



## MAGNIFICENT MOTORS

➔ No U turn: restoration in progress

### LOGBOOK

**OCCUPATION:**  
Managing Director of  
Fiennes Restoration

**BUSINESS:**  
Restoration of  
pre-war Bentleys and  
Rolls-Royces

**LOCATION:**  
Filkins, Oxfordshire

**RECOMMENDED  
DRIVE:**  
Peking to Paris  
rally

**FIRST CAR:**  
1936 Riley

**MOST DECORATED  
CAR:**  
Pebble Beach  
Concours d'Elegance  
winning Rolls-Royce  
20/25

After finishing my PhD, I realised that industrial research wasn't really for me, and so decided to do my own thing.

In restoration projects that may last years, if not decades, Will Fiennes (PhD Mechanical Engineering 1970) takes the unrecognisable shell of what may, in its heyday, have been a supercar and painstakingly returns it to its former glory.

**IMPERIAL:** You've made a career out of something you love: what advice would you give to today's students?  
**FIENNES:** If you have an ambition or a dream, it will always be an unanswered question unless you have a go at achieving it. There's that nagging "what if" and, for me, that question would bug me for the rest of my life. When something is your heart and soul, you'll put up with

difficulties that people in a regular job just wouldn't.

**IMPERIAL:** Would you change anything about your career?

**FIENNES:** I don't have any formal business training and I started out very naive – I remember trying to

summon up the courage to send out my first invoice. I used to wonder if I would have done things differently if I'd had any formal business training but came to the conclusion that I'd probably never have started the business in the first place.

**IMPERIAL:** What's been your favourite car to restore and why?  
**FIENNES:** Of all the cars we've had through the workshop, the one that gave me a real thrill was a 1938 Bentley known as the Embricos Bentley, commissioned and built to test the theory of aerodynamics. We had it here about 25 years ago and it was the most wonderful car to drive: even with all the windows down there was no change in air pressure inside the car – which was tricky in hot weather.

**IMPERIAL:** What's the closest you've come to disaster?

**FIENNES:** I was taking the first car we'd ever restored back to its owner in London: our former premises were down a single track lane with

a sharp blind bend and I met the Post Office van coming in the opposite direction – we stopped about six inches apart.

**IMPERIAL:** Why should classic cars be driven?

**FIENNES:** Cars need exercise. I remember one customer coming to collect their car: we took it for a test drive on a local route with lots of sweeping bends and they turned to me and said, "I've never driven it at more than 40," and I thought to myself: shame on you! Some of these cars may be over 50 years old but they still more than hold their own against modern traffic.

**IMPERIAL:** Why is there such an enduring love and fascination for these cars?

**FIENNES:** There's a sense of satisfaction from repairing something and making it work. People who buy these cars often have that sort of interest. These days, if you take something apart, you'll probably have to throw it away because it won't survive the process of disassembly.

It's a shame that there are kids who haven't had the opportunity to really get involved in the mechanics of an object.

**IMPERIAL:** Tell me more about the 1932 Rolls-Royce 20/25

**FIENNES:** Originally shipped to Switzerland with a formal saloon body, the original owner later rebodied it with open coachwork. After his death, the car was sold to an Afghan prince who, in 1939, accidentally drove it into Lake Geneva returning from a party (it was retrieved the next day). The daughter of its 1950s owner tracked the car down to Seattle: she bought it, shipped it to the UK and we got involved in the late 1990s, completing the restoration last year. We were invited to attend the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, where the car won second in Rolls-Royce class, as well as the Lucius Beebe Trophy.

**+ ONLINE EXTRA:** See more photographs from the workshop and find out about the Rolls Royce 20/25 at [www.imperial.ac.uk/imperialmagazine](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/imperialmagazine)

PHOTOGRAPHY: TIM WALLACE

# Stormy crossing

Journeying from College to career is no easy ride, says Kelly Oakes



“I'm afraid we don't have any umbrellas left, would you like a free pen instead?”

As rain hammers on the roof of the crowded careers fair marquee on the Queen's Lawn, a pen from a prospective employer promises to do little to shelter me from the down-pour. But should it give me hope for when I leave Imperial? If they're handing out free pens, might that mean they have jobs to give out too?

At the end of my undergraduate studies, the Rector told us in the Royal Albert Hall that our newly conferred Imperial degrees would open many doors for us. Despite impressive statistics – 89 per cent of Imperial graduates find graduate-level jobs six months after completing their studies – my classmates and I are finding those doors rather stiff.

Faced with a stormy jobs market, and no umbrella to protect me from the worst of it, I opted to shelter inside academia for

one more year while studying for a Master's degree. I'm gaining skills that I hope will help me into a job when I leave Imperial.

At a recent Royal College of Science Union dinner, I spoke to an alumnus who graduated a generation before me. In her final year she received not one, or even two, but three job offers. In similar tales, alumni described the 'milk round', when companies would visit campus and encourage students to sign up to interviews for any positions that interested them.

Current students talk about the old-style 'milk round' as if it were a myth or legend. Though it still exists, these days it is the employers who have their pick of the students, not the other way around.

Today, most students frequenting Imperial's careers fairs will say they're 'networking' with the people manning the

stalls. The marquee is awash with students who would claim that it's just a coincidence that they happen to be wearing a suit and carrying a stack of freshly printed CVs on the day of a fair. You will often see these same people trying to strike up a casual conversation with a potential employer which, in reality, looks anything but casual. Alongside seasoned careers fair patrons are the more sceptical punters, unconvinced that the event supports their cause, who are using it to gather enough free stationery to see them through revision instead.

Regardless of the approach taken at a careers fair, getting an interview is a marathon affair. Meeting the challenge requires hours of online assessments, application form filling and CV tweaking, not forgetting all those extra curricular activities you should be doing too. A degree is no longer enough.

Interview days can provide some light relief, especially if they involve The Apprentice-style tasks, as many now do. They are nonetheless hard work. Employers want perfection – in a whole day spent analysing case studies, working in small groups and enduring one-to-one interviews, just one slip-up and you've blown it.

In our final year, instead of rumours of job offers spreading through lecture theatres, those who had received good news made announcements on Facebook. Congratulations were offered in the same way, giving others yet to taste success a computer screen behind which they could hide their jealousy.

Those who went on from Imperial straight into jobs or PhD study were the ones who had numerous internships under their belt, or had spent sweltering summers working in the lab.

As for the rest of us, some rays of sunshine are beginning to peek through the clouds. Some of my classmates are back with their parents for now, but as the interviews trickle in they are inching closer to their first, proper job.

Those of us who chose to stay in academia just a little longer will have to leave its warm embrace eventually. Though it didn't protect me from the rain, that free pen will come in handy when I start filling in job applications of my own.

KELLY OAKES (MSci Physics 2011) is studying for a Master's in Science Communication. She edits the science pages of Felix, the Imperial student newspaper, and blogs for Scientific American.