

Sir Roderick, who died towards the end of August 2001, succeeded Sir Duncan Cumming to become the Society's second President (1974-78). His interest in Libya stemmed from his years as Ambassador there, from 1964 until Colonel Qadhafi seized power in September 1969. When I arrived at the Embassy at Tripoli in 1971, Rod was of course still a legend, especially with the Embassy drivers, with whose acquiescence had evolved his nickname of "Hot Rod". Endowed with amazing energy throughout his life, he had driven by car as much as possible throughout the length and breadth of the Kingdom. Indeed, his boast was to have driven both ways between Tripoli and Benghazi (not far short of 1000 kilometres each way) within 24 hours, including a sandstorm. His technique was to seize the wheel after the driver had seen him through the city traffic, and then give the man the choice of sitting alongside him in the front, or in the back. Most chose the back, as Rod drove very fast. There were few corners of the Kingdom to which he did not penetrate.



Sir Roderick Sarell.

He was an indefatigable attender at the Society's lectures to an advanced age, coming up by car and train from his house in Berkshire, and often enlivening the questions session with a first-hand account of a visit to a distant site, or an apt contrast with practices in Tunisia and Algeria, both of which countries he knew well.

His distinguished career as a diplomat has been covered in published obituaries. He was very modest about his achievements. I once asked him which of his many postings to the Middle East he had disliked most. His answer was instant. "Basra, at the beginning of the war. The night clubs there were absolutely lousy." I was happy to confirm that when my wife and I visited Basra in the 60s and then the 80s, the position had not changed.

Rod was greatly attached to his elder brother, Captain Ivan Sarrell DSO RN, a war hero about whom he would tell hair-raising stories in a loud whisper when an SLS Lecturer went on for too long.

I shall miss his immaculate if rather attenuated presence, and shy smile. He was a good man to sit next to at meetings, and a generous friend of the SLS.

Stephen Egerton
President 1994-98
30 August 2001