Thank you to all who turned out for the Departmental photo re-take last week. This week’s social highlight will undoubtedly be the big Departmental Party at the Goblin Bar on Friday night. Dress (type of, that is) is optional, but be sure to be there.

Micro-News features this week welcomes back to the Department, Merylin Hibma, one of our former PhD students who has just returned from a post-doctoral appointment at the University of Cambridge to work in the Virus Research Unit with the support of a Health Research Council Repatriation Fellowship.

We also include an extremely amusing, but I am told entirely factual, account of the recent VRU Cricket Test Match provided by ‘Googly’ Maguire, who was once again lured out of retirement by the adrenaline surge evoked by the prospect of a first-class game of such unique significance.

Meetings this Week
Post grad colloquia 4.15 pm
Friday 8th floor
Debbie Dobson

The Great Virus Unit Cricket Match.
(A Frolick of Flannelled Fools)

To mark the departure of Peter Nettleton from the Virus Unit, a great test match was organised at Fairfield, to start at 5 pm on Thursday 13th October, the day before Peter took off for home. The day began with promising sunshine, but as time passed, grey clouds threatened and the temperature dropped ominously. After a late departure from the Unit due to light refreshments, it was decided that slightly heavier refreshments were required at Steve Fleming's home, not far from the test venue, while consideration was given to appeals against the light. These having been dismissed, the participants wended their way pitchwards, clothed in a wide variety of completely unacceptable dress and pockets full of light refreshments.

The game started only one hour late, just as it was getting dark enough so that ball tampering could not be detected. A roving cameraman managed to record some of the more spectacular cricketing feats, for which he has yet to be forgiven.

That’s not cricket!

- John Tagg

Happy Birthday
Barbara Clark  2 November
Jan Hesketh  3 November
Lack of style was not one of the more pressing problems faced by either bowlers or batters and in spite of the colourful waterproof/windproof clothing worn by most (even though some played in slips), the cold certainly provided an incentive to keep on the move. Rules were loosely interpreted to even out the abilities of the players. A slightly softer version of the standard ball, no pads, no 'no-balls', no ' wides', no 'outs' until at least one run had been scored etc. made the game quite meaningless to the lover of real cricket, but it was a lot of fun.

Since no maidens were present to be bowled over (who can find one these days anyway?), some players had to resort to more light refreshments to keep themselves amused in the outfield. Older players had to use all their cunning and guile to reduce the need to run too often, while the enthusiastic young often came to grief through the vagaries of the pitch, which was still recovering from the rugby season.

'Chuckling' seemed to be the preferred bowling style adopted by some of the more determined lady (?) players and this nearly resulted in unmentionable injuries to unprotected and unsuspecting males, preparing for a quick glance. The result of the game? Who cares?

At the conclusion of the game (when the batters complained that they could not see the bowler, let alone the ball), Steve hosted a barbeque for players and hangers-on at his home.

This was a wonderful opportunity for many exaggerated claims of sporting prowess (which in many cases could not be disputed, because it was too dark to have seen them anyway), for social interaction and to farewell formally a stiff, cold (and slightly bemused) Peter.

He had been a wonderful ambassador, a very easy person to get to know and to like, a very competent golfer and a mean leg break bowler. What he reported of the Kiwi approach to cricket when he got back to Britain we hesitate to think about.

- Terry Maguire

Recent Publications


Further 'much awaited' papers in the sense that the gestation period has been substantial! The first explores the advantages and pitfalls in the use of an automated analyser for deer haematology, derives reference values for a wide range of parameters and looks at the influence of tranquillising drugs, as well as sex, age and seasonal variations.

The second paper studies the haematological response of red deer to an acute bacterial infection, by comparing pre-exposure values with values during the course of the infection. In addition to the predictable alterations, neutrophil levels were raised before clinical signs developed, but were back to 'normal' by the time such signs were detected, platelet size and basophil numbers altered, and differences were found in the ante-mortem haematology parameters of fatal versus non-fatal cases.

Quote of the Week
Letter to Mike Holmes from a CFS patient:
"I am writing to you because I have been in bed with the doctor for a month and he isn't doing me any good. If things do not improve I shall have to get another doctor and I was hoping you could recommend a good one."
PROFILE
- MERILYN HIBMA

Merilyn is an Otago graduate who completed her PhD “Humoral immunity in farmed deer” under Frank Griffin’s supervision in 1989. She has just returned to Dunedin to work in the Virus Research Unit.

Since April 1990, I have been employed by the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF) in the United Kingdom as a Research Fellow. The ICRF lab is situated in the Department of Pathology in the University of Cambridge and is led by Lionel Crawford who is most renowned for his discovery of the anti-oncogene p53, with David Lane.

Cancer research in the UK is divided between the ICRF and the Cancer Research Campaign. These institutes are both entirely dependent on charitable donations for their funding and the ICRF in particular gets a significant amount of its resources in the form of bequests. The main building is prominently situated in the heart of lawyer country in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, supposedly for this reason. In addition to the 700 employees in the main building, there are a number of outside units. Our unit in Cambridge was set up about 2 years before my arrival so that a collaboration could be exploited with the lab of Margaret Stanley in the Pathology Department.

I have been working on human papillomavirus type 16 which is the primary causative agent of cervical cancer. My interest is particularly in the early protein E2 of HPV16. I worked in collaboration with Ken Raj in Margaret’s lab who was interested in another early protein, E1. These two proteins function together to control viral transcription and viral DNA replication.

Between us, we generated an extensive set of reagents to study the interactions between these proteins.

My plan is to now make use of the various E2 expression systems that I generated to develop a prophylactic vaccine against HPV16. The E2 protein is an obvious protein target for vaccination as eradication of cells expressing this protein will prevent viral DNA replication and the possibility of integration of HPV16 DNA into the host genome which is the primary event in cellular transformation. The HRC has provided initial support for this research by providing me with a repatriation fellowship.

John suggested that I mention my hobbies. Cambridge is not an environment conducive to hobbies but this is certainly an area that will require development now that I have returned to New Zealand. Having said that, the location of the UK is ideal for travel and we have certainly taken advantage of that aspect.

FROM THE DID YOU KNOW FILE

Work is progressing well on the front door. Don’t forget to smile as you go in and out because big brother (the security camera) will be keeping a friendly eye on you. The door should be finished by the end of next week.

Security is certainly becoming an issue on campus. I am sure you have heard by now that there have been five muggings on campus in the last few weeks. Three of these happened late at night not far from the Micro Dept. to individuals who were on their own and slightly the worse for drink.
There have also been some strange things happening in the women’s toilets on the third and seventh floors. If you see someone interfering with the ceiling panels at the back of the toilets or have any idea of what is going on please let me know at once.

Are you missing anything? Small pieces of equipment, chemicals, solvents? Please have a check.

-BT

VISITOR   BARRY PALMER

I am visiting Dunedin, from my usual workplace at Lincoln University’s Animal & Veterinary Science Group, to work in the AgResearch Molecular Biology Unit. Drs Diana Hill and Murray Broom are allowing me to screen the unit’s YAC library of multi-megabase sheep DNA clones for sequences believed to be involved in the determination of post-slaughter sheep meat tenderness.

It is great to see so many familiar faces and old friends and the Dunedin exam-time weather has been as good as ever.

[Barry is a member of the organising committee for the 1996 ASM/NZMS Combined Meeting which is to be held in Christchurch. Anyone wanting information about the meeting should write to the Conference Secretariat, The Plant Group, Attn: Stephanie Humphries, Kilmore St, Christchurch 1].

Microbiologists in the News
Former Director of the H.R.C. Virus Research Unit, Tony Robinson, visited Wellington recently for a workshop of the NZ Association of Scientists. Saturday’s O.D.T. reported some of his comments-

Call for scientific freedom
Wellington (PA).—Governments wanting concrete returns from funds spent on scientific research in Australia and New Zealand could hinder creativity, says scientist Dr Tony Robinson.

Dr Robinson, who works for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation in Canberra, said government policy in New Zealand had changed from “let’s leave them to it” to wanting results for money spent.

“Flexibility and freedom are the base of innovation. If the government wants innovation it should let scientists get on with it with minimal interference,” he said.

A New Zealander, Dr Robinson has been visiting Wellington recently for a workshop and conference of the New Zealand Association of Scientists.

The workshop has been assessing results of a survey of workplace morale which showed more than 80% of scientists employed by the Crown Research Institutes felt threatened by unstable career futures. "That will be difficult for the politicians to ignore," he said.

Of 2069 questionnaires in the survey, 63.2% or 32.3% were returned. Scientists surveyed also thought New Zealand's ability to attract and retain overseas scientists was getting worse. Dr Robinson said Australian scientists did not think it was a good idea to come to New Zealand because of perceived job instability.

However, the survey highlighted optimism over a $71 million funding boost over the next three years.
Departmental Party

The Party is to be organised by the 4th and 5th Floor

When: 4th November at 5.15 p.m. onwards
Where: Goblin Bar, down stairs in the Union
Theme: Fairies, Goblins anything mystical or mythical

Competitions will be held including:

Air Hockey
Pinball
Soccer
Pool
Boat Race
Others??

Be there or be square