

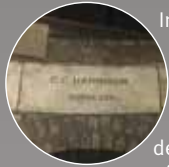
Imperial College  
London

We are  
celebrating 125 years  
of the Queen's Tower.



# Chronology

Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone of the Imperial Institute, which was created to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887.



Stones were set in the Institute's central tower on 17 November 1892 and honoured all those with major involvement in the design and construction of the Imperial Institute.

The statue of Queen Victoria was donated by the University of London, which temporarily had offices in the Imperial Institute building.



Imperial's expansion plans, which involved the demolition of the Institute, were made public. Sir Julian Huxley proposed that the central tower – now the Queen's Tower – be retained.

The statue of Queen Victoria by Edgar Boehm, located on the ground floor of the Tower, was moved to the College's Main Entrance.

1851

Conceived by Prince Albert, the Prince Consort, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was held in Hyde Park in 1851 and celebrated the very best of modern technology and design. Surplus profits from the Exhibition were used to purchase land to realise Prince Albert's vision for a scientific and cultural quarter in South Kensington.

1887

Lease of land granted to the Organising Committee of the Institute by the Royal Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851. The grant of a Royal Charter established the Imperial Institute.

1888

1892

1893

Opening of the Imperial Institute by Queen Victoria.

1907

Imperial College London created and based on the same site.

1936

1953

The government scheme for the expansion of Imperial was announced.

1956

1957

Demolition of the Institute began in the rear galleries.

1966

Work began to convert the central tower into a free-standing campanile, the Queen's Tower.

1968

The Queen's Tower work was completed.

2006

A competition was held by the Dyson School of Design Engineering and Imperial College Advanced Hackspace to design and create a 3D-printed crown. The winning 'Lion Crown' was designed by Civil Engineering student Eric Yick Hong Leung.



2016

# Welcome



**Anne Barrett**  
College Archivist &  
Corporate Records  
Manager

**This year, Imperial College London is celebrating 125 years of the Queen's Tower, the only remaining part of the Imperial Institute, which was built to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, and opened in 1893.**

The purposes of the Institute were very close to those of Imperial College London, to promote scientific, technical commercial, industrial and educational interests.

In celebrating the Imperial Institute and the Queen's Tower we therefore celebrate the impetus behind the Great Exhibition and the 1851 Royal Commission on whose land the Institute and now Imperial stand, and the ambitions of Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, the Prince Consort that a scientific and cultural quarter should be created around Exhibition Road. The iconic Tower, visible from many areas in London, so tall is it, celebrates the College as being at the heart of the South Kensington Quarter.

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of rapid change in culture and science, technology and medicine. The government asked Imperial to respond to this by expanding its teaching and facilities.

Whilst it wasn't possible to retain the whole Imperial Institute building to fulfil this demand, rising to the challenge, Imperial utilised the skills and knowledge of its Civil Engineering Professor of Soil Science, Sir Alec Skempton to engineer the structure as a free-standing bell tower. In this way, it has become the Imperial College London icon, a symbol of ingenuity, expertise and swift response to the need for scientific and technological change.

Imperial's history is rich in creativity; it has stood the test of time, as has the 125 year old Tower. Its use today reflects College and South Kensington history and current life, with its bells ringing for Royal occasions, and also for Imperial's Graduation ceremonies twice a year.





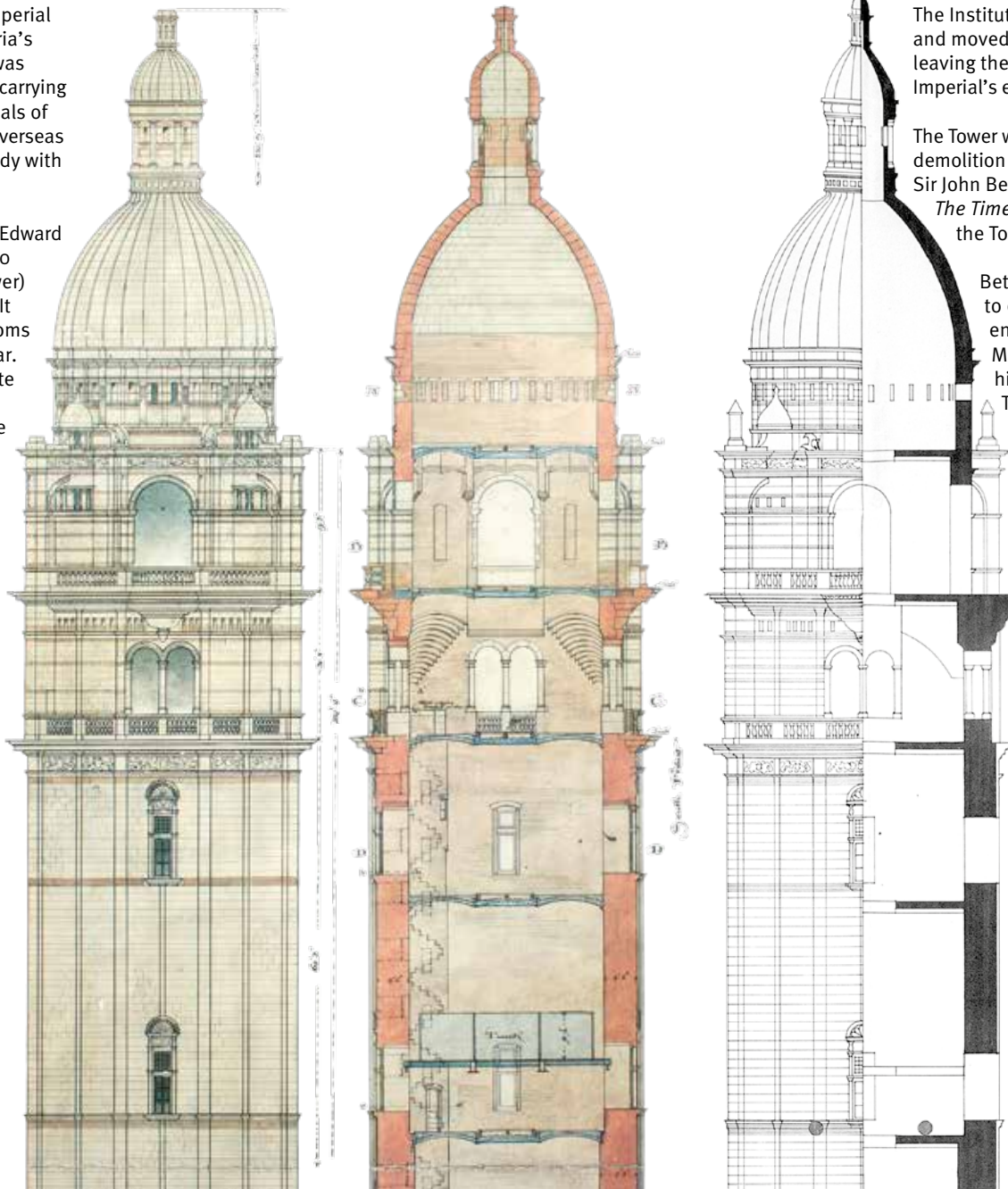
# The Queen's Tower: a history

The Queen's Tower is all that remains of the Imperial Institute, which was built to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. The Imperial Institute was established by Royal Charter for the purpose of carrying out research into the resources and raw materials of the Empire and to provide a meeting place for overseas visitors. It was administered by a governing body with the then Prince of Wales as President.

The Imperial Institute was designed by Thomas Edward Collcutt in the neo-renaissance style. It was 700 feet long with a central tower (the Queen's Tower) and smaller towers at the east and west ends. It contained a library, laboratories, conference rooms and exhibition galleries with gardens at the rear. Construction work took six years and the Institute was opened in 1893. The University of London used over half of the building as administrative offices from 1899 until 1936, when it moved to its present site in Bloomsbury.



The Imperial Institute under construction.



The Institute became the Commonwealth Institute in 1966 and moved to a new building in Kensington High Street, leaving the Imperial Institute building as a legacy site for Imperial's expansion as the government demanded.

The Tower was retained thanks to a campaign against the demolition of the Institute led by the former Poet Laureate, Sir John Betjeman, and a letter from Sir Julian Huxley to *The Times*, in which he proposed the preservation of the Tower as a free-standing structure.

Between 1966 and 1968, work was carried out to enable the Tower to be free-standing. It was engineered by Imperial's Professor of Soil Mechanics, Professor Sir Alec Skempton and his team in the Civil Engineering Department. This involved creating massive foundations and then substantially rebuilding the lower portion of the Tower.

Today, the Queen's Tower is a prominent feature of South Kensington's cultural landscape. It serves as a reminder of the College's rich history, and of Prince Albert's vision for a world-leading scientific and cultural quarter in South Kensington. This vision was made a reality following the success of the Great Exhibition of 1851, and paved the way for the formation of the cultural icons that sit alongside the Tower, including the Royal Albert Hall, the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum and the V&A.



## Did you know?

The Queen's Tower has not always been a free-standing bell tower. It was the central tower of the Imperial Institute, which took **six years to construct**, 1887–1893, and was **700 feet long**.

When the Queen's Tower was opened in 1893, over **25,000 people** were present, including **Queen Victoria**.

Between 1966 and 1986, the Tower was engineered to be **free-standing**, and a bell tower, by Imperial's Civil Engineering Department, led by Professor Sir Alec Skempton, a founder of the discipline of Soil Mechanics.

The Tower was previously known as the **Collcutt Tower** after its designer, Thomas Edward Collcutt.

The names of the artisans and foremen who built the tower are inscribed in stones fixed around the dome at the very top.


There were originally **four lions** outside the Imperial Institute. Two remain on site and sit proudly outside the entrance to the Queen's Tower, at the foot of the steps, and two are now in the gardens of Clarence House.


The land for the Imperial Institute and now Imperial College London was granted by the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851, using the Great Exhibition's surplus profits.

## The Queen's Tower in numbers


 **287**  
The Queen's Tower is 287 feet tall

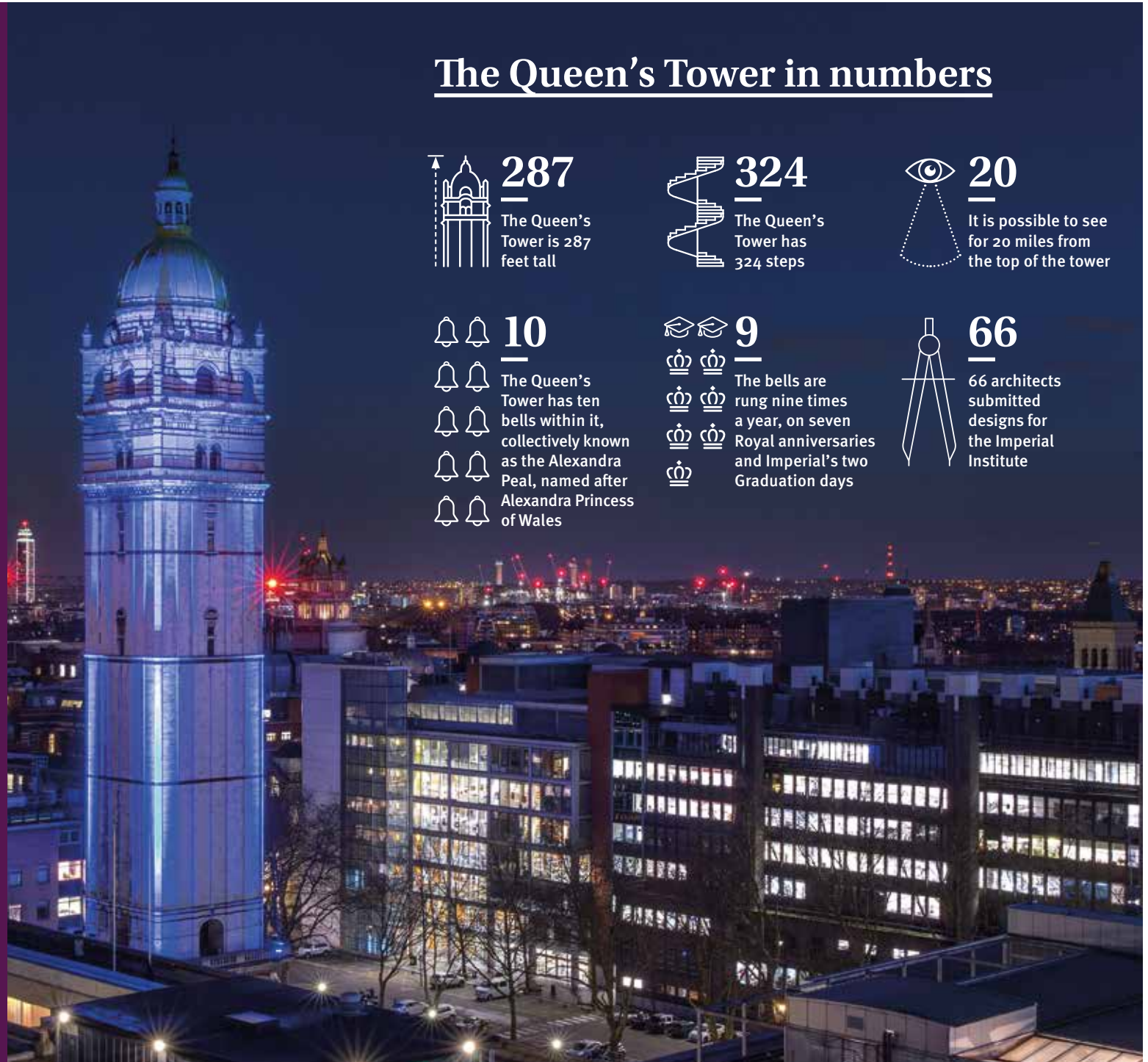
 **324**  
The Queen's Tower has 324 steps

 **20**  
It is possible to see for 20 miles from the top of the tower

 **10**  
The Queen's Tower has ten bells within it, collectively known as the Alexandra Peal, named after Alexandra Princess of Wales

 **9**  
The bells are rung nine times a year, on seven Royal anniversaries and Imperial's two Graduation days

 **66**  
66 architects submitted designs for the Imperial Institute





# Philanthropic origins



The Queen's Tower was founded on philanthropy, with its construction part funded by the £440,000 of public donations to the Imperial Institute, made in celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

Further donations have included the Alexandra Peal of bells, a statue of Queen Victoria, stained glass windows and terracotta medallions featuring eminent scientists.

The arched windows at the first stage of the Tower now house three stained glass windows, donated in 1921 in memory of Henry George Plimmer (Professor of Pathology) by his widow. At the time, they were believed to be by Burne-Jones, but they are now thought to be by an artist from the circle of Henry Holiday and to have been made by Powells of Whitefriars. They date from about 1890 and may have come from Plimmer's Music Room at his home in St John's Wood. The figures represent Art, Music and Literature.



Three literary quotations appear at the bottom of the windows:

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Die Zukunft decket  
Schmerzen und Glücke  
Schrittweis dem Blicke;  
Doch ungeschreckt  
Dringen wir vorwärts

The future veils  
Pains and happinesses.  
Step by step towards the sight.  
But undeterred  
We press forwards

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:  
Loge: Symbolum*

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La raison triomphe de la mort,  
et travailler pour elle c'est,  
travailler pour l' éternité.

Reason triumphs over death,  
and working for Reason is  
working for eternity.

*Ernest Renan: Discours de  
Reception a l' Academie  
Francaise*

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All things of the body are as  
a river; those of the soul are  
a dream and a mist. Life is  
but a war, and the visit of a  
stranger; Fame is oblivion.  
What then has the power  
to survive? One thing only –  
love of knowledge.

*Marcus Aurelius: Meditations,  
Book II.*





## The Bell Chamber

The Bell Chamber contains the Alexandra Peal of bells. The Peal consists of ten bells and is named after Alexandra, the Princess of Wales (1844–1925). The bells were a gift to the Prince of Wales from Mrs Elizabeth M Millar of Melbourne, Australia in 1892. Each bell is separately named after members of the 19th-century royal family.

The bells are rung on the following Royal anniversaries and occasions:

6 February	The Accession of Her Majesty's Queen Elizabeth II
21 April	Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen
2 June	Coronation Day
10 June	Birthday of the Duke of Edinburgh
15 August	Birthday of the Princess Royal
14 November	Birthday of the Prince of Wales
20 November	Her Majesty's wedding day

The bells are also rung on the College's two Graduation days in May and October.

### The Dome

The internal wooden structure of the dome is an interesting example of Victorian craftsmanship. On the upper stone cornice are inscribed the names of those who built the tower and an inscription which reads:

*"The stones on this top cornice of the Queen's Jubilee tower were fixed on the 17th day of November 1892 by the persons whose names appear on them and who have all been closely associated with the work from its commencement."*



## The meeting of tradition and innovation

The work undertaken by Professor Sir Alec Skempton and his team to preserve the Queen's Tower is a continual reminder of engineering excellence at Imperial. Since then, the Tower has inspired a range of student and alumni projects that fuse tradition with innovation and showcase the engineering, technological, entrepreneurial and creative talent that Imperial is known for.

In 2016, a competition was run by the Dyson School of Engineering and Imperial College Advanced Hackspace, challenging participants to create a new 3D-printed crown for the Queen Victoria statue in the College Main Entrance. The competition was the idea of Professor Peter Childs, Head of the Dyson School of Design Engineering, and won by Civil Engineering student Eric Yick Hong Leung. Another fusion of tradition and innovation, Eric's 'Lion Crown' design sat atop the statue's head for the duration of the next academic year for visitors of the College to see.



The video game 'Queen's Treasure' won the Best Web App at Imperial's annual Hackathon, ICHack18. 'Queen's Treasure' is a web-based interactive adventure game created by a group of recent graduates, which uses the Queen's Tower as its primary setting. Produced in just 24 hours, the game's objective is to find treasure hidden within the Tower, and is a tribute to the College from its creators.



*President Alice Gast and Maximilian Doelle with the Queen's Tower 3D models at Imperial College Union Shop*

Alumni Maximilian Doelle (MSc Economics & Strategy for Business) and William Trewinnard (MEng Mechanical Engineering), created a 3D printed model of the Queen's Tower at the Advanced Hackpace situated within the Invention Rooms at the White City Campus. The models were used as trophies at the Imperial College Google Glass & Wearables Hackathon event in March 2014, before going on to be sold in the College Shop, who donated the proceeds back into the Hackspace. Through this project, the Queen's Tower served as an inspiration for enterprise and collaboration.



## 'Our Queen's Tower'

The Queen's Tower is inextricably linked with Imperial's past students and staff, whether that is Professor Sir Alec Skempton and his team of Imperial researchers, who repaired the Tower and enabled it to stand on its own, preserving it as an enduring feature of the South Kensington landscape; the celebrated meteorologist, Francis Wilson, who gave the weather forecast from the top of the Tower, or, today, the group of recent graduates who fused tradition with innovation to design a video game with the Queen's Tower as its inspiration.

Students, staff, alumni and friends of the College have always used the Queen's Tower as a place of meeting, reuniting, celebrating and learning. The Queen's Lawn surrounding the Tower is a hub of activity all year round, providing students with a beautiful setting to work on group projects and catch up with friends. Queen's Tower Tours are a highlight of the annual Alumni Weekend at the Imperial Festival, and the Tower has always been a popular backdrop for alumni reunion photos!



*MSc Statistics 1984 reunion*



*Alumni enjoying a guided tour of the Queen's Tower*



## A reflection of Imperial life



Today, the Tower is a reflection of life at Imperial, and of the wider world. During February, the Tower hosts a rainbow light projection to celebrate LGBT history month. The Tower also hosts projections throughout the year to mark flagship events such as the Imperial Fringe and Student Volunteering Week.

As well as the Tower reflecting Campus life, it is itself reflected in and juxtaposed by the contemporary buildings that surround it. It also inspires creative projects, such as the photography competition that ran last year to celebrate the anniversary of the Tower's topping out. The winning entry (above) was from Agnese Abrusci, and showcased the optimism the Tower can evoke on a rainy day.

We welcome you to reflect on your Imperial connection against the backdrop of the College's most famous landmark on this special anniversary.



## Continuing a philanthropic legacy

The philanthropic tradition that the Queen's Tower has inspired is being continued by the Queen's Tower Society, a cohort of alumni and friends who have pledged a gift in their will to the College.

The Society was established in 2016 to recognise our growing number of supporters, to celebrate the generosity of our legacy pledgers, and to connect people who share a common vision for the future.

The Queen's Tower has always been a place to meet, a place to come together, and a reminder of our long-standing commitment to science and education for the benefit of humanity. In the same way, this group of profoundly committed friends of the College have come together to form the Society, and to contribute to the continuation of Imperial as a world-leading institution.



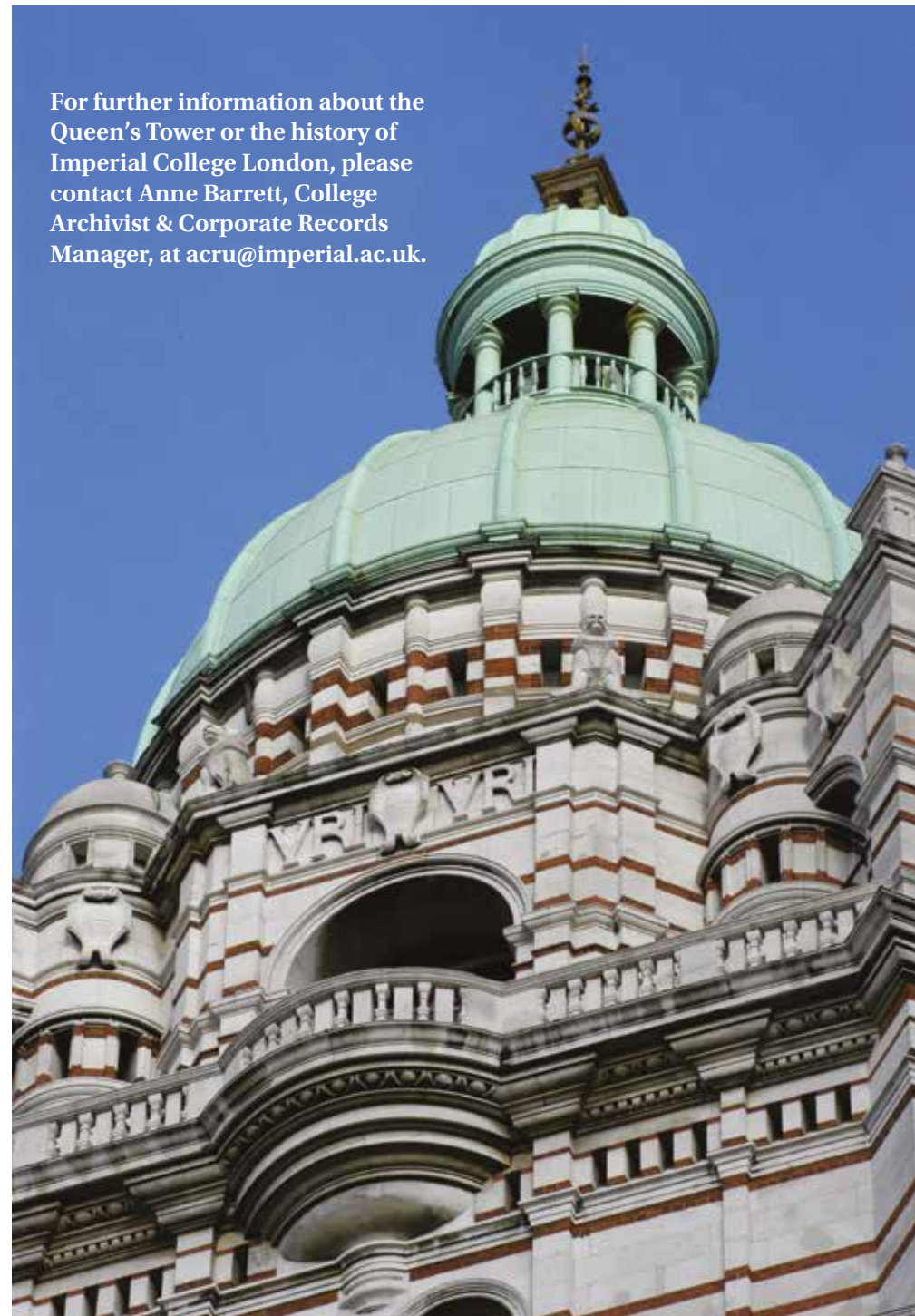
*Sylvia Watson (Physics 1973) has included a gift in her will to the College.*

Members of the Queen's Tower Society gather once a year for the Queen's Tower Society Lunch, and can take advantage of various opportunities to find out more about research and activities at the College through events and an annual newsletter. Members also receive a custom lapel pin.

If you are considering leaving a gift in your will to Imperial, please get in touch with Anna Wall, Head of Legacy Giving at +44 (0)20 7594 3801 or [a.wall@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:a.wall@imperial.ac.uk).



For further information about the Queen's Tower or the history of Imperial College London, please contact Anne Barrett, College Archivist & Corporate Records Manager, at [acru@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:acru@imperial.ac.uk).





Imperial College  
London



CELEBRATING 125 YEARS  
OF THE QUEEN'S TOWER

#QueensTower125