



## **E-mail Newsletter December 2008**

Dear Royal Commission Alumnus,

I have sent the Commission's Christmas good wishes separately – as our e-Christmas Card (and thanks to many of you for replying) – but nonetheless I would like to offer all Royal Commission Alumni every good wish after a turbulent year for world events. This was a year in which global financial collapse graphically demonstrated that sustainable economies cannot be built on service industries, debt and hot air alone. As Prince Albert identified over 150 years ago, the crucial importance of “productive industry” in its broadest sense is the real key to long term economic success of any developed nation.

If 2009 is going to be a year of recession, continuing population growth, food shortages and increasing concern over climate change, hopefully it may also be a year in which the crucial importance of scientists and engineers in solving these issues will be better recognised.

Of course the Royal Commission plays its small part in this by identifying the very best scientists and engineers and rewarding them with our fellowships and studentships. In this regard we continue to build on these programmes as our income increases and the decisions of last May's strategic review are now being implemented. In particular, following the strong message from the alumni questionnaire of a year ago, our Science and Engineering Research Fellowships have been extended from two to three years. This will be implemented from the 2009 awards and will significantly increase the value – and attractiveness - of these important fellowships. A number of other new initiatives are also being explored and developed.

### **Alumni Science Evening**

One of our first events of 2009 will be the Alumni Science Evening on Tuesday 10 February. As well as presentations by final year fellows and a demonstration by our new Design Fellow, the keynote address will be given by 1851 alumnus Professor Roger Cashmore, Principal of Brasenose College Oxford and formerly Director of Research and Deputy Director General of CERN. This promises to be a fascinating insight into the development of the Large Hadron Collider and could hardly be a more contemporary topic.

The evening will be held, as previously, in the City of London. Please let me know if you can come by e-mail reply with your postal address and I will send you an invitation with all the details.

### **Edwin Salpeter**

On the subject of distinguished alumni, it is with sadness that we have heard of the death earlier this month, at the age of 83, of Edwin Salpeter, 1851 Overseas Scholar (1946) and, to quote his obituary “one of the most respected scientists in the world.” An eminent astrophysicist, Professor Salpeter's research ranged from black holes to missile defence systems. His lasting contributions to this field include the “Salpeter Process” which describes how helium nuclei fuse to form carbon in the interiors of ancient stars, and before this discovery the origin of the elements beyond helium in the periodic table was a mystery. His fundamental “Salpeter initial main function” enabled determination of the numbers of stars of different masses that form in a galaxy.

Born in Austria and taken by his parents to Australia in 1939, Professor Salpeter won a Royal Commission Overseas Scholarship at Birmingham University in 1945 after which his career was spent at Cornell University. He attended the Commission's Alumni Reunion and Science Evening in 2006 where the keynote speaker Lord Rees, President of the Royal Society, publicly paid tribute to Edwin Salpeter's great distinction.

### **The Commission's Archive**

Angela Kenny, the Commission's Archivist, has now completed the transfer of the archive's paper catalogue onto a Calm database. This is a specialist archival database which meets international standards for archive catalogues and which will make our catalogue much more readily accessible. We now plan to expand the archive page on our website to include a link to the catalogue, and to explore the selective digitisation of some of our more visual, popular and treasured items such as the early estate maps.

### **Commission Staff**

Mr Amahl Smith has joined the Commission as its Accountant. Having previously been with the St Mary's Hospital Trust in London, this experience ideally suits him to the Commission and he is looking forward to getting to know our alumni and current award holders in the coming months.

### **South Kensington**

Activity continues on the Commission's legacy estate, including Exhibition Road Development with changes to traffic management soon to start in preparation for the development of the road itself. The major refurbishment of the concert hall of the Royal College of Music is now almost complete and Imperial College is gearing itself for the final phase of its £400m development programme – the rebuild of the Mechanical Engineering Department.

### **Miscellanea: The First Celebrity Chef?**

In 1831 a young French chef called Alexis Soyer, left Paris for London where he quickly established himself as the most famous cook of the Victorian era. In 1837 he became chef at the Reform Club, London, where he redesigned the kitchens. Ten years later, having invented the "soup kitchen", he was sent by the British Government to establish these in Ireland.

His links with the Commission began in 1850 when, along with a Mr Warrener, he submitted a design, ultimately rejected, for a building in which to hold the Great Exhibition. He later exhibited at the Exhibition – "a gas stove for cooking... which retains and radiates the heat". In 1851 Soyer opened his Symposium, a restaurant serving international cuisine, in Gore House opposite the Great Exhibition. This had an enormous dining room and gardens. However, his plan to make money from the large number of visitors to the Exhibition failed, and he was left with large debts. The Commission later bought Gore House as part of its South Kensington estate.

From then until his death in 1858 Soyer toured the country promoting his cookery books, worked in the Crimea where he revised military diets and designed a stove for use in the field. He died in 1858 and is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery in North West London.

Finally, as the turn of the year approaches, we look forward to another exciting year at the Commission as we build on our award programmes and continue to increase the numbers of our greatest asset – our alumni, distinguished Royal Commission award holders, past and present.

With all good seasonal wishes,

Malcolm Shirley  
Secretary to the Commission