

Speech given by Colin Mackie on the retiral of Bill Henderson

President, Douglas, ladies and gentlemen, when I started to think about what I would say tonight about Bill Henderson one word jumped into my mind and stuck there. That word is 'appreciation'. What I want to do this evening is obviously to express the appreciation of the local association and my own personal appreciation for the work of Bill over two and a half decades. But it goes beyond that.

In my experience of the EIS at local level few people have been less fully appreciated by so many for so long. In a sense that comes with the job because Bill was local association treasurer throughout the entire time of his membership. Indeed-if memory serves me correctly-at the time of his nomination as treasurer back in 1986 he was not actually a fully paid up member of the EISan utterly astonishing and grotesquely unconstitutional phenomenon in which I played no part and for which I bear no responsibility!!

Now a treasurer's role within an organization brings little kudos and can be thankless. It involves a great deal of work which is not readily obvious to the members and yet which is of essential importance. When Bill took over as treasurer, the LA had funds which would have been under severe pressure if we had held tonight's gathering in a Blairgowrie chippy.

Through his careful and judicious stewardship a very substantial bank balance was built up over the years. Funds were more than adequate to properly finance all our activities-to provide decent honoraria to office-bearers, to provide those office-bearers with the technology to carry out their duties on behalf of the membership, and, most recently, to provide proper office-facilities for our secretary. Bill's regular treasurer's reports to the executive committee elevated brevity to an art form but they disguised the huge amount of hard work which went into the custodianship of our funds.

Bill was certainly under-appreciated by many of his former colleagues at Blairgowrie High School. Many local association officials continue to teach in their schools whilst at the same time carrying out EIS Duties. Most are fortunate in that their school colleagues understand and appreciate the work being done on their behalf and co-operate with the individual in question. This was not always the case for Bill at Blairgowrie. It is hugely to Bill's credit that he never sought the easy option of withdrawing from his EIS activities but soldiered on in the face of what at times, I know, was considerable unpleasantness for him personally.

If he will forgive me for saying so-Bill is not perhaps a great committee man. He sometimes found reports being delivered by the more loquacious amongst us somewhat tedious. He could never quite understand why we could not reduce our reports to match his own concision.

I could never quite understand therefore why he tried on more than one occasion to be elected to EIS Council. Those of us who have had the honour of being elected to that august body-certainly since it was moved to a single whole day marathon-have had plenty experience of how mindblowingly dull and tedious much of it can be. One of your current council members recently texted me, clearly towards the end of a particularly excruciating day in Edinburgh, to say that council would drive one to drink. Bill would have loathed council with a passion. I failed to convince Bill of this but, in successfully defending my own seat on council, did him an enormous service.....though I doubt that he saw it that way!

But if Bill was not necessarily a big fan of committee work there was another aspect of our association work in which Bill was a tower of strength. Yet by its very nature this aspect was largely concealed from most and thereby, by definition, not properly appreciated.

I can only talk here from my own experience as your secretary for 16 years. The LA Secretary is the key local official. He or she is the lead negotiator with the local authority. The secretary deals on a daily basis with the problems of individual members or groups of members. It is an exposed role and can be difficult and lonely. The judgment of the secretary is tested day on day in often very sensitive situations.

It is only natural that frequently a good secretary will require to reflect on the way he is dealing with a situation or handling a problem. Confidence in one's good judgment is-of course-essential but over-confidence can be folly.

Throughout my years as secretary I relied hugely on Bill for advice. I used Bill as a sounding-board for ideas. I ran policy issues past Bill on a regular basis. And-although-a secretary is supposed to treat matters relating to casework as confidential, I freely now admit that I often consulted Bill on the details of particular cases.

Fortunately, due to his excellent husbanding of our resources, we could afford to pay for the many phonecalls between my home and Bill's of an evening. I doubt if a week went by without one or two of such very lengthy conversations.

And I did so because I had learned to trust Bill absolutely. Not only his total discretion, but the soundness of his judgment. It is that latter quality which I want most emphatically to draw to your attention tonight.

However Bill might be perceived by some, he is someone of quite excellent, sound judgment. It was invaluable for me as secretary to be able to examine my role and my duties in the light of his considered comments. I know that I was saved on many occasions from mistakes I might have made by being able to reflect on the 'second opinion' offered by Bill.

Throughout Bill offered advice with good humour and grace. But then...that good humour is one of Bill's most distinguishing characteristics. He is a model of good cheer and tolerance which puts me to shame. When we first entered the age of new technology and I gave up my fountain pen and my trusty typewriter for the first home computers I found the transition difficult to put it mildly. The wretched machines

would continually fail to respond to my screeched imprecations. The simplest of tasks would sometimes be beyond me. I would phone Bill in a state midway between panic and total mental breakdown.

I must have sounded to Bill as if I was placing the full and complete blame for my stupidity on his shoulders as the person who had inflicted the ghastly machine upon me. Yet Bill would calmly and with immense patience talk me down off the ceiling and point out that the keyboard was not really a minefield of exploding back slashes or that if one ensured that the correct plug was in the correct socket all would be well.

I owe him another immense debt for being such an incredibly patient and sympathetic teacher.

Bill has now joined in retirement others of that particular generation which became active in the local association in the 1980's. He looked forward with especial anticipation to being retired and is enjoying it with great relish.

Tonight we honour his huge contribution to the work of the EIS Here in Perth and Kinross with profound gratitude and, I know that you will all join with me, in wishing him continued good health and good fortune in the years to come.