



**A Memorial Meeting in the T.S Eliot Theatre, Merton College  
To Celebrate the life of Sir Rex Richards (1922-2019)  
Saturday 8 February 2020  
Addresses**

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## **Rex at Merton**

### **Philip Waller, Emeritus Fellow**

Two reasons make it a pleasure to recall Rex's Wardenship. The first is my admiration for him. The second is that I become 25 again.

I joined the firm in 1971, the year that *The Go-Between* (1953) was screened. No film could better L.P. Hartley's opening line - 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' Merton was different. Fellows' stipends were paid quarterly, as befits gentlemen scholars; but times they were a-changin'. Inflation was in double figures, soon hitting 25%. This meant that Fellows were giving the college interest-free loans every three months. Much as we loved the old place, we decided we weren't gents any more. Rex, always down-to-earth, approved.

Merton also looked different. This theatre didn't exist; and Rose Lane was without its mansard roof. What we did have was an avenue of limes in Fellows Garden and, as a reality check, an actual chestnut tree on the Chestnut Lawn. There was no Holywell or Finlay Building. Bursaries occupied the east ground floor of Fellows. Mob was asphalted, but Front was paved and cobbled for Rex's arrival. As the ground was being raked in preparation, other colleges politely enquired: arable or pasture? Scaffolding was omnipresent. The Tower of the Four Orders was leaning alarmingly; but during Rex's wardenship we approached the end of a restoration programme begun in 1954. The last stage was the Merton Street front, untouched since 1838.

Rooms were parky. Central heating was for ancient Romans and modern Americans, not for character-building Mertonians. Sky-rocketing electricity bills dominated battels negotiations; that is, when there was electricity. Rex's shining wardenship was dimmed by power cuts during the three-day week caused by strikes. Offsetting this, log fires burned in Hall. Up close you were roasted, as if by Flashman; further away you could enjoy the heat disappear up the chimney.

Pervasive too was another sort of smoke, from countless cigarettes and pipes. Only a minority of dons smoked, but those that did puffed away in college meetings and tutorials; undergraduates similarly. The loyal toast was fervently anticipated because it was cue for the butler to circulate the silver cigarette box. Rex abstained, but a hallmark of his Wardenship was tolerance.

Communication was also different back then. During Rex's last year as Warden the first mobile phone was marketed in the USA. It cost over £6,000 in today's money and no one here had one. We spoke or we scribbled. Two large sacks of mail arrived each morning addressed to Fellows. Our village joke was that one sack was for Tolkien, whom we harboured in 21 Merton Street, the other sack for the rest of us.

It's no revelation to say we were all younger then, but it is startling what a young Governing Body we were. Our Senior Fellow in 1971 was aged 46. He is

happily with us today: Courtenay Phillips, now clocking 95. Rex took up the Wardenship in 1970, a year after his election at age 47. He still played squash, to a high level, as with everything he did. Mostly non-sporty, Fellows nevertheless pushed the boat out. An SCR Eight inspired the headline, with a nod to Sholokhov, 'Slow Rows the Don'.

The Fellowship was republican-minded and committed to self-government. Senior Tutor, Tutor for Admissions, Finance Bursar, all these offices were held by tutors; and the Sub-Wardenship alternated between tutorial and non-tutorial Fellows, cementing their confederation.

Rex signalled his own belief in a community of scholars by briskly walking round to Magdalen, where unaccountably I'd been a Prize Fellow since 1968, to tell me I was moving to Merton. Thenceforward, a perfectly choreographed comedy occurred at Governing Body. Whenever a new committee was formed, Rex would announce, 'We need a young Fellow'. He'd then scan the Savile Room, point to me and say: 'Philip. I'm sure you'd like to take part.' This brutally ended for me in 1973 when Pitt the even Younger turned up in the shape of Jack Beatson, Law tutor; but the theme was set.

It was not that older Fellows did not exist or did not count. They did. What must be figured in Rex's Wardenship is the overlapping of generations, shared experience and memory. Rex was a boy of six in Colyton when a few miles away in Dorset the poet-novelist Thomas Hardy died. Hardy had talked to soldiers who fought at Waterloo. Undertones of war reverberated throughout Rex's wardenship. In 1970, most Fellows had done national service. Many had been under fire. Honorary and Emeritus Fellows included Great War veterans: Edmund Blunden, Nevill Coghill, Alec Cooke, Hugo Dyson, Walter Moberly, Tolkien. Rex's predecessor Robin Harrison lost both brothers killed in that war. Before Harrison was Mure, who lived until 1979. He fought at the Somme and Passchendaele, won the MC, and saw friends' names inscribed under the Fitzjames Arch. Our war survivors leave memorials in their life's work. Alister Hardy served in the cyclists' battalion; then, suitably for a budding zoology professor, he became a camouflage officer with the Royal Engineers. In retirement he pursued research into religious experience; or, as we saw him, was hot on the trail of God in a back room of Mansfield Road which the college made over to him.

Three Mertonians won the VC in WW2, including the dam-buster Leonard Cheshire. Among the Fellows was the Admiral, Derick Hetherington, our genial Domestic Bursar; indeed, the college's first full-time Domestic Bursar. He played the clarinet with the Kodály orchestra and had the DSC and two bars. Then there was Bill Williams, Monty's trusted intelligence officer at Alamein and D-Day; Rodney Needham, wounded with the 1st Gurkha Rifles in Burma; and Tolkien's successor Norman Davis, whose clandestine activities with the SOE in Bulgaria earned him a death sentence in absentia. This puzzled folk back home in New Zealand who couldn't find Absentia on any map. War did not go away. We had students who fought in Vietnam - then the longest war in American history - and a succession of Lt-Colonels from the USAF Academy in Colorado Springs. Airey Neave could escape Colditz but not an INLA bomb at Westminster in 1979. Nor

had the Cold War cooled. The Berlin Wall, like Fermat's Last Theorem, still stood. Hungary produced two notable refugees for us. In 1956, George Radda fled Soviet Communism and morphed into our chemistry tutor just as, in 1938, Eva Vago fled fascism to become chemistry tutor at Somerville. Why does she merit mention today? Because in 1948 she married Rex and was his indispensable partner in life, in his science, and in his wardenship.

Together they made 19 Merton Street the epitome of hospitality. If members of the College wanted to discuss anything with Rex, Eva resolved it shouldn't be the first time they'd met because she'd already have had them to a friendly meal, which she cooked herself. When the Boat Club acquired a new 1<sup>st</sup> Shell, Eva was invited to launch it in a memorable ceremony – memorable not least because it'd already been in a collision.

Here was a preliminary to that landmark of Rex's wardenship, the decision in 1978 to admit women. Not for the first time, Fellows were bolder than undergraduates. A JCR referendum disclosed them keener for co-residence in other colleges than in Merton. Rex himself was an enabler, not an evangelist; above all, level-headed. Since he aimed for academic excellence, how could Merton excel if it ignored half the population? Rex was also emollient, never bore a grudge or left others with one.

Rex understood that a vital part of being Warden is bridging the humanities and sciences and combining different characters. Great minds think unlike. Colleges thrive through Fellows' dissimilarity. Groupthink breeds stagnation, unless whatever is the current orthodoxy is persistently questioned. Rex was unfussy and unpretentious, sharp-minded, direct and always inquiring. He was a modernizer: how could he not be, with that unwaveringly positive look so deftly captured in Bryan Organ's portrait? He also liked most sorts of people. Those he liked less interested him for that reason.

In 1977 he became Vice-Chancellor, Merton's first since Scrope Berdmore in 1797. Uncle to a Regency dandy, Scrope B. resigned after a year, finding the whole French Revolution a trifle tiresome. Rex took all inconveniences in his stride. Hating administration, he was therefore supremely good at it. He deplored the later mushrooming of bureaucracy and aggrandizement of the office of Vice-Chancellor, under a pretext of professionalism, as if he lacked expertise or experience. During his tenure, the JR2 opened and Green College and the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies were founded. A bonus followed, in the advent at Merton of Prince Naruhito, now Emperor of Japan, who reveled in the college's informality under Rex's Wardenship.

It's no one's fault if they're not a Mertonian, only their misfortune. Rex wasn't a Merton aborigine, but he made the college and his name inseparable. Under him, Merton was unmistakably going places. It still has that aura. *Gaudeamus igitur*.

## **Rex and his Research**

### **Professor David Gadian (1968)**

#### DGG, Merton, Rex as pioneer, and opening of new area of research

It's an honour for me to be able to say a few words here, especially as I feel that I'm speaking on behalf of a number of friends and colleagues (and indeed my wife, whom I met in Rex's lab) who are also here. Rex was a pioneer in the development and chemical applications of the technique known as nuclear magnetic resonance, or NMR. This is a technique that detects the magnetic properties of atomic nuclei, and it became a standard method of analysis in chemistry labs.

Up to the 1970s, Rex had worked in the Physical Chemistry Lab in Oxford. But when he was appointed Warden of Merton he resigned from his post as Dr Lee's Professor and Head of Department, and with great foresight moved his lab to the Biochemistry Department, where his group worked in close collaboration with George Radda's team. This was when I joined Rex's group for my DPhil research.

I won't say much about this period in the 70s, other than to say that Rex's and George's teams, working together, opened up a brand new area of NMR research, namely the use of NMR to follow biochemical processes that take place in intact biological tissue. This is an active area of research to this day. MRI, which you will all be familiar with, and which is an offshoot of NMR, was being developed at the same time in other laboratories, so by the early 1980s there were NMR, or MRI systems that could both obtain images of our body and also study our chemistry.

#### Colyton and Mackay Ohm

Let's go back in time to Rex's initial pioneering days, and even earlier, to look at how his scientific career evolved up to the time when I and many of my contemporaries here knew him.

Rex was brought up in Colyton, a small town in Devon, and went to the local grammar school. He evidently made a strong impression, and the headmaster, a gentleman called Mr Mackay Ohm, decided to enter him for Oxford. It was a novel experience for him, so Mackay Ohm made a special visit to Oxford on Rex's behalf, walking around the science area and asking for advice about suitable colleges for a prospective chemistry student. In one such conversation he was told "Send him to St. John's where 'Tommy' Thompson is the tutor". Tommy (later Sir Harold Thompson) was a distinguished young academic, more of whom later. So Rex was duly entered for St. John's College, and as far as we know, became the first pupil of Colyton Grammar School to go to Oxford.

### Tommy Thompson and war years – penicillin and Dorothy Hodgkin

These were war years, and Rex kept expecting to be called up, but at the end of each year, he was summoned back to Oxford. After his Part I finals he joined Tommy's laboratory for his Part II research project on infrared spectroscopy. The lab's research was directed towards the war effort, and Rex's main project for his Part II was to work out the structure of penicillin, though it was Dorothy Hodgkin, who was working on the X-ray structure, who sorted it out.

### NMR, physicist and chemists

Rex obtained a 1<sup>st</sup> in 1945, and stayed on in Tommy's laboratory for his D.Phil. studies. Before very long at all, in 1947, at the age of 25, he was elected a Fellow and tutor of Lincoln College, and it became time to become fully independent and to find another research avenue. Rex became interested in NMR after reading the initial NMR papers published in 1946 by two American groups of physicists.

So he went to see Bernard Rollin in the Clarendon (physics) laboratory just down the road. Rollin had built an NMR instrument and had published his work on NMR in Nature soon after the papers from the States. However, Rollin was discouraging, saying Rex would never get it to work and in any case it wouldn't be useful in chemistry. But around that time Linus Pauling came to Oxford as a Visiting Professor. One evening over dinner at Lincoln, Rex mentioned to Pauling that he'd like to have a go at NMR but that his physicist friends had advised against it. Pauling replied 'I've learned never to take the advice of physicists'.

So Rex returned to the Clarendon for further discussion with Bernard Rollin, who from then on was extremely helpful. Rex had meanwhile met Eva, and they married in 1948.

### Spectrometers, molecular structure

Rex had to build his own spectrometer, which involves a magnet and associated electronics, and managed to convince his head of department, Sir Cyril Hinshelwood, to give him the £100 needed to buy the magnet. For the electronic equipment, he went to a place known as 'the dump' at the airport hangar in Abingdon, where he could buy surplus RAF and army radar sets for next to nothing. These sets contained electronic components that Rex used to build his spectrometer. Eventually, after an enormous amount of endeavour, he obtained an NMR signal.

Rex soon set to work on using analysis of NMR to investigate molecular structure, and with his student John Smith published a paper in 1951 on acid hydrates. This was arguably the first in which a chemical problem was solved by NMR.

### Rex's strengths

By 1951, while Rex was still in his 20s, we see the strengths that were to pervade his career. He had the vision to foresee a major new field of research,

namely NMR in chemistry, and the intellect, practical skills and courage to take it on, both at the level of building the equipment and of designing and interpreting experiments. He also had the ability to get on with people. This is illustrated by his interactions with Tommy Thompson who was not, by many accounts, the easiest of people. In due course, Tommy was to become Chairman of the Football Association, and for anyone who is interested, there have been some fascinating accounts of Tommy's somewhat robust dealings with eminent managers such as Alf Ramsey and Brian Clough.

#### Continuations, and promotions

Rex's success with the design and building of NMR equipment (and in particular with magnet design), and with new applications in chemistry, continued from thereon, and with it came very rapid recognition and promotion.

Just very briefly, in 1959, while he was still in his 30s, he was elected FRS, and in 1964, in his early 40s, he was appointed Professor and Head of Physical Chemistry. Then, by a path I'm not familiar with, he and his skills evidently came to the attention of the Fellows of Merton, who duly appointed him Warden. At this stage, as I mentioned earlier, he resigned from his post in Physical Chemistry and relocated to the Biochemistry Department.

Through his interest in magnet technology and his links with Oxford Instruments, Rex was a key figure in the development of superconducting magnets for NMR. Such magnets are central to modern MRI scanners.

#### Ray's tribute

I hope that I've been able in this brief time to give you a flavour of Rex as a scientist. A key feature was his ability to bring people together, for example physicists, chemists and biochemists during my time with him. Rex was also very highly regarded as a teacher. I understand from Keith McLauchlan that in the mid 1960s Rex was several times voted the best lecturer in Oxford (not just chemistry) in student surveys.

Let me conclude by quoting Ray Freeman, a student of Rex's in the 1950s who has himself gone on to have a stellar career in NMR. In Ray's words: "It is hard to adequately set out the enormous contribution that Rex made to science and education during his charismatic career. The first person in Britain to have the vision that NMR would revolutionize chemistry, and then build his own NMR spectrometers from scratch in a department largely dedicated to wet chemistry. A superlative undergraduate tutor, research supervisor, and an outstanding mentor." I think these are fitting words with which to end this brief tribute to Rex and his science.

## **Rex and Art**

**Sir Nicholas Serota, art historian and curator, Director of the Tate 1988-2017**

When CP Snow gave his influential Rede lecture. 'The Two Cultures' at the Senate House in Cambridge in 1959 he wanted to draw attention to the flaws of an English education system that for more than a century had placed much greater value on the humanities than on the sciences and engineering.

Today, with the emphasis on STEM subjects, we might argue that the balance has gone the other way. However, we can share Snow's ambition that we ought not to see the arts and sciences as two competing poles, but rather as equally important components of an all-round education that equips us to face the modern world.

In his lecture Snow recounted 'A good many times I have been present at gatherings of people who, by the standards of traditional culture, are thought highly educated and who have with considerable gusto been expressing their incredulity at the illiteracy of scientists'.

Speaking as a physicist himself, he went on to point out how correspondingly limited was the understanding of even basic scientific concepts, such as weight and mass, by those he termed 'literary intellectuals'.

I don't know whether Snow ever met Rex Richards, but if he did, he would surely have recognised that Rex was the shining exception to the widely held belief that scientists were illiterate.

For Rex was a man of great distinction and achievement in the scientific world whose deep engagement with the arts, and especially the visual arts, ultimately enabled him to make an outstanding contribution in that field as well as in his own.

I first met Rex when I arrived in Oxford in 1973 to lead what is now Modern Art Oxford. The then Museum of Modern Art Oxford was a relatively new foundation that was in the process of merging with the well established Bear Lane Gallery, a small gallery that showed and sold work by living artists, including artists at an early stage in their career.

In the sixties Rex had been a regular visitor to the Bear Lane and had begun to make occasional purchases of work. In the main he was drawn towards the leading edge of abstraction, taking a special interest in the work of artists associated with St Ives like William Scott, Alan Davie, Patrick Heron and Peter Lanyon as well as acquiring paintings and sculpture by more established figures such as Ivon Hitchens, Keith Vaughan and Henry Moore. Sometime in the late sixties or early seventies, Rex was invited to join the board of the gallery which ran as a not for profit charity

As I have mentioned, in 1973 a proposal was made to merge the recently established Museum, with the Bear Lane. The museum had been created by architects, designers and others in the town, many of whom were associated with the Polytechnic, now Oxford Brookes. The Bear Lane was the favoured child of the university community. Given that the merger involved the closure of the Bear Lane and the amalgamation of two boards, there was considerable friction.

Fortunately, Rex agreed to join the joint Council where his calm response to challenges, lucid presentation of his position and sensitivity to the views of others quickly made him a pivotal voice and earned him the respect and deep gratitude of a rather gauche young director not well-versed in the politics of a university town.

After I left Oxford and moved to the Whitechapel Art Gallery in East London I had less frequent contact with Rex, though he was a regular visitor to our exhibitions. He continued to show a lively curiosity about new developments in art, while maintaining his personal affection for painting. During the eighties he made several purchases from Waddington Galleries of works by artists of the next generation, such as a beautiful Patrick Caulfield still life in an interior, or the painting that he gave to Merton, John Hoyland's powerful 'Jinn' from 1988, which many of you will have seen during your lunches or meetings in College.

In 1978 Rex was given an opportunity to bring together his interests in science and art when he was invited to join the Scientific Advisory Committee of the National Gallery. The Committee had been established to support the Gallery's scientific research into the techniques and materials used by the old master painters, what is now termed 'conservation science'. It also brought a measure of independent judgement to the difficult issues arising from the conservation of old master paintings, following the controversies over the cleaning of paintings in the late forties. One can imagine what pleasure this appointment must have given him.

Recently, Dr Ashok Roy, a research scientist who worked in the department from 1977 until 2016, for much of that time as its Director, commented on the vital and energetic contribution made by Rex. He also captured so well the character of the man whom many of us knew 'I remember Rex as the soul of kindness – a man of great intellect and creativity – and also a person of exemplary civilised dealings with those with whom he came into contact. He always seemed to put over it was a privilege for *him* to meet you.'

It was a natural development that in 1982 he should have been invited by my predecessor at Tate to serve as a trustee of the Gallery and also as a trustee representing Tate on the Board of the National Gallery. His indispensability to both galleries went well beyond his interest in conservation and may be gauged by the fact that when his term on both Boards expired in 1988 he was immediately appointed a trustee of the National Gallery where he, in turn, served as the National Gallery's representative on the Board of the Tate.

When I arrived at the Tate in 1988, he immediately became an ally and counsel on many of the developments of the next few years. He became a powerful

advocate within the Board for the idea of creating what became Tate Modern at a time when few believed that it was either desirable or possible.

Rex had a capacity for friendship and conversation that drew him to artists. He visited his fellow Tate trustee Patrick Heron in Cornwall and over many years he was a regular visitor to the studio and home of Henry Moore in Much Hadham. In 1989, he was encouraged to become a trustee of the Henry Moore Foundation by its Director, Sir Alan Bowness, with whom he had worked closely during Alan's directorship of the Tate.

Following Moore's death in 1986, the future of the Foundation was uncertain and together Alan and Rex steered it to the important place it still occupies in the British art world, as a guardian and an advocate for Moore's work and as a patron of scholarship, exhibitions and the art of sculpture of all periods. Rex became Chair of the Foundation in 1994, taking a special interest in personally leading the creation of a proper database, and continued to serve until 2002

Rex had a gentle, courteous manner but a penetrating mind that brought wisdom and clarity to any issue. He may have served on many committees, but in my experience, he was never a 'committee man'. He preferred decision to prevarication. He was prepared to argue his case but also to recognise the strength of another. He brought fairness and balance to any judgement.

I feel extremely fortunate to have worked with and learned from him and the art world institutions he served continue to bear the imprint of his wise counsel.

## **Rex and the Leverhulme Trust**

### **Sir Michael Perry, Former Chair of The Leverhulme Trust**

Thank you for inviting a representative of the Leverhulme Trust to speak at this celebration of the life of Sir Rex Richards. Rex was our Director – our CEO, in essence – for some ten years - between 1984 and 1993. I myself was appointed a Trustee in 1991, so he and I overlapped for his last couple of years. As a newcomer I was able to see him in action, to feel the warmth of his personality, and to see his contribution to our work at first hand. I became the Trust's Chairman in 2008, and from then until I stood down in 2013 I was able to experience what the records now make clear: that Rex had been the Director who gave the Trust the direction and shape to transform it into the formidable research funding agency it is today.

For those of you who do not know us, the Trust was created by William Hesketh Lever, the founder of Lever Brothers, the company we know today as Unilever. When he died in 1925, Viscount Leverhulme (as he by then was) left a portion of his personal shareholding in the company to endow a charitable foundation, specifically to provide benefits for the trade charities closest to him – for needy commercial travellers, pharmacists and grocers - and also to provide funds for broad educational purposes.

By the early 1980s it became clear that the funds generated by the endowment were fast outstripping the dwindling and time limited needs of the originally intended beneficiaries. Independent grocers and chemists were becoming much smaller in number, so Lever's Will therefore had to be revisited - to provide his charity with a lasting future, with a more clearly defined mission, and with greater independence from the company whose dividends provided it with its income.

The new arrangements came into effect in 1984. Support for the benevolent trade charities was to continue within a discrete entity, the Leverhulme Trade Charities Trust, and the Leverhulme Trust in its modern form was established, with its own endowment and a specific mission to provide 'scholarships for research and education'.

The Trustees of the reshaped Trust – nearly all of them business executives, most of whose academic experience did not stretch beyond their years as undergraduates – now needed an inspirational scholar and academic leader to guide them in taking forward the new entity. They found that leader in Rex Richards.

Rex was the first head of an Oxford college and the first Vice-Chancellor of a University to become Director of the Trust. He immediately set about the substantial tasks of devising a coherent strategic framework for us, professionalising our rather traditional organisational ways, and making the Trust's approach to grant-making fit for modern purpose. Rex was, in a word, the Director who created the modern Leverhulme Trust.

Future Trust historians will want to describe Rex's contribution in detail. My own summary, viewed as a Trustee of some twenty-two years standing, is that Rex made three fundamental contributions on which the subsequent success of the Trust has been built.

First of all, he made sure that the Trustees of Leverhulme engaged directly with what he saw as the major strategic issues of the research funding world. Ever the scholar, he did so by setting them an 'examination paper', as it were, of eighteen questions about which they needed to have thought carefully and formed a collective view.

These included the different research funding needs of the sciences, social sciences, and humanities; the possible role of the Trust in providing support for music and the visual arts; whether and how to support 'archival work'; the role of 'evaluation' in determining the success of completed projects and providing future support for ongoing work; and how Leverhulme's support for 'people doing projects' could be married effectively to the 'research facilities' that were provided by public funds and other foundations.

Most importantly, he encouraged the Board to find a suitable balance between support for basic, fundamental, or so-called blue-skies research, and what Rex called 'topical research': that is, research undertaken for the specific purpose of devising a practical application, or providing robust evidence to inform the design of public policy, the organisation of business, or the development of educational curricula. Rex was prescient in seeing that this particular issue was fundamental to the whole research enterprise.

Indeed, as today's Trustees remind me, it continues to be at the forefront of discussion today, in global debates about how best to fund 'high-risk/high-reward' curiosity-driven studies, where outcomes are uncertain except in the very long term, and about how best to target research which is driven by the need to deliver a specific, practical or societal 'impact'.

Today's research landscape of the UK is dominated by heated discussions about the value of the various research assessment exercises, and the success (or failure) of what we now call 'knowledge transfer' between the academic and the wider world, or – to define the issue in Rex's own words – 'the failure of scholars to communicate with practitioners'.

But Rex was also a very practical man – which brings me to the second major theme of his years as Director of the Trust. Rex was a brilliant administrator. Very quickly after his appointment, he set to and reorganised the machinery of the old, pre-1984 Trust bureaucracy. He devised new criteria for the assessment of bids for Trust funding, including revised guidance for peer reviewers. The template that Rex provided is distinctive to Leverhulme, and is still largely in use today, providing peer reviewers with rigorous and consistent criteria for assessing the originality, significance, lasting value, timeliness, and excellence of research proposals. His aim was to provide Trustees with more extensive and more reliable information to help inform their grant-making decisions.

The best known of these administrative reforms involved the computerisation of the Trust's data base. When Rex arrived at Leverhulme, the Director was required after every Trustees' Meeting to borrow what he referred to as a 'small army' of copy-typists from the Unilever building half-a mile away, so that award letters could be issued and carbon copies made, to create the paper files that were needed to track the progress of the awards. Rex was horrified, so he set about teaching himself coding, in order to design a computerised grant management system for the Trust. Revolutionary in its time, but no research funding agency or grant-making charity today can operate without these electronic systems.

The fact that, confronted by this data-management problem, the former vice-chancellor of Oxford University simply sat down and devised his own bespoke and sophisticated computer package from scratch is, frankly, astounding. It speaks volumes for Rex's 'can do' attitude and lack of pretension. Most people in his position would surely have hired a team of expensive consultants (who would probably have devised a less robust system!). If Rex had been a business entrepreneur rather than a scholar, he might also have patented the system, and sold it for profit to other charities and grant-making agencies. That he did neither of these things reflects the character of the man, and a life spent altruistically in public service. Rex's computerised grant management system was so effective that it was still in use twenty years later.

Its use also allowed the trustees to make the proud claim – which is still true today – that Leverhulme's administrative costs are amongst the lowest in the sector. The Trust still employs only 15 people to handle the more than the 4,000 grant applications it receives each year.

The final distinctive contribution that Rex made is less obvious from the written record. Yet, in some ways it is his longest lasting legacy, and it probably presented him at the time with his trickiest challenge.

As the Trust's resources grew, the number of proposals to be considered by the Trustees became unmanageable, so a new way of dealing with the Board's business had to be found. Since the Trustees are all either current or former senior executives of Unilever, they are heavily dependent on the ability of the Director – who is the only academic on the Trust staff – to help them interpret the often highly specialist peer reviews of the proposals that come to the Board for consideration. Rex designed a process whereby the Director provides a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each bid, as identified in the peer review, but in plain non-technical English. This provides a framework or filter that helps trustees to read and assess each bid – but without steering them to any particular decision.

As Directors since Rex have all attested, there is a real art to writing these summary accounts, and it is intriguing to see in the Trust record how Rex himself accomplished it, for instance by gently reminding Board Members that certain elements of a proposal might not be eligible for Trust support. To take an example, at random of course, that it was the responsibility of universities, not

the Trust, to provide routine sabbatical leave for academic staff, so that they could fulfil their contractual obligation to conduct research.

The Trust has grown immensely since Rex's time. Nowadays, it benefits from an endowment of some £4 billion, allowing it to make grants worth approximately £100 million annually. Indeed, it is now one of the twenty largest endowed foundations in the world. Particular research schemes have come and gone since Rex's time, but I am confident that were he able to do so, Rex would look at Leverhulme today and still recognise it as in many important respects his own creation. The Trustees – and indeed the whole academic community in this country and beyond – owe him a huge debt of gratitude.