

## Preface

This booklet is a sequel to a similar one written by D.S.J. Gray some 25 years ago when the South African Chemical Institute turned 75. This historical update has been written by Professor Ivan Green, a SACI member who has served the Institute in different capacities over these past 35 years; including being its immediate past President. On behalf of SACI, I would like to thank Professor Green for taking on this task of writing the history of the Institute that covers this past quarter century.

Personally it is an honour to be leading the Institute at a time when SACI celebrates 100 years of existence. The Institute has gone through a few years of decline in its membership, from a high of over 1 500 members in the mid-1990s to a low of about 700 members a few years back. I am happy to announce that membership has recently passed the 1 000 mark and is growing. I am certain that with every SACI member playing his or her part in activities of the Institute we will get back to the 1 500 membership mark in the next few years, and even surpass this mark.

I would like to thank all the past presidents before me for having built a solid organization that has lasted a hundred years. I strongly believe that with every SACI member's support SACI will have many excellent stories to tell when the Institute turns 200.

Professor James Darkwa – President 2011 - 2013

**The South African Chemical Institute**  
**1978 – 2012**  
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## A brief history of the South African Chemical Institute (SACI)

1987-2012

An account of the history of SACI since it was founded on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1912 until 1987 has been written by D J S Gray and is in the archives of SACI for those who might be interested to read this at leisure. Council considered it an appropriate occasion to provide an update of the events over the past 25 years to demonstrate how SACI has developed and changed to embrace all the new innovations and developments that have occurred in the Chemical Industry in its broadest terms in celebrating the 100 years of its existence in 2012. This task has fallen on my humble shoulders and thus I have taken the liberty of addressing the task from a more personal viewpoint than a purely factual account as to do otherwise would both take too long and might not provide the desired interest. In addition I have taken the liberty of making a selection of various themes that have contributed to and played such an important and salient role in the functioning of SACI and in a sense will endeavour to follow their movements over the past 25 years or so.

With this in mind it would seem to me that the most appropriate starting point would be with the SACI Presidents and their combined impacts as best I am able to recollect and in addition taken from some archival information.

## **The Presidents from 1987**

|           |               |           |             |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1986-1988 | J R Bull      | 2000-2001 | B Rae       |
| 1988-1990 | J D Bradley   | 2001-2003 | G E Jackson |
| 1990-1992 | A M Heyns     | 2003-2005 | E Meintjies |
| 1992-1994 | M D Booth     | 2005-2007 | T A Ford    |
| 1994-1996 | T M Letcher   | 2007-2009 | N J Coville |
| 1996-1998 | E L J Breet   | 2009-2011 | I R Green   |
| 1998-2000 | C J Rademeyer | 2011-2013 | J Darkwa    |

I can truthfully state that I served under all of these presidents in one or other capacity since I served on Council in many varied capacities from as early as 1982 when Casper Schutte was president and how wonderful and deserving it is that he is the 2011 SACI Gold Medal recipient. At my very first Council meeting with Casper as chair, the meeting seemed to go on for ages and I thought “how does his voice last?” In those days meetings used to start at 0900 and continue until late in the afternoon to be then followed by the AGM, all at Kelvin House. After a short tea break, Casper had to again do most of the talking at the AGM until at last, after the marathon endeavour, we were treated to some welcome refreshments. Kelvin House had an aroma and historical aura about it which unfortunately has not been equalled by any of SACI’s new homes since we had to vacate it.

In those days of 1986 onwards, travel was a given for those hailing from the far provinces. I would leave Cape Town by plane on a Thursday afternoon to arrive at Johannesburg airport, catch a coach to the Rotunda in Johannesburg, walk

through the station to the Victoria Hotel which almost abutted the station, where I would book in and the Friday morning would walk the roughly 1.5 km down to Kelvin House for the meeting after which I would walk back to the hotel at 2130 or thereabouts and leave the Saturday morning. This is somewhat reminiscent to the olden days when farmers travelled to town in their ox wagons to celebrate communion and in the larger towns, stayed for a week!

It would be unfair and require too much detail to write about all of the Presidents. Each one had his and her own style of leading SACI forward through the tough times it went through and I believe no President had an easy task to lead SACI. While each continued to finalise the legacy left by the previous President, each introduced new directions they considered important for SACI to develop in. One of the major tendencies which I am happy to share is the vast reduction in the duration and number of meetings SACI has in 2012 compared with 1986. Of course this has come about through the modern technological gismos of the internet. Previously, correspondence by the President was either singularly or collectively via telephonic or written means. Nowadays with the internet, the President is able to communicate either with the entire Council or the EXCO at the press of a button and expect replies within 24 hours in order to make decisions needing immediate attention. This has in no way reduced the executive authority of the President but has made many decisions more inclusive and democratic. But what is really important in this regard is that decisions can be made almost immediately and not have to wait for an EXCO meeting. Another spin-off this has brought about is in the reduced time

Members have to set aside for EXCO and Council meetings. EXCO meetings now last about 2-3 hours while Council meetings are almost the same duration and are interspersed with a brief luncheon as well. What has not changed however, is the effectiveness of the process and an absolute commitment of each EXCO and Council member to wholeheartedly promote chemistry for all Members in their areas. This latter point is made abundantly clear by the contribution of each participating representative and the agenda items under discussion.

An historical advancement in the participation of our female Members in the administrative structures of SACI was when Elsie Meintjies was elected as President in 2003. This heralded in a breath of fresh air and Elsie administered her duties in a most professional manner during her term. Folders, containing the constitution, the previous minutes and agenda were religiously handed out to each Member at the commencement of each of the meetings placing us all on the same page. Meetings were run according to the accepted protocols which were strictly applied. This resulted in meetings delivering outcomes expected by the President and made each committee member take his responsibility seriously. This new style was made abundantly evident at the very first AGM Elsie chaired at the CSIR on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2004 and which lasted 3 hours. Unfortunately this remarkable style for running meetings proved to be too time consuming for new Presidents to continue as it required quite a bit of pre-preparation which had to be balanced by other factors. The four subsequent Presidents were elected from the academia and could not sustain such attention to detail. However, meetings are conducted very

strictly as has always been the case and indeed according to the correct protocols but with reduced paperwork.

Cor Rademeyer followed the lead of some earlier Presidents, who during his term, made it a point to again visit all the sections of SACI to personally address any concerns local members might have had. I remember making the arrangements for Cor in the Western Cape as I was the Chairman of the Section at the time. What such personal visits did was to reaffirm to SACI Members that Council cared about their concerns and was willing to take these to a collective body (Council) for attention. In general a most positive outcome resulted due to the immediate feeling and perception that sections were the most important component in the greater SACI structure (and still are) and that apart from the section committees, the door of the President's office was open to every SACI member. This tendency has been endorsed by every President since then....not that doors were inaccessible at any time in the past by any President. This was merely an added invitation to Members to participate and interact via the President and secretariat. In those days funding was available to make this possible which is rather unfortunately not the case today.

The change in Government in 1994 did not have any dramatic effect on the operational side of SACI as it has always been and always will be a body of chemists striving to look after the interests of all its members. Under the previous regime, we seldom experienced any reluctance for invited international colleagues to visit and participate in our Conventions and under

the new regime, if anything, in the early stages of the new democracy, when colleagues would ask how safe it was to visit the major centres, we had an opportunity to demonstrate how far SA had come in providing a safe and secure environment for Conferences to be organised. In 1994, the then President, Mike Booth attended the International meeting of the Presidents of Chemical Societies in Coimbra, Portugal at which occasion he was able to participate and represent our views as in the past. Mike noted that SA was the only African country represented at that meeting which demonstrated how highly SA Science was recognised at the time.

One factor Council has always tried to ensure, is that the President should be elected from all parts of South Africa irrespective of how far away their *domicile citandi* was. During the era prior to internet coverage, Presidents had to phone the secretary and *vice versa* to stay abreast with matters and at times send faxes. Things just took that much longer but were nevertheless done most professionally and efficiently.....an accolade for our secretaries over the years. One needs to be reminded that in the mid 1980's SACI meetings were run in both official languages alternating between English and Afrikaans at each consecutive meeting. Of course Members could raise issues in the language of their choice but Ms Tsimas had to produce all documentation viz., previous minutes and agenda in both languages which meant a huge additional amount of paperwork and cost. Thankfully this practice has been phased out some time ago in a naturally progressive and acceptable way which reduced the paperwork by both Presidents and the secretariat enormously and did not require an incoming

President to be proficient in both English and Afrikaans. Presidents had the option of using the language of their choice which allowed more Members to be nominated to serve as President.

As in any business domain, our secretaries play a pivotal, vital, essential and indispensable role in ensuring the smooth running of SACI's functions and keeping Presidents on their proverbial toes. No single President in the past could ever have had the successes and abilities to steer the SACI vessel into uncharted waters without an interactive relationship with the secretariat. I write this through personal interactive experience and am convinced that the success of SACI has in the main been due to committed, professionally trained and dedicated secretarial support.

In August of 2011 the first Black President, James Darkwa, was elected to serve and lead SACI for the 2011-2013 term of office and heralded in a new era in the ever evolving history of the institute.

### **Secretarial Support**

Who, dating from the early era of SACI can ever forget the absolutely wonderful and knowledgeable Ms Efty Tsimas who commenced her association with SACI in the 60's and was secretary in 1986 at the time James Bull was President. Perhaps it would not be amiss if I were to state that Efty actually "ran" SACI and would on a regular basis dutifully inform the President what she had done and why. In a sense the President had to thankfully condone her actions and there was never ever to my

recollection one action she had taken in which she was wrong. In point of fact, I recollect the numerous times sitting Presidents running Council or EXCO meetings would turn to Efty and ask: "Where in the constitution would we find this?" or "Ms Tsimas, how do you think we ought to address this problem/question?" And she would simply quote the precise and appropriate section in the constitution or would as an aside in the President's ear, indicate how she would tackle the problem. The President would then ask Council members if after some discussion, they were in agreement and the matter was then finalised. She was the constant factor in SACI for many years and we were spoilt by someone with her knowledge and abilities since it demonstrated a most vital function of SACI secretaries.

### **Structural Changes of Council Meetings**

One of the most obvious and time saving changes Council introduced in the early 1990's was to move away from having separate and independent meetings of the Administration, Awards, Chemical Safety, Education, Finance, Publications, Publicity, Membership and Programme committees into a more inclusive and concise EXCO which comprises of elected Members with the following portfolios; President, Vice President (Programme and Awards), Hon Treasurer (Finance), Hon Secretary (Membership), Publicity (Newsletter and Website), Elected Member (Liaison with Chemical and Allied Industry) and the SACI Secretary (Administration, Website, Records and Finance).

All the other interest groups are catered for under their respective Divisions/Sections/Interest Groups and have direct access to Council Members as well as EXCO Members.

In the mid 1980's and for a few more ensuing years each of the portfolio committees of SACI held meetings viz., Administration, Membership, Publications, Awards, Education, EXCO and Council. One can well imagine what the travel bill for out-of-town Presidents was as well as other Members in that era. Over the years all these functions have been consolidated into the current EXCO portfolios whose designated Member does his/her work via the internet and reports at the EXCO or Council meetings. Travel and time constraints have taken their toll on all active Members in administrative portfolios of SACI and the logical consequences over the years has been to reduce the frequency of EXCO and Council meetings in an efficient and constructive way so as to both maintain and even improve efficacy by making use of the modern means at our disposal. Up until some 4-6 years ago there were 4 EXCO and 2 Council meetings per 12 month period. In 2011 there were 3 EXCO and 1 Council meeting which included the 4<sup>th</sup> EXCO meeting and SACI is as efficient as ever.

## **Finances**

At a Council meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1986 mention was made as to the fact that the Institute "could not drift along on an *ad hoc* basis since the costs of administration were extremely high" Whilst I would not entirely agree with that prognosis, SACI has certainly come a long way in its management of assets over the

years. Quite exceptional treasurers have come to the fore over the years who, with consensus from the EXCO's have made great strides in SACI's investment portfolios, electronic banking practices, monitoring to ensure strict control of spending patterns and additionally developed an efficient protocol of getting Members to pay subscriptions. This has been instrumental in the sound financial position SACI finds itself in today despite the challenges we have faced during the past 25 years. However, one should realise that SACI finds itself with some concerns as there have been instances in which our income from Membership fees has not covered expenditure and thus we have had to dip into the reserves as an interim measure to balance the books. The problem this has created is that expansion and new capital ventures have had to be financed from profits made from Conferences.

Over the years treasurers have made the manner in which the financial statements are presented to both EXCO and Council easier to understand and with fewer complicating aspects and today we can boast as having a really easy and quite straightforward presentation of the status of income and expenditure at each EXCO and Council meeting. Electronic banking and an efficient programme to effect the flow of funds and auditing of accounts has vastly improved one's understanding of how to interact with the statements in a logical way and Ernst Breet together with Laila Smith have made this possible.

## **Move from Kelvin House to the Observatory site**

In his annual report in 1990 John Bradley makes mention of the fact that Kelvin House was sold and that a new site was purchased by AS&TS at the Observatory Site known as 18A Gill Street but nothing further is mentioned. I was on Council at the time and simply accepted our fate of moving from an historical building to some site with a telescope room which would be our new home. I was convinced that all the societies which formed part of AS&TS at that time believed this would work and thus embraced the relocation with anticipation. Indeed the 79<sup>th</sup> AGM of SACI was held at the Observatory Site as we referred to it on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1991 at which occasion Prof C C Mjogo, President of the African Academy of Sciences delivered the address. It was also at this time that SACI purchased its own computer since AS&TS were no longer to provide their services to SACI and in any event the sooner we became independent and were able to take control over all our records viz., finance, membership and all new ensuing developments, the better. It meant that Ms Tsimas had to work overtime to do all the transference of data from the AS&TS systems onto our systems. An initially tense time at the Observatory Site followed but we soon settled down and enjoyed a good few years. It was also during this period that our most dedicated and efficient secretary Ms Tsimas retired and a new secretary, Mrs Lily Giacobazzi took over.

At the end of the 89<sup>th</sup> AGM held at the Observatory Site, on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2001 the President, Graham Jackson, made a shocking announcement that AS&TS had gone bankrupt and that SACI would thus have to find a new home and its own way to finance

its secretarial services which had up till then been paid by AS&TS. Graham Jackson was asked to determine what would become of SACI and what had become of the roughly R2 million SACI had contributed towards the acquisition of the Observatory Site as its portion derived from the sale of Kelvin House. It would appear that at the time the Observatory Site was purchased it was given as an asset to a section 21 company viz., AS&TS. As such a 21 section company does not have any shareholders and no individual or organisation may occupy a preferred position. It thus meant that SACI gave its money/property away and was in no position to request its return. There was unfortunately no written agreement between SACI, or any of the other organisations who also went into the deal upon having to move out of Kelvin House and the AS&TS with regards to the property.

This was a truly disastrous decision made by SACI and all the other societies/institutes to simply give the property away. At that stage Council requested to be given the documentation relating to the sale and the aftermath. This has as yet not materialised.

### **Move from the Observatory site to The University of the Witwatersrand**

As a consequence of the shocking financial demise of AS&TS, SACI was without a home and thus some serious and urgent negotiations had to be conducted between SACI and whoever could provide us with a new *domicile citandus*. This was a truly sad moment in our history since we had for so many years

depended upon AS&TS to provide both the secretarial services and home address as a member of AS&TS to which we paid our membership dues. Suddenly in the middle of 2001 we were without both a home and secretary. At this time, our then secretary Mrs Lily Giacobazzi also resigned. Thankfully we were able to negotiate a move to WITS who very kindly and graciously provided SACI with an office from which to run its affairs as well as the use of a board room for meetings of the EXCO and Council. A rate for hiring these facilities as well as the use of the internet at WITS was negotiated and after advertising we appointed a new secretary, Mrs S Gajoo-Naidoo whom we appointed in a half-day capacity due to financial factors. The 90<sup>th</sup> AGM was held at the new SACI home on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2002.

The demise of AS&TS left a void in which the various learned societies within science and technology could no longer communicate and debate issues of common concern. Eventually a home was found in the Natural Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) which came about to advise government on burning issues of the day in science, engineering and technology. SACI is a founding member of the Professional Societies Constituency named as proSET.

### **South African Journal of Chemistry**

From 1976 onwards the Bureau for Scientific Publications thankfully undertook the responsibility for publication of the *S. Afr. J. Chem.* which included the costs and actual production and thus this was taken off SACI's shoulders. It must however be noted that prior to this event, SACI was responsible for all the

costs and production of its Journal. Our Journal is a National Journal and as such it represents a National asset and all Councils and editors of the Journal have fought for its status and retention of the financial assistance by the state. At Council meetings in the late 80's and early 90's Percy Bloom put huge efforts into persuading the state to continue its financial support since they indicated that they were no longer prepared to provide this aid any longer. Unfortunately it was also during this period that serious doubts were expressed by some 75% of polled Members as to the future viability of the Journal. There were even talks of allowing up to 25% of non-refereed material to be included in the Journal to secure its future interest to the broader scientific community. However a strong and motivated kernel of diehards did not give up on the Journal and our thanks are essentially to that group that the Journal survived as a refereed international scientific publication which is currently in an evolving and improving electronic format. In order to make the task of the Chief Editor lighter, sub-editors for Organic, Inorganic, Physical, Analytical and Education have been appointed to take on the responsibility to evaluate articles in their specific fields of expertise and report to the Chief Editor. In this way the time taken for a manuscript to be either rejected or published has been dramatically reduced and the Journal is on par with the internationally accepted norms for publication. There is still an on-going improvement strategy in order to make the Journal as user friendly as possible since we need to encourage Members to send in articles to support our Journal and not have foreign authored papers dominating our hard fought for platform. Government has for many years not

supported the finances of the Journal and from about the mid 1990s SACI had to pay for the publication.

### **Other Publications**

SACI Members used to contribute to Chemical Processing. This was once a fairly popular minor local Journal, but regrettably experienced a continued decline in the number and quality of articles and was in difficulty due to the consequent paucity of advertisements which were essentially its life blood and thus in a sense died of benign neglect.

Of course who can ever forget the ChemSA publication which SACI used as a platform from 1986 onwards to publish snippets of news and information about what SACI was involved with and also to read about what was happening in industry. These were the days that SACI attempted to play a vital role to make ChemSA as viable a publication as possible. However in the ensuing years and unfortunately due to contributions and adverts from industry beginning to dry up, it was also relegated to the out box. There was a tremendous paucity of interactive discourse in the broader communication between SACI and its members and it was during the Presidential term of office of Bruce Rae in the 2000's that SACI started to develop its own website with the initial help of a most dedicated and selfless person, Mr Andreas Landman who after a few years handed the task over to the really superb and much appreciated new driver, Klaus Achleitner from UCT. Klaus was almost singlehandedly responsible for the establishment of a much improved SACI website which then served as the medium of broadband

communication between SACI and all its Members. During the period of his association, Klaus was instrumental in establishing a range of innovative design improvements and when he finally retired it provided SACI with the firepower to then send its secretary Mrs Laila Smith on an intensive and professional course of website design and maintenance. Graham Jackson, upon arriving at the new SACI home at WITS in 2002 formulated some changes to the newsletter and emphasised its importance as a communications medium. Over the ensuing years however, the good intensions of the newsletter began to platform somewhat and thus in his term as President, Neil Coville was instrumental in “reviving” the SACI newsletter in an entirely new format ably assisted by Mrs Laila Smith, the SACI secretary, and has done so with much appreciated acumen. I am of the opinion that SACI Members read this with relish as it gives an up-to-date account of what events have been held, what events are being planned in the near future and the distant future as well as links to symposia of interest internationally. Advertisements for both academic and industrial vacancies are also posted and the newsletter provides a forum for interactive discourse between members since all Members have the opportunity to send in suggestions, raise issues and exchange experiences about what was found to work in terms of programmes for Members in their areas of endeavour. I believe this was the intention that Graham had and am convinced that he is pleased to note the way the newsletter has developed.

Two publications, although not SACI initiatives, viz., Spectrum and Archimedes, comprising high quality popular science articles were strongly promoted by Etienne Malherbe and were

of special interest to senior students at high schools, were given publicity among our members who in turn made numerous contributions all of which aided to boost the interest of schools and students to acquire these journals in order to promote their interest in science and specifically chemistry. Thus SACI also made use of alternative outside Journals to promote itself among the younger communities.

A compilation of papers from these Journals dating from their inception in 1989 up till 1997 about aspects of the chemical and related industries was published in 1997. Subsequently and unfortunately in a sense, our interest has not remained since we are now more focussed on promoting our own Journal and requesting Members for their support to submit regular research articles.

### **Golf Day**

In the late 1980s, would you believe it, there was a special committee which had the sole task of arranging an annual golf day. This was considered an important event as it was one of the best ways to get the Corporate and Company members together for relationship building and for SACI golfers to interact in a social manner with them. Sadly, this event has fallen away over the years which is perhaps symptomatic of how the academia who are largely responsible for the SACI portfolios, have to spend their time nowadays undertaking research to survive financially and not have time for this type of activity and it is perhaps an idea to if possible, to revive this gentleman's past time.

## **Membership**

In the previous 10 years and up till June of 1996 there were a reported total number of 1500 Members in SACI which seemed even in those days to be rather under representative of the qualified chemists in South Africa and of course as always various strategies were discussed as how to address this situation. This time honoured practice has never really changed over the years since each time Council would meet, this would be a topic of concern and of planning and while it was always considered a battle that can be won, the correct strategy of attracting new members has evaded the most ingenious and stalwart plans to date. Admittedly, there were limited successes in which our main source of new members, the young university graduates, were intensively targeted with various forms of enticement and this has been one of the major successes. However, we have had limited success in attracting new people from industry and the allied technologies to become SACI members. It was also noticed that the re-emergence of the CSIR and Mintek in the mid 2000s had very limited impact on the membership so far compared to the earlier era where numerous persons from these and other institutions were Members.

The majority of our industrial members currently have their home in the analytical sections of the Analytical Division, ChromSA and SAAMS. There has also been a decline in the number of company members which at its peak numbered in the 30s. There has, however, recently been a notable resurgence and interest in the Institute from the main industrial

players including SASOL, AECI, BASF and Omnia as well as multinationals operating in South Africa. This was particularly evident at the 2011 National Convention where considerable sponsorship was forthcoming from these organisations.

It has over the years been a matter of grave concern to note the declining membership numbers from one year to the next ranging from a maximum of about 1740 reported members in 1993 to the current independently confirmed 600 actually paying Members. What caused this decline may be speculated upon and could perhaps include emigration, fee increases (which we have kept to the absolute minimum), a perceived absence of providing tangible services to our Members and changes in subsidy rules of institutions. We are further of the opinion that the inadequate secretarial services provided during the transitional period following the demise of AS&TS together with the move of SACI to the WITS site played a significant role as well. The problem faced by SACI at that time was that our finances simply could not allow us to afford anything more than a half day secretary. Once this became clear to Council a decision was made to appoint a full time secretary and this has proved to be one of the most successful decisions taken.

Thus in the early 2000s SACI, with the assistance of a full time secretary, went through a most intensive exercise, upon moving to its new premises at WITS, of actually re-registering all its Members so as to establish exactly how many paying Members there were. This was no insignificant task and neither was it achieved within the timeframe we had hoped for. When the final results became apparent, to our great shock we realised

that for many years we had “ghost members” i.e. people who had not paid their annual fees for years but were on our books. The exercise was extended and attempts were made to contact every person on our data base. Eventually we were able to ascertain that of the 1200 members on our books at that time, only about 500 were paying SACI Members and thus we had a basis for more accurate budgeting for the first time in many years. The major reason for this is believed to be due to the disbanding of the membership committee which met regularly to discuss pressing issues and would routinely suspend non-paying Members subsequent to serious attempts to retain their membership and a few final warnings.

In consequence of this discovery SACI was able to very carefully draw up its budgets since we then and now have to pay for the secretarial services, office rental, telephone and various other items. This proved to be a most strenuous undertaking which the treasurers and most recently, Ernst Breet handled very professionally. Currently, the treasurer is assisted by the secretary Mrs Laila Smith and this interactive association will hopefully extend into the future. Thus by knowing the number of paying Members, SACI is able to present Council with an accurate budget from which to operate.

### **National Programme**

This has become a *de facto* portfolio of the Vice President and is probably *the* most important activity of SACI since the National Programme has to cater for all our Members’ interests and ensure that programmes are organised on a rotational basis to

effect just this. There is an historical and traditional rotational scheme which has been tested over time but with the National Convention always forming the central event. The latter is the only occasion where all SACI members are able to congregate as a collective and get to meet Members from both other disciplines and provinces. It also presents the opportunity for Members to attend lectures on topics unfamiliar to them but which are important in the greater scheme of things. At such an event we have arranged for the Heads of Chemistry Departments to meet and discuss mutual matters of interest and to get to know ones colleagues in the rest of South Africa. These networking sessions have proved to be highly successful but need a champion at the meeting to drive them and to chair such meetings.

Subject sections have also to be catered for in the scheduling of events around the National Convention and as the number of interest groups has grown, so too has the complexity of devising a matrix for the events so as to ensure there is not a clash of events either being too close in time or province which would negatively affect sponsorships. Various options have been tested viz., the National Conference being held every 4 years instead of every two years, or every 3 years. Through the years it has been found that a biennial event is just about right and since the rotation between Western Province, Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal, Southern Gauteng and Northern Gauteng also provides a much desired change of environment, these may be held during either the December/January or June/July periods depending on the province. There was even a period that Members were of the opinion that the National event should be

forgone and that only specialist events should be held which would have the exact opposite effect of putting Members in an untenable position of never being able to meet their fellow Members and thankfully this suggestion died a natural death. I mention this to indicate the dynamics which SACI had to contend with and believe that going through such phases only makes us stronger and more determined in our efforts to provide the best programme and support systems for our Members.

At the 34<sup>th</sup> National Convention held in Durban in July 1998, the 7<sup>th</sup> International African Chemical Conference was for the first time held in SA and formed part of the week's proceedings. What it heralded in was the stronger ties that were being forged with our Northern neighbours and this has become a recurring feature since at the 40<sup>th</sup> National Convention in 2011, a FASC meeting representing the Federation of African Societies in Chemistry was included as a special one day event. This was instrumental in bringing in a substantial contingent of scientists from the rest of Africa to forge and improve networking opportunities between our societies.

One of the more innovative supporting facilities that has been established for our Members is what we call an electronic secretarial service for the running of SACI events. Some time ago we sent our secretary Mrs Laila Smith on a comprehensive course dealing with website design, website management, financial management, brochure design and how to establish and run a website. A new laptop was also purchased to allow Mrs Smith to work from home. Essentially what happens is that

the committee of the conference/symposium liaises with the SACI secretary and indicates what they need and provide the necessary details. The secretary then sets up a website for the conference on the SACI website, designs the flyers, sends them out, receives applications, replies to all delegates, receives the registration fees, sends receipts and does all payments. Since the cash flow is facilitated via the SACI office all auditing is done automatically and payments are on time and accurate. This saves enormous costs for the committee as well as time and thus facilitates their ability to concentrate on organisation. The 2011 National Convention held in January 2011 commemorating the International Year of Chemistry at WITS was a shining example of just how successful this was. Other conference organisers are now using this facility and as time teaches us, fine tuning to improve on the current platforms will benefit our Members even more. I believe this has been one of the more appreciated benefits SACI has been able to provide for its Members.

### **Constitution**

As with all dynamic societies SACI has to look at its constitution from time to time and as new Council Members serve so too are new and exciting developments made to the constitution. Council does not view changing the constitution lightly as it requires a 67% majority vote and to canvas support for any change, which in the past was done through either postal votes or at AGMs, can now thankfully be achieved via the internet. The early days saw such an example when on the 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1980 a special meeting was held at the CSIR to allow for the co-option

of up to 5 past presidents to serve on Council. Just think of the logistics to organise that. Today we have only the Past President to serve on Council for a 2 year period. Then there was a meeting at Kelvin House in February of 1988 during which no fewer than 18 minor changes were introduced by changing the quorum at Council Meetings to 8 members. It was in November of 1987 at an EXCO meeting at Kelvin House that proposals from the Western Cape and Natal served to reaffirm a *de facto* representation by the chairpersons of the sections on Council so as to reflect a more representative one but which additionally had the consequence of expanding Council. This was approved at a subsequent Council meeting but with the proviso that the Sections were responsible for the travel costs. This financial burden meant that local sections only sent people whom they believed would make a substantial contribution to any discussions at Council. This has changed over the years and Council now picks up the tab for travel by its Members for all meetings which is why fewer meetings with fewer people are the current feature.

In 1992 the Institute of Assayers and Analysts were incorporated within SACI which led to the consequent change in the constitution to recognize the welcome movement. This essentially became the Analytical Division of SACI and provided it with a strong new membership influx as well as influence at higher Governmental levels. It was also at that time that SACI commenced discussions with ChromSA and SAAMS about them joining SACI. These discussions however have been on-going and took the better part of 16 years before our dreams were realised. SACI is very pleased about the contributions each of

these societies has made and has assured them that their independence is still assured.

The SACI constitution has been moulded over the years into a well structured document serving Member's interests as best as possible and if one were to read through some of the documentation from the late 1980's about just how many meetings were involved to establish certain priorities and changes it is no wonder why it took so long compared to the time taken at present. I believe this is exactly why we have developed such a good working constitution since we are able to make changes today in a most efficient way through the internet and we only need concentrate on the essentials of the changes and not change the substantive foundational work.

Through the years SACI has made whatever changes were necessary to the Constitution in order to ensure that it serves its Members professionally. The very last Constitutional change made under my Presidential term was to allow SACI to be registered as a Non Profit Organisation (NPO). In the past our annual financial turnover fell under the SARS limit for tax liability. In the recent past our annual turnover has approached the limit where our auditors alerted us to the tax implication if we did not register ourselves as an NPO. The net result is that we do not now have to pay tax on the "profits" made at National Conventions and specialist symposia when such "profits" exceeded a threshold published by SARS from time to time. This was an exercise that kept our secretary Mrs Laila Smith and I busy for a year in order to make the necessary

changes in the constitution acceptable to the receiver and thus save SACI from having to pay such taxes in future years.

### **Interaction with Sister Societies**

SACI has for many years wanted to form definite and cooperative interactions with the RSC and ACS and if possible with some societies from the far Eastern blocs. In spite of the excellent collaborations between the Western Cape and Southern Gauteng branches of SACI and the corresponding chapters of the Royal Society of Chemistry in which we have reciprocal committee representation and enjoy mutual parochial programmes, our relationship with the actual central administrative side was lacking. It was during the term of Tony Ford that Ivan Green on the request by the Western Cape Section made contact with the President of the RSC to investigate a more binding interactive arrangement between the societies. This led to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being drawn up between the two societies where a cocktail of various mutual benefits were established for Members of each society to enjoy. This among others resulted in the two Presidents, Ivan Green and John Philips of SACI and the RSC respectively, sharing a common platform at the launch of the IYC at the SACI 2011 National Convention as well as invitations to visit the RSC in Cambridge in July 2011. It is hoped that a similar MOU between the SACI and ACS might become a possibility. All of these dynamics place our Members in a position of being accepted internationally as belonging to a recognised professional Institute and thus we hope this fact will attract new members to join.

SACI has always enjoyed a most cordial and productive relationship between itself and the IUPAC since many of our Members are also IUPAC Members. Some of our Members have served generously on Commissions of the IUPAC with Piet Steyn serving as the President of IUPAC for a term. In addition our secretariat acts as collector of annual fees for IUPAC and remits these each year to the mother body. The IUPAC President for 2011 visited the 2011 National Convention at WITS and conveyed a message to the attendees of IUPAC's respect and appreciation for the contributions made by SA scientists and SACI Members.

### **Salary Surveys**

This has been one of the annual undertakings that SACI sponsors each year and we are most grateful for the Members who have so assiduously provided this service to our members over the past years. In the mid 1980's the surveys were accompanied by numerous tables and graphs of the earnings of academics at various institutions, of different age groups compared to similar parameters in industry to give SACI members an idea of the relative salaries earned in each of the sectors of the survey. The institutions most interested in the survey were and still today are, industry. SACI is often reminded by industry that it is time for the next survey since they were approaching the salary adjustment time of the year. It is thus gratifying that this service, although indifferent to academics, is nevertheless of considerable value to our industrial Members.

## **Awards**

It is the policy of SACI to recognise achievements by its members who have made a substantial contribution towards developing their particular spheres of endeavour and these are on the website for all to read. Over the years SACI has acted on the many new proposals by its members when introducing new awards in order to meet the changes in the interest groups that comprise SACI. Thus in 1993 two new awards viz., Chemical Education and Industrial Chemistry were introduced. Council is however all too aware that when introducing new awards, these have to have a long term life time as well as financial sponsorship for the future. We have over the years found that for some awards viz., Hendrick van Eck, Innovator, Industrial and Analytical for which a fair amount of effort needs to be made by the nominator who may view this as a bit arduous, we unfortunately receive no nominations. Council is in the process of reconfiguring and rewriting some of the descriptors of the awards to be topical and relevant for the future years.

The Gold Medal, the most prestigious award made by SACI, is still its most intensely vied for award and the past recipients have all excelled themselves in their research fields and done SACI very proud. It is always interesting to follow the future careers of the recipients of the Raikes Medal, SASOL Post-Graduate and James Moir awards since these are for younger academics and students respectively. We believe the latter awards have additionally been instrumental in attracting young academics to join SACI.

I believe the successful changes SACI has made over the past 25 years to its constitution, its administrative profile and the operational platform has been as a result of its excellent and dedicated Members who have elected representatives who were willing to engage with all issues that needed to be addressed. Interactive discourse between Members is good and this has led to further change and improvements in the services SACI currently offers. SACI has a sound financial basis which has been built up over the years into the Central Fund which is used to allow all branches of SACI to organise events for its Members. This fund needs to grow with inflation to take account of the future growth and development of the Institute.

Two of our biggest challenges into the future are: firstly, to grow our membership numbers including Corporate and Company members, who would be sourced from industrial and Government members to receive their input and secondly, to ensure that the National Programme serves the best interests of all Members. We need champions to serve these noble aims and these will come from our Membership core.

SACI Members can be most proud of their membership which is recognised throughout the scientific world and we trust that the future years we start at our Centenary celebrations on the 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2012 followed by a June 28<sup>th</sup> major event in Johannesburg will be an exciting experience for our current Members and future new Members.

Ivan R Green

President 2009-2011