

## Alumni Newsletter – December 2006

Dear Royal Commission Alumnus,

2006 has been quite a year, beginning as it did with our very special gathering in London in February for the Alumni Reception at Buckingham Palace. Despite this being the undoubted highlight of the year, the Commission remains as active as ever, including signing up more previous award holders on the alumni website. Together with our new 2006 Fellows and Students, registrations have now broken through the 500 barrier.

The 2006 round of fellowships and studentships is now nearly complete, and will finish next week with the award of the Commission's inaugural Fellowship in Design. This new Fellowship is mentioned later in the newsletter. Our main awards were made during the summer and as well as being published as usual in The Times, full details appeared in the last newsletter, which is now posted, with all previous newsletters, on the Alumni website.

### Alumni Science Evening – 13 February 2007

The next 1851 Alumni event is the annual Science Evening, which will take place as in previous years (apart from 2006) at The Gallery, Cowcross Street, London EC1 (just north of Smithfield Market. With our regular format of presentations from current Fellows and a keynote speaker, all previous award holders are welcome - and encouraged - to attend, **so if any of you would like to come, please inform us by e-mail reply, with your postal address, and we will send you an invitation with all the details.** (All current award holders and Commission members will receive invitations.) For the 2007 evening the keynote speaker will be Professor Anne Dell, FRS, not only an eminent biologist, but also a member of the Commission's Science and Engineering Fellowships Committee AND an Alumnus.

### Palace Science Day

Returning to this year, the Royal Commission was back at Buckingham Palace on 24 October, this time as one of a group of major science and engineering bodies to stage a big science show for 16-18 year-olds as part of the year-long series of events to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Her Majesty the Queen. This exhibition, including a 12-metre flying dinosaur skeleton suspended between the crystal chandeliers from the ceiling of the Royal Ballroom, was staged jointly by the Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum, and was supported by the Royal Commission. In the presence of the Queen, our President Prince Philip and other members of the Royal Family, it was attended by over 800 young people. Its aim was to inspire them to consider careers in science, technology and engineering and it was extremely well received by participants and the media alike.

### Anniversaries and events

The presence of the Royal Commission on the science centre stage is set to continue in 2007 with a number of anniversaries in its legacy cultural estate in South Kensington. After the success of the Great Exhibition the Royal Commission purchased 87 acres of what was then called Brompton with the profits. It then encouraged the establishment of museums and colleges, the first being the South Kensington Museum, which was formally opened by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1857. So next year the Victoria & Albert museum celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a number of events and exhibitions. These will include a display of original watercolours of the interior of the Great Exhibition, recently offered to the museum and which the Commission has helped it purchase with a Special Award.

2007 also marks the centenary of the founding of Imperial College. Stimulated by the early concerns of Prince Albert and the 1851 Royal Commission, an inquiry by another Royal Commission set up in the 1870's resulted in the move to the 1851 estate in South Kensington of the Royal College of Science, the Royal School of Mines and the Central Technical Institute of the City & Guilds. These were subsequently brought together in 1907 as Imperial College. Its centenary is being celebrated with a year-long programme of events, some of which the Commission hopes to support. At the same time, in 2007 the Royal College of Music will celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its foundation.

All these events combine with the continuing programmes of the other museums and colleges, together with events staged by the Exhibition Road Cultural Group as part of Exhibition Road Development. They all continue to raise awareness of the unique legacy of Prince Albert and the Great Exhibition which was his brainchild.

#### New Royal Commissioners

After several years of stability among the Commissioners, two have recently reached the end of their terms of ten years. Sir John Meurig Thomas stood down in 2005 and was succeeded by Mr Bernard Taylor. This year Mr Lawrence Banks was succeeded by Sir John Krebs – the eminent behavioural ecologist who has already been a member of the Science & Engineering Fellowships Committee for many years. Both our leaving Commissioners were chairmen of key committees, and Sir John Meurig Thomas was succeeded as Chairman of the Science & Engineering Fellowships Committee by Professor Windle (Professor of Material Science at Cambridge University). Lawrence Banks' chairmanship of the Finance Committee has been taken on by Mr Bernard Taylor. All Commissioners are listed on our main web site.

#### Fellowship in Design

To add further emphasis to the Commission's support of "art and science", it has created a new Fellowship in Design, the first of which will be awarded this year. Similar in framework to the Fellowship in the Built Environment, awarded every other year, this fellowship is offered in intervening years and is aimed to support high level research into the future needs of design. The first award, full details of which are on the Commission's website, is to explore the Future of Design in Business. It attracted a very high standard of entries and following recent interviews the result will be announced on 7 December.

#### New Brunel Science Fellowship for Engineering

Despite it being available equally for research projects in pure or applied science, engineering or mathematics, the Royal Commission's flagship programme of top-level 2-year Science Research Fellowships always attracts applications mostly from pure scientists. To further encourage applied science and particularly engineering research at this level, the Commission has this year announced an additional award, the Brunel Research Fellowship, to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great engineer's birth. Awarded specifically for engineering and research, the first will be awarded in 2007 and full details are on the Commission's website.

#### Upgrading the Commission's office and procedures

When the Commission's staff moved in 1986 from its grand accommodation in Lowther Gardens into its more modest new offices in Imperial College, they were fitted out with desks and filing cabinets for the reduced staff of Secretary, PA and Accountant. While the old leather-topped desk in the Secretary's office still serves well (although now embellished with a laptop), the PA post has been superseded by the Senior Administrator and the main office furniture no longer works for its 21<sup>st</sup> century role with more IT-based activities. In particular as a major step forward for 2007 we will be accepting applications for Research Fellowships via the web, thereby avoiding growing mountains of photocopying every year as the numbers of applications increase.

So over Christmas and New Year the office will be stripped, new IT channelling, lighting and equipment fitted and new furniture installed. So if any of you visit us during that time, please do not be deterred by an office full of workmen – just go down the passage to the door of the Secretary's office. There you will find us all sandwiched in together, conducting as best we can, business as usual!

Finally, as we are now (just) in December, it is timely for all of us at the Commission to offer you every good wish for Christmas and the New Year. Please keep in touch.

Malcolm Shirley,  
Secretary to the Commission.