

Proposed New Science Centre At Portsmouth Grammar School
Supporting Testimonial - Dr Alexander H Todd

I visited Portsmouth Grammar School (PGS) on 11 September 2008 to return a spirit level used by my father, Lord Todd, when he laid the foundation stone of the present science building in 1952. I met the Headmaster and several of the science teachers and was shown round the school by two of the year 13 pupils who are intending to read sciences at University.

I was struck by the enthusiasm and commitment of both staff and pupils to science education, which I felt to be in contrast to the attitude of so many others I have met who consider science to be unfashionable and difficult and who fail to appreciate the importance of the subjects to everyday life. As is witnessed by the number of former pupils who have gone on to read scientific subjects at University and subsequently pursued careers in science based industries, science teaching at PGS stimulates interest in the subjects in all those pupils with an aptitude for them.

The principal constraint on science teaching at PGS is, however, the antiquated and inadequate nature of the laboratories and other teaching facilities. Science has made enormous advances since 1953, when the present building was opened, and what were then state-of-the-art facilities are unsuited to the needs of today's teachers and pupils.

The importance of scientific discoveries and developments to the economies of the world and of the UK in particular is critical to our past, present and future prosperity. The historical achievements of people like Brunel are well known and British engineers went on to build railways and bridges all over the world. Consider more recent achievements, in the period since 1952 (most of my lifetime), so many of which are taken almost for granted by today's population but which owe their success to scientific endeavour. Think of computers, the internet and mobile phones, bar code readers and other electronic devices. The average man in the street has no concept of the inventive skills of the electrical engineers who conceived and perfected them. Or think of the contribution of pharmaceutical products to modern medicine. A patient visiting his doctor today expects him to be able to prescribe something which will cure or alleviate his ailment. He knows little if anything about the first-class scientific brains behind their invention. These are just two examples which illustrate the point. Scientific invention does not stand still, however, and if this country is to contribute to future advances, it is vital that a steady stream of able young scientists emerges from our educational system.

This is the reason why PGS, as a leading educational establishment in the South of England, urgently needs up-to-date facilities in which the excellent teaching staff can inspire the interest of able young people in the sciences and to prepare them to contribute to the future prosperity of this country.

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