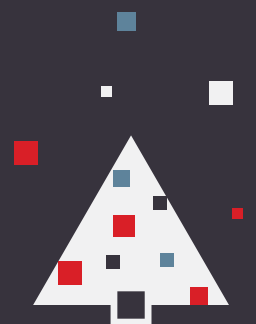
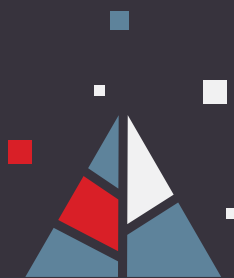
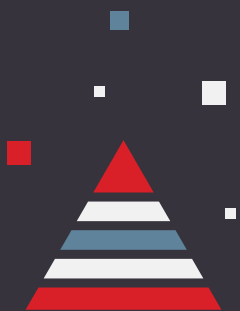


SEASON'S GREETINGS

from the students and
staff of the Otago

Department of
BIOCHEMISTRY



11th December 2017

Welcome to another Christmas Newsletter from Biochemistry at Otago. It seems like no time at all since I was writing the last one, but then I'm getting old and we all know what happens to time when you get old.

This year we can show you more of our finished renovations, we announce the retirement of another long-serving member of staff, and we can report that we have done much better funding-wise than we did last year. We are also giving you advance warning of a planned celebration to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Department.

Funding and research

This was a good year for the Department in terms of grants. Staff and students were awarded totals of ~\$200,000 from Breast Cancer Research in New Zealand, ~\$7M from the Health Research Council, ~\$9.5M from MBIE, over \$2M from the Marsden Fund, and various smaller sums from a variety of sources. This relieves us of a certain amount of stress, and provides a degree of stability for the next few years, but oh how nice it would be not to have to spend so much of our time trying to find money instead of doing the actual research!

On top of this, Peter Dearden led a team that won \$35M government funding for Genomics Aotearoa, a new nationwide genomics and bioinformatics platform. The team is an alliance between the Universities of Otago, Auckland and Massey, Crown Research Institutes AgResearch, ESR, Landcare Research, and Plant and Food, and 32 associate organisations. Bill English, then Prime Minister, visited the Department in August as part of its launch. He toured the laboratories and spoke to researchers.

Each year the University awards the Distinguished Research Medal for outstanding scholarly achievement, including the discovery and dissemination of new knowledge, the development of innovative technology, or the development of concepts that lead to significant advances. Parry Guilford was named as this year's winner in October. He was presented with the medal after a well received public lecture on the 22nd November.

New website

In the middle of the year we launched our new website; it is now an integral part of the University one and can share data with it in both directions.

New sections include an expanded "About us", details on prizes and scholarships, and a page of alumni profiles (otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/people/alumni). We would very much like to increase the number of alumni featured, so if any of you would like to be included please get in touch.



Iain Lamont, Catherine Day, and Parry Guilford after the announcement of their HRC grants.



Bill English with members of the Dearden research group



Parry with his medal after giving the Distinguished Research Medal lecture

Teaching and outreach

On Saturday we will have a record number of seven PhD students graduating at one ceremony, and each year we seem to set records in first year student numbers. As a result our teaching staff remain very busy, with over all student numbers steadily increasing. The trend away from BSc(Hons) towards a two year MSc continues, so our teaching and research laboratories are rather full.

This year, in addition to our usual outreach activities of school visits, Hands On at Otago, Science Fair, etc, we ran a Lab in a Box module. In 2015 Peter Dearden led a successful bid for funding “Lab in a Box”, a mobile science laboratory for outreach work in schools that do not have access to good lab facilities. This year he gained further funding from MBIE for its ongoing support, and it is currently touring the North Island. In November this year two Biochemistry staff travelled to Stokes Valley for a week of Biochemistry fun in Koraunui School. The children had a great deal of fun building plastic molecules, extracting DNA from dried peas, testing “urine” for glucose, and finding out about how glowsticks work. We would like to do more of this outreach work in the future.



Children from Koraunui School making molecular models in Lab in a Box

In January this year a team from the USA made a fascinating video about Miriam Sharpe's and Kurt Krause's work on the “glow” of New Zealand glow worms. The story was featured on National Public Radio's Science Friday programme, and the video is available to see on their website. It's well worth a look. <https://www.sciencefriday.com/segments/meet-the-new-zealand-glow-worm/>



Glow worms

Renovations and landscaping

Last year we told you about all the construction that's been going on in and around the Department, and this year we can share with you some photos of our new improved campus and building. The Chemistry building is still half shrouded in scaffolding, so that one will have to wait until next year, but the rest of our surroundings are looking much smarter.



Left: Part of the new sculpture at the corner of Union Place and Castle Street. The Staff Club in the background.

Right: Detail of the ground level portion of the sculpture. A bronze saltire embedded in the ground, with lots of interesting Otago details. The pale central strip lights up at night.





This was taken from outside the northern end of the Staff Club. Our beautiful flooding basin. It has been under water a couple of times since it was finished, in dry weather it's a lovely spot for lunch.



And this taken from the same position looking south. Those bench seat things are all over the place - very versatile, doing duty as seating, tables, or even a place to have a wee lie-down on a hot day.



The Department, with new benches in the foreground. Still plenty of skips and tradesmen's vans around, and will be for a while.



View from the new benches



And here we have some pictures of the inside of our building. The renovations to the central part of the first floor have been finished for a few months now.

The east end of the building is still being converted to lab and office space, but we will have this finished very soon. All research groups will be back in their refurbished labs in time for the beginning of the 2018 academic year.

Then the builders start on the ground and third floors!



Top left: part of the new Centre for Protein Research, which has moved from the east end of the building to the centre,

Below left: part of the new renovated multi-user laboratory that takes up most of the south side of the first floor.

Welcomes and Farewells

In January 2018 we welcome three new lecturers - one of them, Peter Mace, has been in the Department for five years as a Rutherford Discovery Fellow. Paul Gardner has been at Canterbury as a lecturer and Rutherford Discovery Fellow, and Sarah Diermeier comes to us from a post-doc in Cold Spring Harbour. We all look forward very much to their arrival.

Peter Stockwell finishes a 48 year career in the Department at the end of the year. He began as an undergraduate in 1969, which must mean that he has been here longer than anyone else! Apart from some brief stints overseas Peter's life's work has been conducted here, a great deal of it hidden behind a great mountain of computer print-out paper, as many of you will no doubt remember. His programming expertise, coupled with his knowledge of biochemistry, made him the "go to" person for collaborations since the early days of bioinformatics, and his publishing rate has accelerated markedly over the last few years. Peter has not completely retired though, he will continue to do some work with Mike Eccles and Annirudha Chatterjee in Pathology.



Above: an early photo of Peter we unearthed from his file.



Left: Peter talking to HOD Catherine Day and Chris Brown at his retirement afternoon tea. His diabetes has one advantage - we had delicious fruit and savoury food instead of cakes!

Wayne Patrick will be leaving us for a position at Victoria University at Easter, and both Warren Tate and Russell Poulter have begun the process of phased retirement, so there will be more leaving functions to come. The place will seem quite different without them.

Publications

We decided not to present you with a boring list of publications this year, but a quick count gives me the number "81" so far. Four of them merited university press releases:

Peter Mace's paper on ASK1 otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/news/otago636840.html

One of Tony Merriman's gout papers otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/news/otago651457.html

Sally McCormick's paper in *Circulation Research* otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/news/otago652463.html

and Catherine Day's paper on E3 ligases otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/news/otago670119.html

The full list of publications can be found on our website otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/publications

150th & 70th Birthdays

The University is planning a series of events during 2019 to mark its 150th anniversary, and each department has been asked to contribute at least one. Because 2019 is also the 70th anniversary of the Department of Biochemistry, we have decided to mark the occasion by having a 70th birthday celebration. We haven't decided exactly what or when, but we will keep you posted. We hope many of you will find the time to visit us for "the event".

Best wishes for Christmas and 2018,

As always, we do hope you will keep in touch, and send us your own news. You are always welcome to pop in for a cuppa and a catch-up with old colleagues when in Dunedin.

You can keep up with our news during the year from our website on the news page (otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/news), and many years worth of our newsletter archive is also available to download (otago.ac.nz/biochemistry/news/newsletters).

Email your news to: biochemistry@otago.ac.nz

Post your news to : The Secretary, Department of Biochemistry, PO Box 56, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand

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Bronwyn Carlisle, Catherine Day
and the Biochemistry staff and students