

**Presentation at the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
Environmental Protection UK on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

On the 10th of September 2018 Environmental Protection UK (EPUK) celebrated the 120th birthday of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society. I was delighted to be invited to speak at the event held in the Guildhall which was sponsored by the City of London Corporation. Fellow speakers included Lord Whitty, Mary Creagh MP, Professor Stephen Holgate, Sarah Legge and Deputy Keith Bottomley. Below you will find the text of my contribution to this important event.

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Lord Whitty, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon

Firstly, let me congratulate EPUK on this important anniversary. Without doubt EPUK is the oldest environmental protection organisation in the UK and quite probably in the world.

Thank you for inviting me to speak about the history of the society.

The society traces its origin to the formation of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society in 1898 and whilst the society has various guises (National Smoke Abatement Society (NSAS), National Society for Clean Air, National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection) its purpose has always been to protect the environment and human health from pollution in its various forms.

The Coal Smoke Abatement Society began with a letter on the "*smoke nuisance*" from the artist Sir William Richmond, formerly the Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Oxford. He wrote to *The Times* on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1898 calling for action. Richmond had become frustrated by low light levels in the winter caused by coal smoke and said that by mid morning "*the darkness was comparable to a total eclipse of the sun*".

Subsequently, Richmond, was elected President of the new society which was formed in December 1898 under the chairmanship of the Earl of Meath. In the spirit of Victorian philanthropy, the first committee of the Society included an eclectic mixture of artists and politicians, aristocracy and laypeople.

EPUK however could claim to be older than 120, maybe we are also celebrating the 142<sup>nd</sup> anniversary as EPUK has very strong and deep roots in the Manchester and Salford Noxious Vapours Abatement Association which was formed in 1876.

In 1909 this became the Smoke Abatement League of Great Britain when various northern and Scottish smoke abatement societies based in Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield and Glasgow joined forces to form a new organisation based in Manchester.

The Coal Smoke Abatement Society and the Smoke Abatement League of Great Britain had broadly common aims in seeking to increase public awareness of the *“evils of smoke pollution and what could be done about it”*.

After the First World War the two societies began to work more closely together and in 1929 merged to form the National Smoke Abatement Society with Dr Harold Des Voeux as the first President and the society established its headquarters in Manchester. The merger brought together the mostly individual members of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society and the mostly municipal and industrial members of Smoke Abatement League of Great Britain into a powerful new alliance. The inaugural conference of the National Smoke Abatement Society was held in Buxton in 1929 with 60 delegates.

In 1929 the first issue of the Society's journal Clean Air was published - later retitled Smokeless Air, and then retitled Clean Air. A personal note here - as a student in the late 1970s Clean Air was an invaluable resource and helped convince me that I wanted to make my career working in the field of air pollution.

EPUK and its predecessors have made globally significant contributions to environmental protection, even changing the language that we use.

The word smog is used everywhere today but it was the first Honorary Treasurer of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society, the surgeon Dr Harold Des Voeux, who in a 1905 paper “Fog and Smoke,” presented to the Public Health Congress in London, coined the term “smog”.

If that wasn't a big enough claim to fame he went on in 1910 to help the society establish a monitoring network to collect dust deposited in London, one of the first networks of its type. The first year of operation reported annual dust deposits of between 195 and 650 tons per square mile!

In reflecting upon the critical contribution of the society we must also note the vitally important work of the National Smoke Abatement Society Chairman, the barrister Charles Gandy, who in 1935 proposed the original, indeed radical, idea of a smokeless zone. This initiative came as a reaction to the deadly smog that had afflicted Manchester and Salford in the winter of 1930/31. The Smokeless Zone of course became a national policy in the 1956 Clean Air Act – another first for this organisation!

The National Smoke Abatement Society played a role that cannot be overestimated in the work of the Beaver Committee and in ensuring that the provisions of the Clean Air Act of 1956 were not watered down too much by vested interests. We must note that EPUK

through the Clean Air Alliance continues to this day to press for a new and hard-hitting version of the Clean Air Act.

In 1958 National Smoke Abatement Society changed its name to the National Society for Clean Air, a reflection perhaps of the optimism engendered by the world leading Clean Air Act of 1956. Following this, the society began to adopt a broader focus on air pollution from traditional and emerging sources that led to successful campaigns relating to stubble burning, crown immunity for incinerators, industrial pollution control, lead in petrol, action on dirty diesels and low emission zones. In 1989 Environmental Protection was added to the name of the society and in 2007 it became Environmental Protection UK.

I end my contribution by again offering my congratulations to EPUK on this important anniversary and offer a particular thanks to the many stalwarts of EPUK who, through voluntary activity, have kept the organisation going through the more problematic recent past.

I also offer my thanks to the City of London Corporation for sponsoring this celebratory event.

EPUK and its predecessor organisations have a glorious past I hope and expect that it has an equally glorious future. I will do everything I can to support it in its mission to provide expert policy analysis and information in support of environmental protection.

I look forward to the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Manchester and Salford Noxious Vapours Abatement Association.

Thank you

Professor James Longhurst

Assistant Vice Chancellor UWE Bristol

Honorary Vice President Environmental Protection UK

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