

## A travel award with a difference

24 Jan 2010 by JR

This is the time of year when we invite applications for the annual [Geoffrey Roberts Award](#), an international travel award of £3,000 (about \$5,000) for a journey that we judges feel is capable of making a positive difference to the worlds of food and/or drink. Apply here by 31 Mar 2010.

The Award has been made every year since 1996 to commemorate the life and work of the late Geoffrey Roberts, pioneer importer of top-quality New World wines into the UK. Since its inception, the Geoffrey Roberts Award has brought farmers' markets to Australia; facilitated [Professor Roger Corder's](#) medical self-help book *The Wine Diet*; made a [real difference](#) to the lives of tsunami victims in Sri Lanka; yielded a brand new Somerset cheese, Oglesfield, thanks to [Caroline Smialek and Peter Kindel](#); helped African rural communities to help themselves (see [here](#)); and exposed a young [Georgian wine producer](#) to modern winemaking techniques in some of France's top properties.

We are now seeking applications for the 2010 Award. Applicants can be any age, any nationality and with any background. All you need do is complete the [online application form](#) in the How to apply section on [www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com](#) and email it to [geoffreyrobertsa@aol.com](mailto:geoffreyrobertsa@aol.com) before 31 March 2010. Please complete all parts of the form, including your relevant past and present experience, an outline of your proposed travel plans, and a budget in as much detail as possible.

Applications are welcome from anyone of any age and experience, no matter where in the world you are located. Preference will be given to applicants whose schemes involve a likely outcome that will be of value not only to the applicants themselves. What you have to say is much more important to us than whether it is expressed in perfect English.

We judges very much look forward to receiving your entry, by email to [geoffreyrobertsa@aol.com](mailto:geoffreyrobertsa@aol.com), for this year's Award which will be judged in early summer in London. All applications must be received by 31 March 2010.

If you have any further queries, you can contact Venetia Lebus, the Hon Sec of the Geoffrey Roberts Trust, a registered charity, at [geoffreyrobertsa@aol.com](mailto:geoffreyrobertsa@aol.com)

And even if this Award is of no interest to you personally, we would be very grateful if you would pass on details to anyone suitable who might benefit from it. All potential applicants need do is visit [www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com](#)

### Our 2009 winner, proving political

The winner of the 2009 Geoffrey Roberts Award was [Dilly Boase](#), who is currently spending her bursary travelling around Italy learning how bread is made there in the most artisanal bakeries. As you can see from her blog at <http://well-bread.blogspot.com/> with her own beautiful illustrations such as these of Bari (top left) and Altamura (right), on the first part of her travels late last year she discovered that techniques are not quite as uniformly artisanal as she had been expecting. Here's what she had to report last week:

'I have now been waiting for a week to go to Sardinia, because of the snow and then because of changes of arrangements with the Slow Food people in Cagliari. But I'm going on Sunday, and the blog will be revived. I also will be putting up more of December's pictures. A crisis in confidence really shook me, but I have had time to assess what I'm not happy with and how I can change my approach. I will be going to the Slow Food 'Pasta Madre' event in Bologna on 7 Feb and now I can't wait!

'After a break and a rethink, I am off on the second half of my travels around Italy. So far, I have found it both fascinating and worrying to see the changing cultural position of bread here. I have used my interminable Christmas break to read the books of Carlo Petrini (founder of Slow Food and co-founder of Association Terra Madre). Combining these books with what I've seen and heard from bakers is making me more politicised, more excited, and better equipped to argue and demonstrate the case for food that is, in Petrini's words, 'good, clean and fair'. Being awarded this money has completely changed my future plans. Perhaps it is better to say that what before were dreams of making 'something' of my interest in good food have become real plans, along with the passion to put them into action. There is nothing like talking to

craftsmen/artisans in their own place of work where they are comfortable and open. It is a great privilege.'

**Alison Thomson**, the runner up in the 2009 Awards, has fared less well. Her plans to revisit Mauritania with a view to helping the local fishermen has had to be abandoned in the face of a series of attacks on foreign visitors and UK Foreign Office advice that it is too dangerous to travel in the country.

### Our 2008 winners - hard covers and serpents

In 2008 we had [two winners](#). Here's what New York-based **Nelle Gretzinger** reported to us judges late last year about her plans to develop the vanilla of Belize:

'I am just now returning [from regretful winding up of her clothing business] to the business of vanilla and what I am concentrating on is funding, either from the non-profit or private sector. We submitted our application once more to the Organization of American States (<http://www.oas.org/en/default.asp>). We applied last year, but they were unable, at that time, to fund any new projects. Thus far, we have only tried applying for grants from within Belize, but it's time to divert attention to stateside grants since nothing, yet, has panned out in Belize. I plan to do some research here in New York at the Foundation Center on other grants that are available to us. This is where we are directing our greatest efforts, since this is a sustainable development project in a third world country, and there are resources out there for such enterprises. I'm also teaching myself how to write a business plan, which I've never done, in order to be able to seek private financing.

'Our most considerable accomplishment, since my return from Belize, has been the completion of the textbook chapter on vanilla in Belize for the Wiley-Blackwell title *The Handbook of Vanilla Science and Technology*. I've never written a scholarly paper of this magnitude and I'm proud of the way it turned out. I submitted the final version of the chapter in June and am awaiting word as to what the publication date will be. Ever the optimist, I believe that this may open some new doors. The sections on Pesach Lubinsky's research and the Manche Chol are particularly interesting, but the other sections lay out what has thus far been accomplished on the vanilla project.

'I am boundlessly grateful to all of you for having faith in our project and for your exhibition of that faith. I sing the praises of the Geoffrey Roberts Trust every chance I get.'

Her fellow award winner **Magdalena Eriksson** has had a somewhat turbulent time implementing her plans to develop some source of income for the people of her adopted village in coastal Ghana from their crop of conical, white-fleshed pineapples, as she reported here at the end of last year:

'The past year has been full of challenges, as I will summarise. My pineapple project moved along decently in the beginning of the year. I played around with chutney recipes on weekends. On a trip to the US and Sweden in April, I brought some samples to friends to taste. I received feedback suggesting more finely chopped pepper and ginger and invested in a blender. Shortly after my return from that trip, I fell ill with malaria. I was hospitalised here in Ghana for several days and then went to Sweden for follow-up treatment since I suffered some severe complications. In June, I was back in Ghana but quite weakened. I was appointed head of the biochemistry department here in the medical school and skipped summer vacation but had to scale down on all activities in order to regain strength. On the morning of 1 Aug, I found a snake - likely a green mamba - in my living room. The same night, as I was in town waiting for a friend who was going to keep me company in the house that night, a robber attacked and assaulted me. As my injuries slowly healed, the robber was arrested and a very inefficient court process started; the actual trial has yet to begin. Then, green snake number two, this one a baby (see picture), showed up on my kitchen counter one Sunday morning. I was demoralized. Finally, in mid-November the hard disk in my computer crashed. My data were recovered and the machine repaired, and since Christmas night my internet connection works again.

'For 2010 my hopes are much higher. I will resume the development of pineapple chutney, perhaps with varying spiciness. I have also started experimenting with drying pineapple. I think I will need to work out a process that I can explain clearly before I engage the women in my village in any work. I'm planning to go to the village tomorrow and discuss projects with them. I also find the idea of using the peel of the fruit for vinegar, as Nelle suggested, tempting and will look for pineapples grown without pesticides. At this point, I feel hesitant to present a timeline for the project. I shall, however, keep in closer touch.'