

Presidents Valedictory Address

Good evening members.

I believe I can confidently declare my Presidential year to have been unique! I must be the only President who as never presided over a meeting in person, never shaken the hand of a member nor a speaker during the year, and never left my home on any club night. Yet I attended all the meetings. Such has been the strangeness of a year dominated by a world pandemic, and a year of meetings only possible because of the wonders of Zoom video conferencing.

This will be the second year we have held a virtual AGM by meeting online. I sincerely hope it will be the last.

Everything moving online had a number of consequences. Firstly, there were around a dozen members who didn't renew their membership largely due to there being no meetings in person. This included some stalwarts of the club.

Moving online also caused some speakers to withdraw from the planned programme. Fortunately, these gaps were filled reasonably quickly and easily by different speakers who were very willing to embrace the online approach. It also had the advantage of us being able to invite speakers from far and wide across the country and even from other countries. And at this point I must thank John Ferretti for his hard work dealing with the programme, booking speakers and making all the changes required. Well done, John. It has been an excellent varied programme with some outstanding speakers. Thank you.

Similarly, the Annual Exhibition had to be altered from the usual format of selecting and displaying prints, to a fully digital affair with the selected images showing on the website. Perspectives Exhibition was also only shown online but was very successful. My thanks to John Scholey and his team for taking up the challenge of a different kind of exhibition. This, of course, was John's last Annual. After four years in the role he is standing down together with his right hand lady, Linda Jackson. Many, many, thanks for your dedication to the task and the professional way in which you have delivered our Exhibitions to such a consistent high standard. Eddie Shewood has very kindly volunteered for the post of Annual Exhibition Secretary. I wish him every success and I ask all of you to support him in what is an important role in the life of the Society. But quite understandably, Eddie has been reluctant to take on the additional job of running the Perspectives Exhibition in the Winter Gardens and so we are still seeking a volunteer for this separate task.

The Members print competition had to morph into the Members online digital images competition. Many of us were sad that there were no prints, but was still successful and my thanks to Jane who overcame the challenges of using Dicentra software over Zoom and thus ensured a successful competition.

Largely brought about because of the advent of meetings on Zoom we have embarked on a twinning arrangement with Norwich and District Photographic Society. Our first joint

meeting was held some weeks ago and another one is planned for the summer. Only time will tell how this relationship will develop.

The whole world of photography lectures and talks seems to have moved online. It will be interesting to see to what extent this remains the case as we return to normality, or at least to what everyone seems to be calling the 'new normal'. Council has already taken the decision to renew our Zoom licence for another year and John Ferretti has planned three Tuesday evenings in next year's programme to be online via Zoom.

Because we can't meet up in person in groups yet, as we did last year, the Summer Programme has been supplemented by meeting online, at least in part. Hopefully we may be able to meet up to take photographs later in the summer. I know June Gorman has this situation under review.

I want to give my thanks and praise to all the Council members who have served over the past 12 months. But in addition to John Ferretti and John Scholey there are a few others I should mention for their particular contributions.

Erica Oram has been looking after the post of External Exhibition Secretary which I vacated in order to become President. Next year I will once again resume the task of dealing with entries to external exhibitions and competitions. But as I take up responsibility for the Inter-club Knockout Competition it will be a hard act to follow considering this year we reached a best ever fourth place.

John Gorman has done a sterling job with publicity, keeping the name of the club in the local media and raising our profile. Lots of members' photographs have been published so they have been viewed by many more people than otherwise would have been the case.

Thank you also to Secretary Dave Elliott, Treasurer Dean Symonds and Membership Secretary Judy Smith for their hard work. These jobs are very largely administrative and so often undervalued, but they are absolutely vital to the smooth running of the club.

Some Council members have played a key role in maintaining and developing the Society's presence online and keep members in contact through the internet. Mike Newman looking after Forum and Critique groups, and Steve Dorey our webmaster who has also successfully overseen our move to a new website hosting service. While Gareth Morgan and John Ferretti have created respectively Facebook and Instagram accounts for SPS. Only our Head Steward, Chris Perry found himself without meetings and hence without a job, and so declared himself to be furloughed, on full pay, which is zilch of course!

This brings me to the President's Award. I am giving this year's award to someone who has gone well above and beyond the call of duty. And I want to recognise the exceptional service given to the club during his extended year in office. Our retiring Past President Gareth Morgan. Due to the pandemic Gareth served as President for 15 months not 12. He skilfully steered the club through the early days of lockdown, got us online, and established an online summer programme when we were all stuck at home. But before dealing with the pandemic, the start of his Presidency was eventful and required much more commitment

than is usual as he had to deal with those looking after the estate of Terry Irons who sadly passed away while in possession of key pieces of SPS equipment. An eventful, challenging, even turbulent year during which he did much more for the club than I, and many other presidents, have ever done or had to do. Gareth, please accept this award in gratitude and recognition of your excellent leadership and all your hard work that I believe left the club stronger, not weaker, despite all that happened during your year in office.

My thanks and best wishes to Jane Perryman as she takes up the duties of President, a role which I have been honoured to fulfil. I trust you will enjoy the year as I have. May your speakers exceed expectations. And may your exhibitions and events run smoothly. And, unlike Gareth and me, may you have a year as near normal as possible – I can think of no greater blessing than having a year where it is only eventful in ways that are planned and expected.

Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to all you, the members, who have stuck it out and stayed with it, when it was impossible to meet together except through a computer screen. I hope you have enjoyed the online talks, the online competitions and online Exhibitions. Thank you to those who sent comments of appreciation and support for the events and speakers. My only wish is that my unique year remains just that, unique and in the autumn we will all be able to start meeting together once again.

Richard Hall