

NEWS FROM COUNCIL

The March meeting of the Council took place in the Library of Rothamsted Manor rather than in the modern facilities attached to the Fowden Conference Centre and Lewis Restaurant. This was a very suitable place for a meeting of the Association of Applied Biology for it was in the 19th Century in Rothamsted Manor and the surrounding farmland that Sir John Bennet Lawes developed and established the fundamentals of agricultural chemistry and the relationship of this subject to agronomy and biological sciences. His first chemical laboratory was set up in a bedroom at the Manor. The nutrition of plants and animals were the major interests and the finances came from successful factories manufacturing fertilisers. George Dyke comments in his book, *John Lawes of Rothamsted* that: "Lawes and Gilbert did not readily think of organisms invisible to the naked eye (their references to pests and diseases are seldom more precise than a mention of "blight" or "a small insect" ----)". How differently we see things now. There had to be a beginning to the application of science to agriculture and a view of the names of departments and centres that make up Rothamsted Research today, as well as the names of the Specialist Groups of the Association of Applied Biologists, reflect subsequent developments and the economic importance of the study of pests and diseases and their control. The experiments with fertilisers and feeding stuffs spawned subjects such as statistical analysis, virology, nematology, plant pathology, genetics, pesticides and many other specialist subjects applied to agriculture and horticulture. Sadly, too much of the time of members of Council was taken up with travel and getting to grips with the business of the Association. For those who were not familiar with Rothamsted and its history there was little time to explore the Manor any further than the library.

The President welcomed two new members to the Council. Jon Pickup from the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, who has joined us as the new Convenor of the Nematology Specialist Group and Simon Cooper from Harper Adams University College who has taken over as Convenor of the Pesticide Application Specialist Group. The Convenors of the Specialist Groups form one of the mainstays of the Association's activities by producing a series of conferences each year, in close collaboration with the Office staff. The tightening up of the planning

of conferences to decrease the risk of any major financial deficits has placed extra burdens on the Convenors and organisers but has avoided the problems of past years. Competition with other organisations to run topical conferences requires good marketing. To achieve this, the Office has established a substantial database of potential delegates who have agreed to accept contact by e-mail or are regular participants in the activities of the Association. The database includes information on current interests so that target delegates may be appropriately circulated with information. Fourteen conferences have been confirmed for 2008, with three more in the pipeline and a further fourteen proposed for 2009.

The cause of increasing international participation in the activities of the Association has been taken up by the Vice President. Members of the Association should continue to encourage visiting researchers to attend and contribute to any appropriate conferences that take place during their stay in the UK. Among the changes discussed to increase international activities were making student travel funds more widely available and the introduction of preferential rates for membership to overseas members. International organisations will be contacted with a view to establishing links through websites and the organisation of joint conferences.

The final statement of financial affairs for 2007 awaits information from Blackwell Publishing concerning the two journals *Annals of Applied Biology* and *Plant Biotechnology Journal*. This should be available by the time of the next meeting of representatives of the Association with Blackwell Publishing in Oxford in May. Submissions of manuscripts to *Annals of Applied Biology* have increased considerably in the last year, and manuscripts have now been accepted for more than two issues ahead. Overall the Journal is considered to be in good shape. A total of fifty one new members of the Association were elected at the March Council meeting, mostly attracted by the conferences that had happened since November 2007. The total Membership number has remained steady. The AGM of the Association has been arranged for 11 September 2008 at Sutton Bonington, Nottingham during the Conference "Resource Capture by Crops: Integrated Approaches". The next meeting of Council will be on 16 July at Studley Castle following a meeting of the Convenors of the Specialist Groups.

Alf Keys, March 2008

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