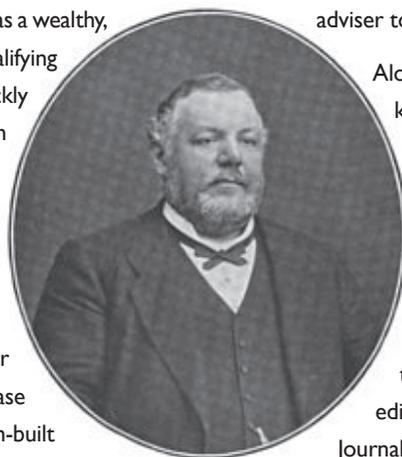


The Ballad of Sir Frankie Crisp

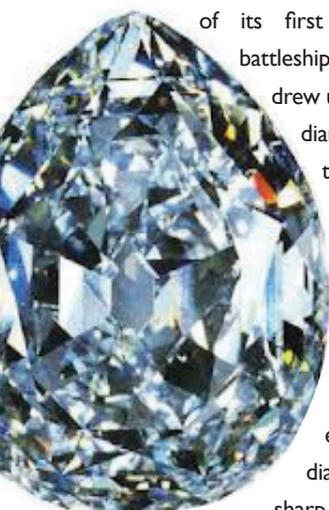
It is interesting to note that many of the early members of the Royal Microscopical Society were not scientists, but included medical doctors, clergy and other assorted professions.

Francis Crisp (1843 – 1919) was a wealthy, London-based lawyer. Qualifying as a solicitor in 1869 he quickly became a partner in the firm Ashurst, Morris, Crisp & Co., where his interests lay primarily in company law. His clients included many foreign railway companies, as well as the Imperial Japanese Navy - for which he brokered the purchase of its first British-built battleship. Frank Crisp also



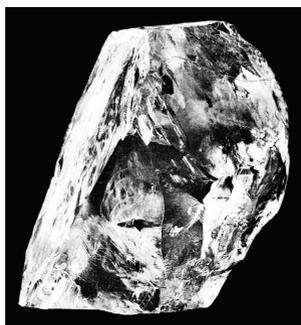
adviser to the Liberal Party.

Alongside his legal work, Crisp was a keen amateur microscopist, and he joined the RMS in 1870, becoming Honorary Secretary during the 1870s. Seeing the growing need for a deeper understanding of image formation theory, and of microscopes themselves, it was at this time that Crisp took over the editorship of the Society's fledgling Journal. His attraction to the role also spoke



drew up the contract for the Dutch diamond expert Joseph Asscher to cleave the famous Cullinan Diamond (at that time the biggest diamond ever found, weighing in at over 600g or 1.37lb about the size of a small child's fist! This nerve-shredding event, which entailed striking the rough diamond with a hammer and sharp chisel, took place in February

1908. For his major contribution to the revision of company law, Frank Crisp was knighted in 1907, subsequently receiving a Baronetcy for his services as legal



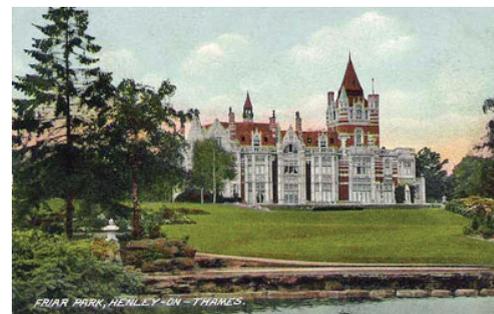
The Cullinan Diamond – before and after its transformation.

of his passion for simply recording observations of microscopic objects - a discipline which, to this day, remains a crucial part of the Journal's editorial policy. Crisp continued as editor through the 1880s, then served as Treasurer during the 1890s. His crucial influence within the RMS during this period of its history also extended to financial support; Crisp's considerable wealth enabled him to finance production of the journal (as well as the Society itself), and he did so until the publication was self-sufficient.



Dutch diamond expert Joseph Asscher required the legal services of Sir Francis in order to take a hammer and chisel to what was then the largest diamond ever discovered – the Cullinan.

As an amateur microscopist with a passionate



Friar Park in Henley-on-Thames, the famous residence where ex-Beatle George Harrison drew inspiration from Sir Francis.

interest in the development of the instrument, Crisp amassed an astonishing collection of microscopes – some 3,000 in all! Sadly, this truly unique collection was dispersed soon after his death in 1919. However, Crisp had donated several superb instruments to the Society; these and others in the RMS's Collection are now housed in Oxford University's Museum of the History of Science.

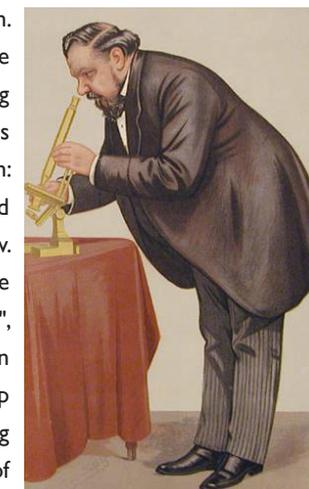
Alongside his professional work and involvement in microscopy, Sir Frank was also a very keen horticulturalist, with a green-fingered passion for landscape gardening. Besides his London town house in Holland Park, Crisp acquired in 1895 the house and extensive gardens of Friar Park, Henley-on-Thames, where he was lavish in his hospitality, often entertaining King Edward VII, Queen Alexandra and other royalty during Henley week. The estate and garden included much that was conventional, but his eccentric alpine garden was further embellished with the construction of a 20-foot-high model of the Matterhorn, apparently built to scale!

Crisp also placed numerous plaques containing 'wise sayings' around the estate, many of which have survived.

Now – to bring the story into modern times... in

1970 former Beatle George Harrison bought the Friar Park estate as his new home. Exploring his new property, Harrison came across Sir Frank's inscribed plaques, including one proclaiming "Let it Roll". He incorporated this and many others into his song lyrics, including his "Ballad of Sir Frankie Crisp (Let It Roll)", which appears on the album All Things Must Pass and was later included in his career-spanning compilation released in 2009: Let It Roll: Songs by George Harrison.

His 1974 hit single "Ding Dong, Ding Dong" also contains the lyrical refrain: "Ring out the old - Ring in the new. Ring out the false - Ring in the true", for which Harrison also credited Crisp as the author, having spotted it on one of the said plaques.



Sir Francis Crisp.

And so, the memory of one of our early and distinguished members, Sir Frank Crisp, the lawyer who did much to build up a fledgling RMS over 100 years ago, lives on in a patchwork of unlikely locations, contexts and art forms: in the annals of Japanese naval history and diamond extraction legend; at Oxford University's Science History Museum, where some of his microscopes reside; at Friar Park, where his services to eccentric landscape gardening and plaque installation still catch the eye; and, perhaps least likely of all, in the foot-tapping solo work of one George Harrison.

Here's to you, Frankie! Let it roll!

**John L Hutchison Hon FRMS
Chair, History Committee**

