

From the Chair



Steve Busby

(Chair of the Executive Committee)

Since I wrote my last piece for *The Biochemist*, the big news has been the UK electorate's vote to exit from the European Union, and the installation of a new government that will oversee this. For science in general, and life sciences in particular, this is not good news, but as this week's *Nature* proclaims¹, UK science is sufficiently resilient to survive and I am sure it will. Meanwhile many column inches are being filled, and words being spilled, discussing the amount of damage that UK Science will suffer, with predictions ranging from 'none' to 'a lot', but with nobody foreseeing any benefits. To my mind this just underscores the importance of explaining our science and arguing our case. In my opinion, it also shows that science really wasn't very high on the agenda of the folk who voted 'leave'. Of course, the other matter I mentioned in my last 'From the Chair' piece was the forthcoming AGM and the need to take a decision on the proposed new governance arrangements for the Society. In the event, the AGM was a happy affair and the proposals were approved, so now I believe that we will be 'fit for purpose' for the future, as we enter the world of Brexit and beyond. During his welcome speech to guests at a small reception after the AGM, our President, David Baulcombe, pointed out that Learned Societies are needed now more than ever before. I thought that was well worth underscoring and I also think that our molecular bioscience focus gives us a clear and distinct role, as we push our message. Talking of

the distinct nature of our Society, I write this from the ninetieth Harden conference. Hopefully most of you will know that these conferences have a distinct brand, running right back to the first one, organised by David Phillips in 1969. When I was a student the Hardens were mostly held at Wye College just outside Canterbury in Kent. These days the venues are scattered all over the UK and this time we are in a village on the edge of the Peak District, in a rather grand hotel, with over 100 participants, enjoying top notch science around the theme 'machines on genes'. I do think that this formula works, and not only for the early career participants, simply because everyone is together and stays together. Successive Honorary Meetings Secretaries have grappled with the issue of what makes the perfect meeting. I suspect there is no one answer, but I do think that the Harden formula has a lot to offer.

Finally, the theme of this issue, gaseous signalling, is going to provide us with some interesting insights that I suspect might have fascinated the Society's founding fathers, who put the word 'Biochemical' into our name. So let me finish with a little challenge. How much of the cell's present biochemistry derives from the time when there was no free oxygen gas, but high carbon dioxide, hydrogen and lots of soluble iron? Then came the key cyanobacterial moment when water could be converted to oxygen. Which parts of our present biochemistry does this account for? Enjoy! ■

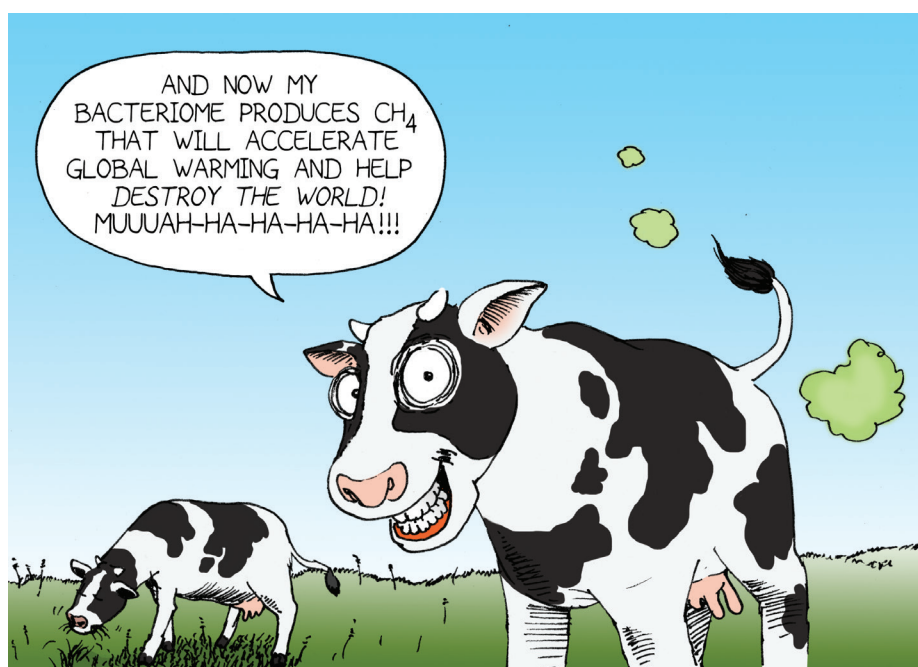
Reference

1. Masood, E. (2016) Resilient British science will withstand Brexit. *Nature*. **535**, 467

People in white coats

By Benoit Leblanc

(<http://peopleinwhitecoats.blogspot.co.uk>)



A rare form of spongiform encephalitis leads to Mad Scientist Cow Disease.