

Ian Downey



Ian Downey, left, being presented with the Founders Award by the RSPSoc President, Paul Curran at RSPSoc 2010

Citation: For services to the RSPSoc

The current Council, two former Chairmen and a former Honorary General Secretary are strongly of the view that Ian Downey is a worthy recipient for the Society's Founders Award in 2010. This view is held not simply because of Ian's distinguished record of service to the Society, especially through its Council, but because of his diplomatic and considered chairing of the Society in challenging times. For Ian was the Chairman who steered the Society through the turbulent waters that will inevitably result when two busy rivers merge; he chaired the Society immediately following the formation of the Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society by amalgamation of the remote sensing and photogrammetry communities. He may have come from the former but he tried hard to represent the latter's views, equally and fairly. This is all the more impressive when you consider that the first Chairman was to have been a photogrammetrist. When this didn't transpire, it was Ian who stepped into the breach, only the first of many calm but decisive actions that he was to take during his term of office. To characterise this period, it did no less than shape the Society that we know and love today; Ian may have inherited two merged Societies, but he passed on to his successors one RSPSoc.

During and after the merger, a particular style of leadership was required and Ian provided just the right model, taking the hard decisions that the merger necessitated but at the same time always taking account of the traditions and concerns of each community. His attitude and leadership style during this period was crucial to the success of the process. He always tried to understand the point of view of the different players and come up with a solution that did not disadvantage anyone. The trick in so doing was to engineer a win-win result, or at least a score draw, and avoid a lose-lose position, and Ian did this especially well. This skill was honed before he became Chairman, when he played a critical role in the negotiations that led up to the merger. To cite a concrete example, Ian came up with the logo and name for the new Society by incorporating the essential elements of both; indeed, it was he who spotted that if "photogrammetric" was changed to "photogrammetry", the new name became simpler, whilst the heritage of both former Societies was still preserved.

Ian's greatest success as Chairman was probably to allow time for some unsatisfactory solutions, which had initially been necessary for the merger to happen, to be quietly sorted out as it became apparent to the majority that they did not work. In so doing, Ian's real strengths were his ability to understand the different initial perspectives that could legitimately be taken on contentious issues; his ability to identify the logical, longer term solutions; but above all, his patience, which created the most essential ingredient, time. He was never afraid to revisit the less logical decisions and iron out their wrinkles, nor to take the unpopular decisions when it proved necessary. When he did this, he carried the majority of people with him by explaining lucidly why these decisions were necessary.

It was a pleasure to work with Ian on Council and as Vice-Chairman and he was a fine mentor when my own time came to serve as Chairman. He gave Council members clear responsibility for their briefs but backed them up and pitched in when necessary. Under his leadership, the key activities of Council took shape; for example, developing the first Annual Conference, a new approach to External Affairs, solutions to issues with the new Society's Publications and early steps to encourage Professional Development. I saw all this at first hand, so it is a pleasure and a privilege to provide this citation for Ian Downey, the first Chairman of the Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society; he not only merits the Founders Award, but he can truly be considered a founder in his own right.