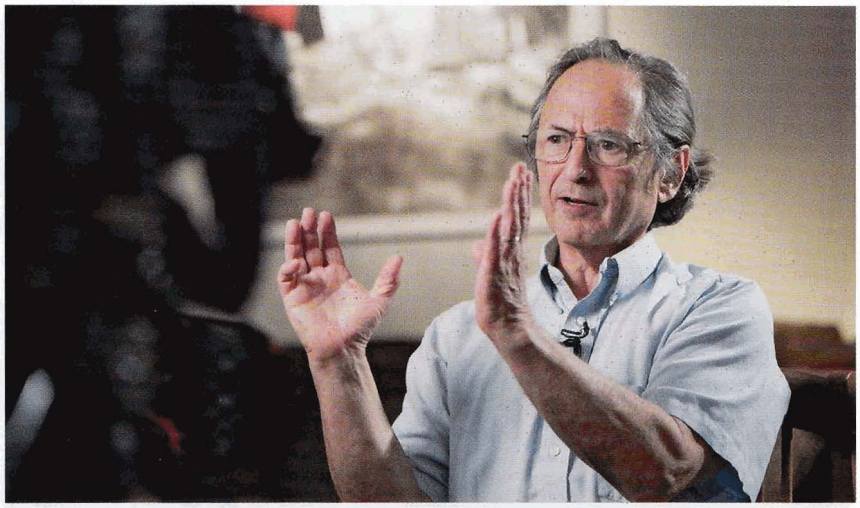
Nobels: an even dozen

Professor Michael Levitt is the 12th member of the King's community to be awarded a Nobel Prize

One day after Professor Peter Higgs FKC (Physics, 1950; PhD, 1954) received the Nobel Prize in recognition of the famous boson that bears his name, another physics alumnus from King's was named a Nobel laureate.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry to Professor Michael Levitt FRS (Physics, 1967), who works in the Department of Structural Biology at the Stanford University School of Medicine. Professor Levitt received the Nobel Prize jointly with Martin Karplus and Arieh Warshel for the development of multi-scale models for complex chemical systems.

'I had a wonderful time as a student in London,' says Professor Levitt, when asked about his days at King's. 'Together with Peter Bostock, I shared a few apartments near Gloucester Road tube station. Keith Richards from the Rolling Stones lived next door. We went to a party with Princess Anne and Prince Charles, as I think one of our roommates was the son of the Queen's private secretary.'



Nobel laureate Michael Levitt: 'There are many memories, but I remember socialising in the Cheshire Cat and sailing at Welsh Harp best'

Known to his Stanford colleagues for his self-effacing sense of humour, Professor Levitt emphasises that he was not an academic star during his undergraduate years.

'In my time, physics at King's was very easy as there was almost no coursework and almost nothing beyond physics and applied math,' he says. 'I didn't pay a lot of attention in the classes but did well in the exams by borrowing the notes of one of the girls and copying them out.'

Professor Levitt says having the opportunity to be at the same institution as Professor Maurice Wilkins – who won the Nobel Prize for his DNA research – was the main reason why he chose King's. He says other memorable professors included Watson Fuller and 'of course the legendary WC Price'.

In good company

Professors Higgs and Levitt are the 11th and 12th members of the King's community to be named Nobel laureates. Here's a look at the first 10:

1917: Professor Charles Barkla
Teaching physics at King's, Professor Barkla conducted research into X-rays and other emissions.

1928: Sir Owen Richardson
First holder of the Wheatstone Chair at King's, Sir Owen discovered 'Richardson's law' and pioneered 'thermionics', a term he coined to describe the emission of electricity from hot bodies.

1929: Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins
Sir Frederick graduated from Guy's Hospital in 1894 and taught physiology and toxicology there. He received the Nobel Prize for his demonstration of the association between beriberi (caused by a thiamine deficiency) and the consumption of decorticated (removed from its husk) rice.



Professor Charles Barkla, the first member of the King's community to receive a Nobel Prize

1932: Sir Charles Scott Sherrington
Sir Charles was a lecturer in systematic physiology at St Thomas'. His research on reflex action and especially his book *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System* were landmarks in modern physiology.

1947: Sir Edward Appleton
Wheatstone Professor at King's for 12 years, Sir Edward was awarded the Nobel Prize for his contribution 'in exploring the ionosphere'.

1951: Dr Max Theiler
Professor Theiler, who studied at St Thomas', received the Nobel Prize for developing a yellow fever vaccine.

1962: Professor Maurice Wilkins
Professor Wilkins was honoured for his role in discovering the structure of DNA.

1984: Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu
Archbishop Tutu received the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his courageous leadership in the fight against apartheid.

1988: Sir James Black
Sir James, Emeritus Professor of Analytical Pharmacology at King's, developed two major families of drugs: beta-blockers used to treat coronary heart failure and anti-ulcer histamine receptor blocking drugs.

2010: Mario Vargas Llosa
Vargas Llosa was a lecturer in Spanish American literature at King's in 1969–70, before becoming a full-time writer. He became a Fellow of King's in 2005.