



## **E-mail Newsletter September 2008**

Dear Royal Commission Alumnus,

Although this newsletter is packed with features, I start on a sad note, to inform you that Sir Denis Rooke, Royal Commissioner and Chairman of the Board of Management from 1987 – 2001, died on 2 September 2008. He was a major figure in British Industry who was responsible for the privatisation of British Gas in 1986 – then the biggest privatisation of any nationalised industry. A lifelong engineer, Sir Denis also introduced natural gas to the UK, replacing coal gas and exploiting the massive reserves in the North Sea. As well as the distinction of Fellowships of both the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering (and Presidency of the latter), he is the only engineer to have been appointed to the Order of Merit. A giant of British industry in all respects, Sir Denis did much to raise the Commission's profile during his chairmanship and will be greatly missed and the Commission's condolences have been offered to his widow and family. Following many obituaries, the last Secretary but one, Michael Neale CB, wrote in The Times:

"Sir Denis Rooke's concern for education is well exemplified by his chairmanship from 1987 to 2001 of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851. I was appointed secretary to the commission more or less simultaneously with Sir Denis becoming chairman. My brief from him was to formulate a new award structure with the aim of focusing the awards more directly on the needs of British industry. This was no easy task. The commission's longstanding pattern of awards had produced a distinguished alumni and so, not surprisingly, there was opposition to change.

"Sir Denis, though, was determined that the changed times required change. We met regularly over lunch. This was at a time when the political uproar over the privatisation of British Gas was daily making banner headlines, yet he would discuss "the 1851" for an hour or more as if the palaver awaiting him outside the room simply did not exist. With great care he settled the commission's award structure down to the finest detail, and 20 years on it remains substantially unchanged.

"With the commission's young award holders he was kindness personified. Many will remember with gratitude his personal concern for their welfare at the commission's annual receptions."

### **2008 Royal Commission Awards**

We have had another busy year for the Commission's three core awards programmes, and after establishing our Science Research Fellowships application and assessment on-line last year, we were able to refine it for this year's process. It went very smoothly, generating significant savings in paper and postage.

The full list of award holders is already on the Commission's main website and was announced in The Times on 20 August so I will not repeat it here, but as you will see, it has the usual range of highly qualified young people and impressive projects.

The Commission's Industrial Design Students continue to excel during their post-graduate courses. The majority are on the Industrial Design Engineering course at the Royal College of Art where those completing this year passed out with flying colours, all exhibiting at the RCA's Summer Show and many winning commendations and awards on the way. Of these, Yusuf Muhammad, already two time finalist in the Helen Hamlyn Design for our Future Selves awards and two time Ideas Challenge winner at Imperial College, won the Imperial College New Business Challenge prize of £25,000 to enable him to take his cooker hood/fire suppressant system to production. Andrew Stordy & Katie Taylor won a Gold Award in the IDEA International Design competition run by the Industrial Designers Society of America for their Malaria Must Go project. Elsewhere, Kirsty Allan, who graduated this summer from Cranfield University with an MSc in Motorsport, is now Composites R&D Project Engineer with the Williams Formula 1 Team.

### **Fellowship in Design**

The only 2008 award yet to be made is the Fellowship in Design. Introduced in 2006, this will be the second fellowship and interviews of shortlisted candidates will take place in November. As earlier announced on our website, this year's award will be for research into "Design: The link between technology and productive industry" and attracted a wide range of

research proposals.

### **Developing Strategy**

It is now over six years since the Commission's last strategy review and as Britain's industrial landscape continues to change, the Commissioners held a strategy day on 1 May 2008. This followed the survey of the views of the Commission's award holders past and present – to which many of you responded – and which provided us with some clear indicators of how we might develop our award programmes and expand our role. These views were fed into the May Day discussions and a number of important strategic decisions were made. These included exploring ways in which we can increase our effectiveness through joint activity with other organisations and improving our existing awards as our income increases. In particular the Board of Management has now agreed that our Science Research Fellowships should be extended from two to three years from 2009, significantly adding to their value.

### **2008 Alumni Science Evening**

Plans are now shaping up for the Commission's next annual Alumni Science Evening, to take place in The Gallery, in the City of London, on Tuesday, 10 February 2009. Now a firm favourite in the Commission's events programme, we would still like to see more previous award holders attending, so please not only put the date in your diaries NOW, also let us know if you would like to come and we will make sure you are sent an invitation nearer the time.

### **The Last Night of the Proms – A Royal Commission Fellow's impression**

As the lucky recipient of the Commission's tickets for the Last Night of the Proms, we asked Richard Forster, a 2005 Industrial Fellow, to send us an account of his experience. He writes:

“Armed with a union jack and unnecessarily high heels we by-passed the prommers queuing outside the Royal Albert Hall and engaged in our first Last Night at the Proms. The heels may have been painful, but we had some fantastic seats; royally commissioned seats. We were dressed as 21<sup>st</sup> century British concert goers, but it soon became apparent that our outfits were a little understated. Our statement of Britishness, quietly enjoying queuing at the bar, was far less exuberant than the sea of maharajas, Victorian gentry and imperial hunters who swam about us.

“Inside, the RAH took on the atmosphere of a naughty school boys outing with Sir Roger Norrington conducting the role of the exasperated headmaster to a tee. The acoustics of the hall were dutifully tested, intermittently, by the noisy balloons released by the prommers on the floor, whose diligent assistance was gratefully applauded by everyone. Beethoven, Wagner and Puccini all managed to accompany the balloons and rowdy Brits with dignified composure.

“The raucous atmosphere tensed when out of nowhere the notorious London drunk, Sir John Falstaff, staggered onto the stage. Fortunately, the merry Sir John sang his way to appeasing the crowd and was not lynched; even though some said his belly rubbing of the conductor was ‘a stroke too far’.

“The second half moved to the inevitable crescendo and I bellowed out ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ in a manner akin to a professional hooligan. As the closing bars of Jerusalem drew in, I swallowed the lump in my throat and sang; I sang for Harry, England and St. George. It was all I could do to hold back the tears, but had I let them flow, I'm sure they would have run red, white and blue.”

### **Last word from the Archivist**

Being based in South Kensington we are always aware of when the holiday season is upon us as we pass the queues of tourists outside the nearby museums. More unusual attractions awaited visitors to the Great Exhibition in 1851. Tourism had barely started at this time. Indeed one of Thomas Cook's early excursions was bringing people from around the UK to London for the Exhibition and his foreign excursions did not begin until 1855. The Royal Commissioners were keen to ensure that foreign visitors would have a range of places to visit whilst in London and so they made arrangements for various London institutions to open their doors to the public. As well as arranging for their admission to the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey and Windsor Castle they also arranged for visitors to see behind the scenes at the Bank of England, the Royal Mint, the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich and various London gaols, and those interested in the “treatment of insanity” could visit the Brideswell and Bethlem hospitals!

*[Taken from the Commissioners' correspondence]*

Finally, Commissioners and staff send you every good wish – and hope you will keep in touch; we are always delighted to hear from you.

Malcolm Shirley  
Secretary to the Commission

