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Biotechnology Group Newsletter

January 2017

Formed in 1987 the Biotechnology Group furthers the interests of academic and industrial members of the RSC in the area of biotechnology.

This is primarily achieved through the organisation of conferences and courses promoting the advancement of knowledge of biotechnology and facilitating the networking of its members.

More information about the group and its activities can be found on the RSC website (www.rsc.org) by following the links to Members and Networks.

Or you can go direct to the Biotechnology Group page using the link below:

[Biotechnology Group](#)

Welcome

The RSC Biotechnology group has organised conferences and workshops for over 25 years on a wide range of topics including proteomics, therapeutic protein modification, chemical and biological therapeutic approaches to neurological disorders, glycotecnology, glycomics, stem cells, synthetic biology, biotransformation, natural products as leads for drugs and agrochemicals, freeze-drying, and biodiversity.

So that we can best tailor our future conferences for our membership, it is important for us to keep in touch with you and hear about your interests and needs. Please let us know your thoughts by email to our secretary [Dr Colin Bedford](#).

Please see details below on how to become a member of the committee.

The conferences organized already for 2017/18 promise to be very exciting and we look forward to meeting you at some of these.

Paul Dalby (Chairman)

Call for new Committee Members

We are actively seeking individuals from both academia and industry who are interested in joining the RSC Biotechnology Group committee. (Current members are listed below.)

We are currently under-represented in food chemistry, biomaterials and DNA/RNA therapies and in areas such as the chemistry important to vaccines, drug delivery (eg. nanomaterials), and tissue engineering.

Committee members play an active role in organising conferences, as well as enthusiastically pursuing RSC's policy on biotechnology, and we would welcome new members with the passion, energy and drive to keep the ball rolling in terms of delivering an agenda that sustains Biotechnology for RSC members. Maybe this could be a development opportunity for yourself, a colleague or for a member of your staff!

Please contact by email our secretary [Dr Colin Bedford](#)

Member News

Felix Franks 1926-2016

In September the Biotechnology Group of the RSC lost one of its great servants – Professor Felix Franks after a short illness. I was fortunate enough to know Felix for the last 20 years of his life, and he became a good friend as well as a scientific colleague and mentor.

He joined our group and the committee in 1991 and became Chairman in an interim capacity in 1992 for 9 months before, upon election to the post at the 1993 AGM, serving for three years until 1996. That was the year I joined: one of the first things we did together was to put on a meeting in 1997 on *Polysaccharide Biotechnology* at the University of Nottingham's Sutton Bonington Campus. This was also to inaugurate the new Food Sciences building and its splendid lecture theatre with the latest back projection facilities ... that no-one was quite sure how to operate. It was in the early days of Powerpoint and *more often than not* things tended to break down: we remembered with affection those big red 'x's which appeared on the screen due to the software not recognising something or some other incompatibility.



Felix amongst MSc students at Nottingham, March 2015.

The meeting proved a great success, and from that the idea of short courses/workshops sprung. So from April 1998 until last year we ran a 2 day course together with Professor Greg Tucker on

Polysaccharide Biotechnology for younger scientists including our own Master of Science students.

The first course was at Girton College Cambridge where Felix was a Fellow, and this too was a great success. The workshop also coincided with the visit to the college of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother: one or two delegates even believed that Felix had arranged the royal visit especially for the Workshop! Felix soon retired from Girton and his base became London at the *Bioupdate Foundation* which he had co-founded. Ever since that time, for the past 17 years, the School of Biosciences in collaboration with *Bioupdate* have held the workshops at Nottingham's Sutton Bonington campus.

Besides being a mine of wisdom and good advice he always took time to talk to the students – they absolutely loved him. Eventually in 2015 – at the age of 89 he at last bowed to the wise council of his wife Hedy and family and this was the last time, he would take part.

When planning future workshops (which always took place in March/April) we used to meet up just before Christmas for a lunch 'half-way' at the Great Northern Hotel by Peterborough station. He would recount many fascinating stories about himself. He was brought up in Nazi Germany but the family – helped by Magda Goebbels, wife of the Propaganda Minister (Felix thought at great risk to herself) – were able to escape shortly before the outbreak of war in 1939. As a young man in 1943 he joined the war effort and in 1945, as a fluent German speaker he volunteered for 'interesting duties' for a short period as an undercover agent in the communist Soviet sector of Germany.

He gained his PhD in Physical Chemistry at Birkbeck College London, and then, after several appointments in Industry and Academia, he became a leading Scientist at the thriving Colworth Laboratory of Unilever Research before taking up a post in the Department of Botany at Cambridge. Whilst in Cambridge he founded his own company PaFra at the Science Park: one of their outstanding joint inventions was *Exubera* for controlled insulin delivery. He became the international authority on water, and became known as 'Water Franks' – with his 7 volume series *Water: A Comprehensive Treatise*, which will stay as the main text in the field for a very long time to come. He became a leading authority on both freeze-drying - one of his well-known catchphrases was 'what is dry?' - and on polysaccharides, or as he intuitively called them *carbon polyhydrates* to emphasize their closeness to water.

A great and highly respected Scientist, a great servant to the Royal Society of Chemistry and a good man. Goodbye Felix, thank you for all you have contributed and for being a good friend. We will miss you.

Steve Harding

November 2016