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We discuss from time to time the role which Government should play in deciding what research should be carried out using the funds which the tax payer provides.

The pendulum swings back and forth between "blue skies" and "applied". The Haldane Principal, first enunciated 100 years ago is regularly rolled out to illuminate the debate. Now we have the eight great technologies.

An important piece of directed research has been commemorated this year. The Government decided that a

reliable method for sailors to know their longitude was essential for Britain's economic and military security. Latitude of course was easier and the modern sextant evolved from instruments that date back to antiquity.

In 1714, a prize was offered (not a research grant) by Act of Parliament, £20,000 for a solution which could measure longitude to within half-a-degree. That's about €6 million today!

It took John Harrison several decades to construct a timepiece accurate enough to record Greenwich Mean Time while out on the high seas. Naval charts were drawn up using the Greenwich Meridian as the base, and 100 years later the rest of the world (with one exception) fell into line. Not a bad return for the "investment" of £20k.

The concept has now been reinvented with the announcement of a Longitude Prize, but this time the public was asked to vote on what the topic should be. They were

given six choices: Flight, Water, Paralysis, Food Security, Dementia and Antibiotics.

The winner was announced on 25th June – "Antibiotics".

This was the subject of one of our discussions during the summer of 2013. Not for the first time, the P&SC was ahead of the game!

Two of the others have been the subject of discussion meetings during the past few years, and a fourth is on our agenda for December this year. Our new website and our journal provide further information.

The distinguished panel of judges was led by Martin Rees who, as the Astronomer Royal, followed in the footsteps of Nevil Maskelyne who led the judges 250 years ago. Plus ça change!

He hopes that the other topics may be taken up by other sources of funding.



The Journal of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee.

*The Committee is an Associate Parliamentary Group of members of both Houses of Parliament and British members of the European Parliament, representatives of scientific and technical institutions, industrial organisations and universities.*



Science in Parliament has two main objectives:

1. to inform the scientific and industrial communities of activities within Parliament of a scientific nature and of the progress of relevant legislation;
2. to keep Members of Parliament abreast of scientific affairs.

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