

1851 Royal Commission Alumni

E-mail Newsletter March 2005

Dear Royal Commission Alumnus,

In December 2004 I mentioned that registered 1851 Alumni had reached 400, or nearly 45%. Now, only three months later, we are over 420, which means that more than half our active Award Holders have now signed up. Also from this year we have decided that all new Award Holders should be automatically registered on the Alumni web site.

Of the letters I have received from 1851 Alumni, one struck a unique chord. It was from Professor Samuel Devons, of Columbia University. He first apologised for not responding earlier, not because of lack of enthusiasm but primarily as, now in his nineties, he has less energy! He then went on to say that as well as his pride in this 1851 fellowship, his professor, Ernest Rutherford, often used to speak of his debt to the Royal Commission. Lord Rutherford was the first of twelve 1851 Alumni to become Nobel Laureates.

The Alumni Web Site

I mentioned in the last newsletter that we were planning to establish a more sophisticated alumni database. In the event we decided that this should be done in conjunction with a complete revamp of the alumni web site as well. This will be launched in a few weeks and for better security will be password protected. This, hopefully, will allay the fears of some of you about personal details on a publicly accessible site. The web site will have a much better developed mechanism for alumni to communicate, including direct updating of their details. I will send you another e-mail to announce the launch and provide user instructions.

2005 Royal Commission Fellowships

2005 has once again been a bumper year for applications for Royal Commission Fellowships. By the deadline for Industrial Fellowships at the end of January we had received 28% more applications than last year. When we reached the deadline for Research Fellowships a month later we soon realised that we had received more applications than ever before, making each of the last three years a record year. At the same time quality, too, of applications and their projects continue at an impressively high level, making all the more difficult the task of selecting recipients for the Commission's awards.

At least, as a result of the generous donation by the ERA Foundation (reported in my last newsletter), we will henceforth be able to award an additional Industrial Fellowship every year from this year onwards. This will be to a candidate from the electro-technology sector and will mean that from 2007 onwards we will have an extra three current Industrial Fellows at any one time.

The Presidential Dinner

Every two years the Commission holds a formal Presidential Dinner which is an opportunity to bring together Commissioners and Committee Members with current Award Holders, all in the presence of the President. A number of selected Fellows and Students mount poster displays of their work. This year is rather special as it is the fortieth year of the presidency of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Throughout this time Prince Philip has taken a keen interest in the work of the Commission and its Award Holders, and he showed this at the dinner, spending over half an hour of the reception talking to the presenters and studying their displays. As in recent years, the dinner was held in the magnificent Armourers' Hall in the heart of the City of London, and special guests included the directors of a number of the Commission's legacy South Kensington cultural institutions.

February Alumni Evening

A month earlier, on 8 February, we held our second Alumni Evening. Now an annual event, it was based on the inaugural science evening held in 2004, with presentations by a selection of Science Research and Industrial Fellows, followed by a keynote talk. This year it was given by the eminent volcanologist and 1851 alumnus, Professor Steve Sparks, who gave us a fascinating account of risk analysis of the volcano in Montserrat. The evening ended with a congenial glass of wine and a meal.

Most importantly, as well as Commissioners, Committee members and current award holders, the event attracted a larger number of 1851 alumni, including professors visiting from India and Australia. This is the main point of the evening and I hope that more and more of you will be able to come to future events. So please make a note now of the 2006 Alumni Evening – 21 February, at The Gallery, in London, when the speaker will be Sir Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal and a member of the Commission's Science Scholarships Committee.

Exhibition Road Development

As I have mentioned in earlier newsletters, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is leading an exciting project to develop Exhibition Road as a fitting portal to the unique Royal Commission cultural estate in South Kensington. This project was publicly unveiled in January and consists of an innovative plan to redevelop Exhibition Road as a shared space for pedestrians and traffic alike. You can see further details of the project on: http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/EnvironmentalServices/general/ex_road_project.asp

Royal Commission Staff

With the retirement of Chris Carpenter at the end of January, the Commission now has a new Administrator, Jenifer Parkyn, who as well as running the office, will be taking over management of the Alumni Database and updating Alumni information and contacts. So as well as communicating through the new web site once it is launched, please do not hesitate to get in touch with either of us by e-mail to the office. We all share the same e-mail address, to make things easy!

And Finally....

Did you know that the expression "Crystal Palace", which so aptly described Joseph Paxton's iconic Great Exhibition building, was originally coined by the 19th century English novelist Douglas Jarrold (1803 – 1857). Picked up first by Punch magazine and the Illustrated London News during its construction in Hyde Park, Crystal Palace not only was the name of the building, but became the name of the area of London (Sydenham) to which it was moved after the Exhibition and its football team, which carried the name to this day.

When the Great Exhibition took place in 1851, many of the more than six million visitors were not only coming to London, but were also leaving their home towns and villages for the first time in their lives. The biggest single group to visit the exhibition was 1,000, from the Methodist and Wesleyan School in the Wiltshire town of Trowbridge, travelling to London on the newly extended Great Western Railway.

With every good wish,

Malcolm Shirley,
Secretary to the Commission