



Chairman's Summer Newsletter 2024

Dear Member,

Firstly, it gives me great pleasure to welcome the following new members to the Society, who have joined since my previous Newsletter – Professor Kevin Harrington, Professor David Johnson and Professor Shahin Rahimifard. Regretfully, I have to report the deaths of two members of the Society, Peter Pallett, our Deputy Chairman and Visits Secretary and Richard Mead. We have also learnt of the deaths of two former members, David Freat, who was the Meetings Secretary, 1999-2000 and Malcolm Busfield.

Appointments – President. I am delighted to confirm that Professor Janet Lord, FMedSci CBE, Emeritus Professor of Immune Cell Biology at the Institute for Inflammation and Ageing at Birmingham University has agreed to be our next President. Professor Lord will receive her Badge of Office from our outgoing President, Professor Rik Bryan at our Annual Dinner on Wednesday 16th October and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rik for his terrific support to the Society over the last two years.

Visits Secretary – I am also pleased to advise the members that Mike Beeson has agreed to take on this role, to which he brings enormous past experience.

Educational Support – I can confirm that the Society has recently provided funding, from the Education Fund, to the Friary School for the purchase of a new incubator/oven. The equipment will be used for GCSE and A Level microbiology practicals. The Society will also continue to support Student Awards to local schools and details will be announced once this year's GSCE and A Level results have been released. The Committee are continuing to explore the possibility of providing financial support to an engineering/science student at Aston University.

Garrick Theatre – we have been informed that the Garrick will undergo a major refurbishment of its front of house areas, commencing in early July. The plans will not affect the studio facility. However as the new bars will not be completed until the end of September, the Theatre will be unable to offer a full food and drink service for our September lecture and will be providing alternative arrangements.

The Annual General Meeting was convened on Wednesday 10 May 2024, prior to the evening's lecture, with 75 members in attendance. My report to the members had been circulated prior to the meeting and on matters arising, I advised the meeting that the Garrick Management had agreed, for the use of the Main Theatre for December lectures, to charge the Society the Studio hiring rate, which would save the Society over £2000 per annum. I also confirmed that the Committee had again investigated the benefits of securing Charitable Status and had concluded not only that the benefits were not of sufficient significance to warrant a change to our current status but also that there was no necessity for it. The Treasurer's Report and accounts were presented, which indicated that expenditure exceeded income by £2306, a much better result than predicted a year earlier, due to the aforementioned change by the Garrick to our December hire fee. The Treasurer advised that there were 262 paid subscriptions, 20 fewer than the previous year. Over the last five years membership has declined by 20%, which emphasizes the necessity for new members. We may need to review the cost of the subscription in a year's time but for 2024-2025 it will be unchanged at £35. In the unavoidable absence of our President, Professor Rik Bryan, Past President Peter Lambert kindly took the chair and the Committee was re-elected.

Monthly Lectures – After the AGM in May, Professor David Johnson of the University of Manchester, gave a fascinating lecture entitled “**Underground Networks: Why soil fungi matter for life on earth**”. Professor Johnson explained the relationship between plant root systems and fungal networks – the “Wood-Wide-Web”. He gave details of various experiments, which demonstrated that plants required not just their roots for survival, but also the presence of underground mycorrhizal fungi.



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Our 2023-24 lecture programme concluded with Professor Shahin Rahimifard of the University of Loughborough, providing a thought-provoking lecture entitled “**How to manufacture a sustainable future for nine billion people by 2050**”. Professor Rahimifard, who is Professor of Sustainable Engineering at Loughborough, explained details of the Centre of SMART – Sustainable Manufacturing and Recycling Technologies, of which he is the Founder and Director. He quantified the enormous waste generated in the UK and the necessity to move from a “linear” economy to a “circular” economy and from the current unsustainable position to a sustainable one. He explained some of the projects at Loughborough University and invited the Society to take part.

Social Events – Annual Supper – this was again held at Whittington Golf Club’s attractive Club House in June and proved to be a most convivial evening for members and guests. We were entertained after dining to an interesting talk by Ben East, a volunteer First Responder, who supports the West Midlands Ambulance Service during emergency incidents. I would like to extend our thanks to Carol Hannam for organising an excellent evening.

Visits – The groundworks for these were carried out by Peter Pallett.

The **HS2 Delta Project** must rank as one of the most impressive visits we have ever had. The scale of the operation, only a part of the total HS2 works, was immense; the number of people involved, the size of the machinery, the immense concrete bridge sections which are cast on site for the whole route left a lasting impression. On April 19th, 28 members were fortunate to have the whole thing expertly explained by Peter’s friend Jim Richings, Technical Director of the Balfour Beatty VINCI Joint Venture.

Following last year’s lecture by Professor Foyer, 13 Members went to the **BIFOR** site near Stafford to see how the centre studies the effect of increased atmospheric CO₂, the concentration of which they control by blowing it from towers surrounding the trees. Everything imaginable is measured - weather, air quality, tree growth, leaf colour, insect life, using miles of cable from a huge number of sensors. The sensitivity is such that they can detect several thousand people breathing out at a pop concert six miles away. We had a very warm reception from Dr Samantha Dobbie and she and Dr Nick Harper gave us a fascinating walk in the woods and an overview of the amazing scope of their research.

June was the proper month for a visit to strawberry growers **Manor Farm Fruits**. Unsurprisingly this was the most popular outing this year, 34 Members and friends were shown by owner Simon Clarke the hydroponic beds in which the strawberries, raspberries and other fruit are grown and the computer control of the water and nutrient levels. Two outstanding memories; Simon waving vaguely at a row of poly-tunnels and saying “We’ll have a ton of raspberries out of here tomorrow”, and the state-of-the art flypaper. Well, the fly-paper is still just sticky but the app on your phone will tell you what bugs you’ve got, how many of each and what you should do about them.

Our 2024-25 lecture programme, which commences in September with the Presidential Lecture, is included with this mailing, along with the Membership renewal form, Visits Invitation and Invitation to our Annual Dinner.

I wish you and your families an enjoyable summer break and thank you for your continued support.

Alan Hooper

Chairman