

The Chromatographic Society; Britain's Best Kept Chromatography Secret?

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After recently becoming President of the Chromatographic Society, I thought it both timely and apt to reflect on how the Society has changed over the last decade and outline some of my initial thoughts on how the Society will look to progress during my tenure and in years to come.

The Chromatographic Society has a proud heritage. By way of a brief history lesson, the Society (often shortened to 'ChromSoc') was founded in 1956 and was originally known as the Gas Chromatography discussion group. Distinguished luminaries such as Archer Martin and Dennis Desty were key to its early development, in a time when chromatographic science was developing rapidly and a popular area for scientific investment. The Society has always had a strong following in the UK, but was also one of the founding organisations for the International Symposium on Chromatography (ISC) in 1956, an organisation we continue to support to this day. While the initial focus for the Society was as discussion group for gas chromatography, as liquid chromatography became more prevalent in the late 1960's, the Society changed its name to The Chromatographic Society and the focus shifted gradually from discussion sessions of largely UK based scientists to meetings of increased frequency covering a much broader separation science including internationally prominent speakers, a practice the current committee continues to pursue.

The first point to note is the Society has had a number of Presidents over the last decade –Chris Bevan (2001-2007), John Lough (2007-2009), Alan Handley (2009-2014) and now myself. The Society is at its heart is a meeting's society. Each of my predecessors has done an excellent job in progressing the Society and they have consistently delivered meeting programmes each year that are varied in their content and provide excellent educational and networking opportunities with fellow chromatographers. Many of these meetings have continued to flourish like the Reid Bioforum or are becoming increasingly established in their own right, for example the biannual GC and Clinical Analysis meetings (the latter having recently been run in September and a review can be found in this edition of Chromatography Today). These meetings while educational also serve to provide the core funds we use to support many of our outreach activities.

Leading on from this previous point, the past Presidents have also overseen an increasing investment in UK based chromatographic research and individual researchers. One of the most prominent schemes was the formation of the John Dolphin Fellowship trust

supporting PhD students travel to international chromatography meetings, which is a key aspect of their development. Additionally, in partnership with other learned societies such as the British Mass Spectrometry Society (BMSS) we support academic research through summer studentships. We will also investigate how we may use our financial reserves to fund and part-fund MSc research into separation science. We have continued to support international meetings, either being members of the permanent scientific committee like the ISC or the PBA conference series, or by providing meeting sponsorship and travel bursaries to the HPLC series of symposia. Our latest fund to support separation scientists is the 'industrial bursary fund', designed to support separation scientists in industry, allowing them to attend UK based separation science events. More information on this will be provided in the next edition of Chromatography Today. Moving forward, we will continue to support separation science researchers and look for new ways to help them.

Alongside these activities, the Society has continued to recognise the impact of separation scientists both nationally and internationally through our Jubilee and Martin medals. These awards are internationally recognised and highly regarded. During the last decade, the selection process has continued to be open to our membership but the process has increased in detail, thoroughness and rigour to ensure we continue to select the most worthy candidates. The announcement of the winners for the 2015 medals is in this edition of Chromatography Today. Additionally, we plan to reinvigorate our student award, which was first awarded in 2011. This award recognises undergraduate students who have achieved a significant level of experience or expertise in an area of separation science in an academic or industrial environment. We are also discussing whether to inaugurate an award reflecting the achievements of UK based chromatographers and if this progresses we will obviously share this news with you.

More recently, Alan Handley has been pivotal in refocussing the Society's charitable status which has involved the creation of a holding company called 'ChromSoc Limited' which will allow us to better meet our commitments to the Charities Commission. This has taken

considerable effort but allows the Society to better meet its legal obligations in the future. This was not a small undertaking and Alan should receive great credit for resolving this situation.

Unfortunately our membership has gradually fallen over the last ten years which is likely due to a number of factors. Many chromatographers working in industry are fortunate enough to have their company pay for one membership to a scientific society, and this is typically the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) or the Society of the Chemical Industry (SCI) who's fees are significantly higher, but offer a greater profile and greater range of benefits than the Chromatographic Society. Also, the value of membership to the Chromatographic Society has not been completely apparent or compelling enough for chromatographers to join us and arguably our visibility is not as high as we would aspire for it to be nationally (but is paradoxically high overseas). I will discuss this in more detail later and how we hope to address this going forward.

Over the last few months, the Chromatographic Society committee have been reflecting on what more we can do to better promote and support the development of chromatography in the UK while growing our own organisation to better support these activities. While we are principally recognised as a meetings society, we also wish to increase our membership base. The principal benefit to being a member of the Chromatographic Society is the significant discount we offer for chromatographers to attend our meetings (and also discounts for partner organisations meetings such as the BMSS). However, we do have a range of other benefits which can be found on our website (www.chromsoc.co.uk). Being a member also entitles research students to access bursaries for attending chromatographic meetings organised by the Chromatographic Society and other partner organisations. Additionally, academics can access research funding for short projects (typically three months over the summer) and this scheme has ran successfully for the last three years. We are also looking at ways we can further improve membership benefits and one area we are actively working on is providing a members magazine called 'ChromCom' which will include technical articles, Society news and meeting information (previews, reviews and updates) and the first edition will be available to members in 2015.

The use of chromatography has probably never been more utilised - reaching into many branches of measurement science across numerous industries and in that respect, chromatography is probably in a healthier state than it has ever been in the UK. However, most chromatographers with an overview of the science in the UK are agreed that chromatography is much less of a focus in academia and largely 'dumbed-down' within most industries. In many UK research groups, chromatography is largely a tool to obtain a measurement rather than being a core research area. In industry, such is the focus on speed and throughput that generic methods and 'walk-up' or 'open-access', accompanied by pre-prepared chromatography kits for specific applications are the norm for many types of analysis which largely reduces the need for an analyst to have any in depth knowledge of chromatography. So, one of the main question for the Society moving forward is "How do we re-engage academia and industry to refocus on chromatographic science?"

This is not a trivial issue, and not one the Society can address by itself.

Colleagues on the committee are crystallising plans as to how to address this issue with suggestions involving industry and academia outreach through training by specialists (e.g. an official ChromSoc lecturer similar to the BMSS's lecturer position), and increasing our financial support for novice chromatographers working in industry to attend separation science meetings alongside our current support for academics. The Society would like to collaborate with other groups with a similar vision, so please get in contact with us if you are interested via chromsoc@meetingmakers.co.uk.

We will continue to work with or develop relationships with other learned societies both nationally and internationally who share our will and vision to support and progress chromatographic science. It is my intention that the Society look to partner successful international organisations that have a strong record in this regard. Through strengthening these links we will also look to influence the respective bodies associated with the major international separation science meetings to create an opportunity to successfully bid for a major chromatographic meeting to be held in the UK within the next decade.

In terms of meeting organisation we will continue to deliver on our core role and 2015 will be another busy year for the Society with five meetings planned across a range of topics (see the meeting calendar at the end of this edition for more information). However, 2016 is the Society's diamond jubilee and we are working up ideas to celebrate our 60th anniversary in (hopefully) grand fashion. We'll obviously keep you all posted. Key to successful meetings are (i) an interesting and viable meeting topic, (ii) chromatographers interested in attending our meetings and (iii) sponsorship to run these meetings. The majority of our meeting sponsorship comes via vendor exhibitions. Whilst we try to maximise the benefit to vendors in sponsoring our meetings, we need to work more closely with them and become better partners. To this end, we are creating a role on the committee which will focus on developing our relationship with sponsors to ensure that our meetings meet their needs and maximise their exposure which our past President, Alan Handley has kindly agreed to lead. Indeed we should also use this forum for steering and coordinating the separation science agenda in the UK, bringing all interested parties (including academics and industrialists) into one place so synergies can be identified and UK separation science progressed.

Alongside all these changes we are also undergoing a rebranding exercise. You may have noted we have changed our logo and we are in the process of redeveloping our website to make it more intuitive, content rich and informative. Please look out for the changes and while you're at it, why don't you follow us on LinkedIn which will provide you with regular updates on our activities.

I hope this has provided a flavour of the Chromatographic Society's activities and direction over the next few years. Hopefully it is one that is of interest to you whatever level of chromatography practitioner you are or whether you work in academia or industry. Having read this, I hope you might consider joining us (via our website - www.chromsoc.com) and help us support and develop this key branch of science while helping us stop being Britain's best chromatography secret! Please let us know your thoughts and ideas how we can move separation science and the Society forward together.