**Speech from Simon Hill Hon FRPS,  President of the RPS, who presented the awards at the 22nd National Audio Visual Championship.**

Well, this has been quite a week, to the extent that until late on Friday, I didn’t know which, if any, RPS events would be cancelled or postponed, including this one. In fact, it transpired this was the least of our problems. As President it was my sincere desire to issue a Statement on behalf of the Society and to write Letters of Condolence to our King and to our Patron. However, for some 24 hours, we didn’t know the correct title of our Patron as this was becoming something of an evolving entity.

On Thursday morning, the Duchess of Cambridge was our Patron but with the announcement of the demise of Her Majesty The Queen that afternoon, by the evening the BBC was reporting that the Duchess of Cambridge had become the Duchess of Cornwall. Very soon after that, it reported that her title was, in fact, the Duchess of Cambridge and Cornwall, while a little later the BBC appeared to switch ‘Cambridge’ and ‘Cornwall’ reporting that her title was actually the Duchess of Cornwall and Cambridge.  I gave it an hour or two - no further changes - so I thought it would be safe for me to issue the Statement and write the Letters on behalf of the Society, which I duly did. However, in his Address to the Nation on Friday, the King announced that he was creating William, Prince of Wales, which of course now made the Duchess of Cornwall and Cambridge, the Princess of Wales. Having checked this with Kensington Palace, I can confirm that our Patron is now officially Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales and our website and literature will be updated as soon as practically possible.

The decision of whether or not to cancel events was made somewhat less difficult thanks to guidance we received from the government on Friday morning. The guidance told us that we should not feel obligated to cancel or postpone any of our events. It went on to say that we could, as a mark of respect and in keeping with the tone of National Mourning, hold a period of silence or tribute at the start of events taking place between the announcement of the death of Her Late Majesty and the morning after her State Funeral.
As a Royal society, enjoying Royal Patronage, we shall of course continue to maintain the tone of National Mourning until the morning of Tuesday 20 September.

I know you have respectfully held a tribute on each day of this event and, on behalf of the RPS, I thank you for that. Furthermore, I hope that your ‘Beatles’ themed evening on Friday, despite the sombre mood of the Nation, heralded the start of a truly marvellous weekend celebrating the very best in audio visual design and production.

This is the first RPS event I have attended since the announcement of the demise of Her Late Majesty The Queen, so I thought I would take this opportunity to reflect very briefly on the historic relationship between the Crown and the Royal Photographic Society.

In the summer of 1851, the ‘Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’ was held in London. ‘The Great Exhibition’ - as it became known - was organised under the Presidency of HRH The Prince Albert and benefited from the astute management of Henry Cole, the designer credited with the introduction of the first Christmas card in 1843.

The Great Exhibition became a symbol of Britain’s ‘Golden Years’, showcasing the cultural and technological achievements of the mid-Victorian era. Visited by six million people - equivalent to a third of the population of Britain at that time - exhibits included ‘Bakewell’s image telegraph’ (a precursor of the modern fax machine); the ‘Tempest Prognosticator’ (a barometer using leeches); and the modern pay toilet, with over 800,000 visitors paying one penny for the privilege and in so doing coining the expression, “Spending a penny!”

Inspired by this celebration of art and science, in the winter of 1851 a group of “gentlemen photographers” formed a committee to consider how they might establish a society devoted to promoting the art and science of photography. The following year, their exhibition enjoyed such enormous success that, on 20 January 1853, they founded the ‘Photographic Society of London’ with Sir Charles Eastlake as its first President.

Despite the founding committee being formed of “gentlemen photographers”, from its inception the Society has been open to anyone interested in photography and today, quite rightly, “an interest in photography” remains the only requirement for membership.

From these Victorian beginnings, the Society grew from strength to strength. Such was their interest in photography, Queen Victoria and her consort, Prince Albert, became the first in a long line of Royal Patrons although it was not until 1894 that our Society became known as The ‘Royal’ Photographic Society of Great Britain despite having received Royal patronage some 40 years earlier.

From our founding in 1853, we have enjoyed a long and unbroken line of royal Patrons which has included three queens: Queen Victoria, Queen Alexandra and Queen Elizabeth II. All were accomplished photographers with Queen Alexandra being the most celebrated royal photographer of her time. In 1952, following the death of her father, King George VI, the young Queen Elizabeth II became Patron of the Society and remained our Patron for 67 years. During that time, following a Petition made by the Society, Her Late Majesty was pleased to grant a Charter of Incorporation to the Society on 27 July 2004.

In 2019, Queen Elizabeth II passed the Patronage to the, then, Duchess of Cambridge who is an accomplished photographer and an incredibly enthusiastic supporter of the Society. Very soon, I look forward to announcing a new RPS initiative arranged with the support of Kensington Palace. I know my predecessor and AV Group member, Robert Albright, had the pleasure of meeting the Duchess in 2020; and I had that same pleasure at the opening of the RPS ‘Generations: Portraits of Holocaust Survivors’ exhibition which opened in London late last year. Now, as The Princess of Wales, and with the inevitable expansion of her duties, we sincerely hope that Her Royal Highness will remain our Patron for many years to come.

I’d like to conclude these few words in the spirit of the [Magical Mystery Tour] of your ‘Beatles’ themed event of Friday evening which was, by all accounts, [A Hard Day’s Night]. Into these closing remarks, I’m going to mix the titles of several Beatles songs and I’d like to see how many of them you can spot. I really hope that you don’t think this is being at all disrespectful of [Her Majesty]. OK, so there’s one, and quite topical too - no, [Wait] - there’s already been four Beatle’s songs in this one paragraph! I hope you are keeping count.

So, to finish then … in case any of you have a [Ticket to Ride] somewhere - I won’t speak for [Long, Long, Long] but [I Will] include a few words more than, simply, [Hello, Goodbye]. Now, if I begin to struggle to find [The Word] please [Help] me, don’t let anyone say [You Can’t Do That], just [Act Naturally], [Think for Yourself] and say [Something].  OK, how many now? Are you still counting? [With a Little Help from My Friends] I’ll get through this. [Don’t Let Me Down], [I Need You] to listen out for those song titles;  think to yourself,  [All I’ve Got To Do]  is spot the song titles - Don’t [Ask Me Why] or say to yourself  [I’m So Tired], just [Let It Be].

Thank you so much for inviting me to say a few words ahead of presenting the awards as we approach [The End] of this 22nd National Audio Visual Championships. [Yes It Is], amazingly, the 22nd iteration of this event. I am grateful to the AV Group Treasurer, Alastair Taylor - who appears to be [Here, There and Everywhere] - for inviting me to present the awards this afternoon. He really does need to [Slow Down]; although some say he’s the [Bad Boy] of the AV Group, he’s definitely not a [Nowhere Man]. [This Boy] would definitely be the ‘go to’ guy’ [If I Needed Someone] [In My Life] - just the [Two of Us].

I would very much have liked to have come to see the AV presentations [Yesterday] although I appreciate the event started [The Night Before] but [I Want to Tell You] its been somewhat hectic for the past few days. [There’s A Place] in Bristol - I’m talking about RPS House - and [What Goes On] there … no, I mustn’t … [I Don’t Want to Spoil the Party]. Really, if you knew, you’d want to [Run For Your Life] because at the moment, we could all do with working [Eight Days a Week] just to get the new CRM System over the line. [It’s All Too Much]; far more than simply [Fixing a Hole] but [I’ve Got a Feeling] [We Can Work It Out]. [Oh Darling], I just hope we don’t sink like a [Yellow Submarine]. When you get home - and [When I Get Home] - I hope you’ll remember the [Things We Said Today] - [Every Little Thing] - and hopefully you won’t come to the conclusion that [I Should Have Known Better]. So, how many songs? [All Together Now] … [Song titles shown in square brackets] Answer: 50

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