

John W Allan

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As a graduate of Physics and Materials Science from the University of Warwick in 1979, John's specialism was in material purity and in particular the study of glass as a potential storage media for radioactive waste. John then joined Johnson Matthey Chemicals in Cambridge as a graduate commercial trainee, where his highlight was buying and selling gold bullion. It is probably fair to say that John joined the remote sensing and photogrammetry industry almost by accident, which was by way of Cambridge Instruments. His grounding in materials science qualified him for heading up their crystal growing capability, but as fate would have it, they also developed image analysis equipment and this became his first exposure to image processing technology and thereby remote sensing – although the link to remote sensing was still quite tenuous!

He moved to GEMS of Cambridge in 1985 at a time when the research and commercial potential of remote sensing was only just beginning to emerge and the DTI had just established the National Remote Sensing Centre, so John showed he had good timing and visionary foresight too! He left an impressive legacy at GEMS, where he had headed up the new Gemstone geo-processing unit. It was clear from his time there that he was very ambitious and endlessly energetic, which later became apparent in his pursuit of developing a greater remote sensing awareness, almost evangelism, in the UK. Not that the remote sensing and photogrammetry industry has a Billy Graham character, but his dynamism, ambition and vociferous nature would make him a contender for this and in so doing, he has become a reputable professional in the commercial remote sensing industry.

John's pioneering attitude has created a notable signature of his, which is being the first employee in a range of companies, most notably ERDAS (UK) Limited in Cambridge which he was instrumental in establishing. He grew this company from three employees in 1993 and with increasing levels of profitability and market dominance, he went on to establish ERDAS International to develop the ERDAS brand overseas as well. Always at the heart of new initiatives, John has continued to plough a successful career along the same lines by being the first helmsman at BAE Systems' Geospatial unit (Incyte) in Cambridge in 2002 and in 2007 likewise was selected by Digital Globe Inc to help establish their first non-US office.

John has an infectious passion for new technology (matched only by his passion for golf), which he has found a good outlet for in software and latterly in high resolution data. Always one for seeing the potential in the technology, John has been a key figure in commercial remote sensing in the UK and it must be said that all the while he has added to the notoriety of Cambridge as being an epicentre for geospatial endeavour!

He has contributed substantially to the Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society and its predecessor, the RSS, initially undertaking an unofficial role as 'Industry Advisor', where the main objective was how to get industry more involved with the Society, and he has continued to make this valuable contribution ever since. John was a member of the Edinburgh Fund Committee from 1993-95 and from 1995-1996 he was on Council and with Kathie Bowden co-convened the Membership and Publicity Committee, following 5 years on the External Affairs Committee. All along John has been a stalwart supporter of the Annual Conference, ever-present at exhibitions and often organizing commercial sessions, but sometimes travelling miles just to pick up the bar bill. Few in the industry could claim not to have heard or met John and this is part of the person he is – generous, lively, energetic and personable. For later bar attendees he has also been known to show an impressive knowledge of progressive rock bands! For all these reasons John is fully deserving of this award and the Society wishes to recognise his valuable contribution.