evangelists where our day-job allegiances are left at the door for the benefit of the industry.

I've learnt that in such circumstances it is possible to create a vision and make a noise greater than the sum of our parts, and in our small way change the world.

This cannot be better exemplified by the Society's response to the UNESCO International Year of Light, coordinated by our late dear friend and predecessor Liz Peck in her presidential year in 2015.

For me, this brought to life the amazing generosity, enthusiasm and passion for light that our members have. The legacy is Night of Heritage Light which spawned a number of spin-off events particularly aimed at the next generation of lighting designers; the result being the creation of Pockets of Light where we engage with school age children as part of local lighting festivals. The most recent you've heard about here in Leeds last year as part of Light Night Leeds 2023.

The Future

But what does the future hold?

Our industry faces many challenges daily; ecological impact, technological advances, changing regulations, budget and financial constraints, and that's not to mention generative AI.

But arguably the climate crisis poses the greatest risk to us all, while a number of countries have committed to net zero emission targets, many are not on track to achieve their goals. I'm proud to be part of an industry that has

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embraced the need for change, with significant steps made technologically that deliver meaningful reductions in operational carbon. This coupled with the development and adoption of TM65.2 and TM66 by specifiers and manufacturers alike, along with the imminent release of BS 8887 promising a code of practice for the remanufacture of luminaires, collectively provide us the tools to tackle the carbon contained within the products we use.

Ultimately, we're all looking to provide our clients with spaces that can be considered high performance; But what does this mean as lighting professionals?

When I look at how the industry talks about performance, all too often the approach is reductive, focusing on technical compliance, practical utility or wellbeing through the offer of "circadian products". We are seemingly in a race to lowest carbon by only talking about 'How' we are going to do it, without thinking about "Who" we are doing it for and "why".

Lighting performance has many aspects – as a minimum, buildings and places must be safe for people and sufficient light for the task in hand; but we know lighting can much more broadly influence human experience, society at large and the environment.

I believe we've unintendedly settled ourselves into a comfortable corner that speaks directly to what Client's want to hear, not necessarily more broadly about the holistic performance of lit spaces that Client's need to hear about.

We know that good lighting considers human needs, aesthetics, and the interplay between light and our senses. It transforms spaces, enhances experiences, and contributes to a healthier, happier environment for all.

What happened to the quality of light?

We're very good at measuring the calculable (energy, embodied carbon, light spill, cost etc), but not so good at classifying the less tangible aspects such as quality, perception, experience, visual comfort, occupant comfort and considering the needs of different parts of our society.

That is by no means meant to dismiss the amazing work of our Members who are educating clients as to the importance of good lighting, the tenacity of our volunteers who donate time to develop our standards and guidance documents or the forward thinking companies that are challenging the historic construction norms one project at a time.

I believe that as an industry we need to be better at describing the benefits of good quality lighting, in a consistent manner, so that we're advancing the narrative in the same direction. Clients should be confident that when engaging with members of the Society, they are getting considered and balanced expert knowledge – ideally evidence based and supported with academic rigour, certainly more than just sales rhetoric.

It is the role of the Society to provide opportunity to access this knowledge, supporting the ongoing Professional Development of our members and assist in the evolution of the industry, moving the market towards higher performing lit environments.

CIBSE, the Society of Light and Lighting, and our members have a role to play in all of this. We collectively are the curators of building performance and carry the moral responsibility to ensure that we are going beyond "bear minimum"; delivering the "best affordable" outcomes for our clients and the people who will use the spaces.

The issue is nothing new, the irony is not lost on me that the theme for the SLL Masterclass held in Sheffield over 10 years ago was titled "Quality Up, Energy Down".

The coming year

So, what can we do about it?

In short, concentrate our message and spread the word. Raise awareness of the society, our activities, publications and contribution to the industry.

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As an industry, we very successfully transitioned ourselves away from conventional light sources. We are starting to see our efforts influence clients as to their approach to embodied carbon, incorporating circular economy principles into their business as usual activity and starting to move the dial on carbon savings now and for the future.

Our sector is at the forefront, surpassing many other industries within the construction field. We are proactively adapting to legislative requirements and showcasing the potential of robust leadership from an engaged and well-supported professional association. The value that our Members can bring to the table is gaining recognition among our collaborators, thereby strengthening our brand and standing in the industry. It's now crucial to leverage this platform to remind our clients about the importance of looking beyond carbon. We need to emphasise that the quality of light and the creation of spaces for people are equally significant. After all, enhancing the human experience is at the core of our work.

All of our achievements are rooted in the capability, creativity, and professionalism of our Members. We must amplify our voice in engaging with the wider industry, celebrate the accomplishments of our members, and harness their enthusiasm. We need to articulate more clearly within the industry what it means to be an Associate, Member, or Fellow of the Society and what the benefits are to projects, so that it is recognised as a symbol of ability and excellence.

The coming year will see our first steps in formally aligning our professional membership requirements of MSLL with that of the Engineering Council. This is a substantial undertaking, and not one taken lightly when a significant proportion of the Society's membership are not, and do not, consider themselves to be engineers. This is not about becoming more scientifically focused, but rather that by clearly articulating the rigour of our membership criteria and the need for commitment to continuous professional development, we can more effectively showcase the value our members can contribute to clients and projects.

In November we will once again be at Light2Perform, as part of Build2Perform exhibition. While the programme is still in development, the theme for this year will be very much aligned with performance of lighting from a human experience perspective, moving away from the traditional energy/carbon metric of lighting performance. The theme for our stage will investigate lighting quality in its broadest definition and cover lighting to support visual impaired, the neurodiverse, spectral quality of light and lighting to support the creation of healthy environments, among other topics. We are in the process of lining up some great speakers to come and share their thoughts, experience and research around quality of light, health and wellbeing.

We will once again be using the event to announce the winner of the Young Lighter of the Year Award and hear their presentation. Before then we'll be hosting the final in a slightly different manner to that of recent years – I do hope you will be able to join us at this event in the autumn. The submissions for this year are now in and Kristina and the panel are in the process of shortlisting the finalists. I have to say the applications are of an exceptionally high quality and in large numbers - I'm very much looking forward to hearing their presentations.

Our Technical & Publications Committee, led by Sophie Parry, continues to go from strength to strength. As the custodians of our Lighting Guides and contributions to technical publications across CIBSE they are the unsung heroes of the Society. The Committee are continuously reviewing or revising our publications, while delivering amazing new content. Including plans for a new Lighting Guide (LG23) on Creative and Architectural lighting; hopefully to be released by the end of the year/early next year.

In summary, I am looking forward to my year in post and the adventure I'm sure it will bring. But right now, I would like to invite you to join me for refreshments and hope to talk to you all later. Thank you for listening.