

The Foundation for Science and Technology Christmas Reception

5th December, 2006

The Earl of Selborne KBE FRS, Chairman of the Foundation spoke at the annual Christmas reception.

I have been attending The FST's events for at least twenty years and it is a great privilege now to chair the Foundation and to work with Dougal Goodman and his colleagues. I remember when I first attended the meetings were chaired by Lord Lloyd of Kilgerran with a firm hand. He was followed by Jack Butterworth who was equally effective and then we were lucky enough to have Patrick Jenkin as our chairman. I am delighted that Patrick remains closely involved with the affairs of the Foundation as President and he has kindly agreed to step in to the breach when I am unable to attend.

We have indeed been fortunate, at least till now, both with our chairmen and with our two directors, David Hall and Dougal Goodman. On our director rests the burden of conducting the day to day activities of the Foundation and I am much enjoying my role in support of Dougal.

Last year Lord Broers spoke at this event on the work of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. The Foundation has worked closely over the last twelve months with the Science and Technology Select Committees of both Houses. Last month Phil Willis MP was one of three speakers on 'Scientific Advice, Risk and Evidence Based Policy Making' which was the subject of a recent House of Commons Select Committee report. In May a meeting on 'Water Management in the United Kingdom' was held the day after the publication of a report on this subject from The House of Lords Select Committee. As I had chaired the sub-committee and was one of the speakers the President kindly took the chair. I would particularly like to thank those speakers who were prepared to participate with only 24 hours notice of the content of the report.

Lord Broers referred to the Select Committee report chaired by Lord Sutherland on 'The Scientific Aspects of Ageing' and hinted that the Committee was less than satisfied with the government

response. During the course of this year there has been a second and much more satisfactory response. The Committee's persistence has paid off. I suspect that Lord Sainsbury played a significant role in securing this outcome and I would like to pay a tribute to him as an outstanding science minister. It is unusual for a minister to have stayed in the same office for so long and this has proved particularly helpful when we were served by a minister with a deep personal commitment to science and technology. When I chaired a research council in the 1980s we were fortunate that Lord Sainsbury's charity, The Gatsby Trust, resolved to build a laboratory alongside one of our institutes. In those days there was a formidable bureaucracy which made co-operation between a charitable trust and a research council strangely complicated. I remain eternally grateful to the Gatsby Trust for its patience. As minister, Lord Sainsbury has done much to streamline working arrangements between charities, research councils, universities and institutes to the benefit of all parties.

It was no surprise that Climate Change has been high on the scientific agenda throughout the year. Last month we held a dinner discussion at which Sir Nicholas Stern spoke on the recent Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change. This meeting was a highlight of the year and I have no doubt that we will wish to come back to this influential report at a future date. In March we held a meeting on energy policy and again we will need to keep this subject in our sights. Later this week the Foundation's Council will be considering next year's programme and any thoughts on this would be very welcome.

Should we, for example, hold more meetings out of London? We value the annual meeting we hold with the Royal Society of Edinburgh and in particular the opportunity this affords to invite MSPs to the meeting. Should we also attempt to organise similar opportunities to meet members of the devolved assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland? Incidentally the topic of our meeting in Edinburgh was 'Science Education in Schools' which was also the subject of another House of Lords Select Committee report.

Would more joint meetings be desirable? In Lord Lloyd of Kilgerran's time we held regular meetings in the City of London and the present Lord Mayor has expressed an interest in holding a

Foundation meeting in the City. Could we organise more visits? Overseas visits can be expensive for participants but if the right opportunity presents itself we might wish to organise such a visit. We should certainly arrange visits within the United Kingdom from time to time. We will continue to hold workshops, which have proved effective for certain subjects where greater focus is required than at the larger dinner discussions.

The work that Keith Lawrey does for Learned Societies who are members of the Foundation in providing guidance notes is an important part of the output of the Foundation. Likewise the Journal plays an important role in bringing our deliberations to a wider public, as does the recently updated web site.

All proposals for widening the scope of our activities have to be tempered by the recognition of how limited are our resources. We achieve as much as we do through the support of our sponsors. Indeed tonight we are indebted to a regular supporter, Ralph Kohn and the Kohn Foundation. Thank you, Ralph, for all the support you have given the Foundation

I look forward to another very busy year. I have no doubt that Dougal and his colleagues will be stretched to the limit to deliver all that we plan in the ensuing year.