



Above, Showlight delegates on the steps of Hopetoun House. Inset, chairman John Watt, the red-shirted speck in the distance, welcomes delegates to the event.

Sweet Talking...

Showlight 2001 shall never be forgot - Tony Gottelier walks us through the highlights

After having spent the weekend in Helensborough with friends, and undertaking several outdoor excursions immersed in Scottish mist, as opposed to Scotch mist which is something else entirely (and of which more later), it was quite a shock to wake up to unexpected and blazing heat for the first day of Showlight 2001. However, this weather was certainly appropriate as, in a very literal sense, the sun seemingly bathed this fourth quadrennial colloquium on entertainment lighting, in a golden glow throughout.

Huge credit has to go to the committee for the success that Showlight was once again. Some of the members of this panel will be mentioned in this article, some will not, if only because their roles were more behind the scenes, as it were, but all deserve fulsome praise for their contribution to a thoroughly rewarding and convivial event. None more so than long-suffering chairperson, and fellow L&SI columnist, John Watt. For, Watty's affable charm and wit was a thread that ran throughout. By the end, he was no doubt wishing that he had been born with a different surname, so that an alternative career might have presented itself. But then, I suppose the obvious option of heating engineer isn't quite as glamorous either, despite the fact that John's skills in the hot air department are second to none.

The first surprise, on entering the Festival Theatre in Edinburgh, was to discover that the exhibition had been set out on the stage (if only someone had told me that beforehand, it would have saved me a lot of grief, as it happens), but never mind, this novel idea had a lot going for it. Each booth, and in this case I do mean booth, not stand, was divided by a sail-like divider. The consequence was, that from the auditorium, the stage took on the appearance of a marina for

small boats, all bobbing around together. Providing the lighting for this collection was ETC. It was quite a design achievement to cram some 40 exhibitors, together with catering facilities for coffee, tea and lunch, plus room for the delegates to meander between the stalls during refreshment breaks, all on a single stage - even one as large as the Festival's. It made for a unique experience and, I am sure, was appreciated by all concerned.

As is well-known, the main attraction of Showlight has always been the facility it provides in relaxed surroundings, for an interchange of ideas among friends whose common denominator is this strange industry in which we all find ourselves. Aside from what goes on in the 'corridors and tearooms', and at the various social events, this is largely achieved through the platform speakers and the iterative sessions afterwards. So, three times daily the curtain closed on the Showlight exhibition, the delegates returned to their seats in the auditorium, and the serious matter of information exchange began.

For the first time at this conference, serious presentation technology was used so that a giant image of each speaker was displayed on a screen simultaneously with each paper. So, we finally caught up with the real world of commercial product launches and corporate ballyhoos, thanks in part to the loan of a DLP (Digital Light Projector) from DPL (Digital Projection Ltd) - steady on the acronyms! The AV and audio was run from the front of balcony through the stalwart work of Bernie Davis and Rick Dines and the team from Northern Light who had marshalled and installed all the gear.

This year we were treated to a wide range of topics from the Opera House, courtesy of Mark White, to





Left, one of the key Showlight moments - the Beating of the Retreat in front of Hopetoun House.

Below, delegates enjoy a drink on the roof terrace of Hopetoun.

Bottom, delegates take a break at the Firth of Forth as part of the Tuesday afternoon backstage visits.



Showlight over the years - in fact, since day one. So, John Watt made a presentation to him to mark the occasion.

Later, David Taylor made an amusing speech of thanks to our host on behalf of the guests. When the coffee arrived we thought it was all over, although the fat lady was not in evidence, nor in full voice, but how wrong we were. Summoned to the steps for what we thought might be a fireworks display, we were treated to some fireworks of a completely unexpected kind, and one which must have given even Robert Ormbo pause. With all 300 guests assembled, facing the long view to the Forth Bridge, suddenly a perfect square of white light appeared, as if from nowhere, on the lawn some two or three hundred metres in front of us to reveal a piped band beating the retreat. It was one of those hair-bristling (if I had any) moments.



Imperceptibly, they strode towards us in the misty light until, facing the stairs, the pipe major requested, "permission to retire, sir" of temporary Colonel Watt, he of the 'light' infantry. "Permission granted" quoth he, and after a stiff salute, the band smartly wheeled away and disappeared to the sounds of the Last Post. However sophisticated we may be, one can't help falling for this stuff! This magical moment came courtesy of John Allen's Northern Light.

On the final day, following the afternoon session, by now plain Mister, John Watt

deferred to Francis Reid, opera lover, theatre lover, plenipotentiary lighting technology enthusiast and general bon viveur, to give the valedictory speech. Now the fat lady was close at hand, but not before a reprise of the previous night's 'retreat' on the big screens.

In closing, I must add a vote of thanks to Allen Campbell and his team of unflappable technicians at the Festival Theatre, whose solid support to the organisers cannot be underestimated.

The success of Showlight 2001 was, as always, in the mix of its delegates, and this year the more so, because of the welcome addition of many friends from the United States. We will see you all again in four years time, for Auld Lang Syne.

We're now looking for venues for the 2005 event and any suggestions are welcome. Please e-mail ruth@plasa.org

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