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Obituary

Professor John R. Jones 1937–2007

On the 5th of February 2007 the isotopic community worldwide was saddened to learn of the unexpected death of Professor John Jones, Emeritus Professor of Radiochemistry at the University of Surrey. During an academic career spanning over 50 years he had become a well-respected scientist and key player in the isotopic chemistry community both at the national and international level.

John's academic and professional credentials were undoubted. Initially educated at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth 1955–1961, he was appointed to a Lectureship at Battersea College of Advanced Technology in London, an institution which in 1967 became the University of Surrey. In the course of time he became Professor of Radiochemistry and for close to nine years he served as Head of the Chemistry Department.

During his long career he supervised over 50 PhD students and 20 postdoctoral fellows, funded by grants and collaborations with research councils, the European Union, NATO and many industrial concerns. He was liked and respected by his postgraduates and regarded as a caring supervisor with a heart of gold. He also had a Dylan-Thomas-like use of language which has converted more than one 'No Good Boyo' into a productive PhD student. In turn, many of his collaborators, ex-students, post-docs and co-workers have now progressed to become independent scientists employed in academia and industry and are regular conference organizers and contributors at key isotopic conferences.

In addition to his academic career, John was involved in the activities of the International Isotope Society (IIS) since its inception. He was twice president of the society and was a co-organizer with Tom Baillie of the very successful IIS Innsbruck meeting in 1988. Furthermore, since 1991 John was a dedicated and enthusiastic Editor in Chief of the Journal of Labelled Compounds and Radiopharmaceuticals, playing a large part in the development of the journal and its editorial board.

In recognition of his many achievements Prof. Jones was the recipient of the prestigious Melvin Calvin Award, the highest award of the IIS and one assigned to isotopic chemists of widely recognized stature and influence in the area who have contributed significantly to the advancement of the subject. Recently, he also received the Becquerel Medal from the Radiochemistry Group of the Royal Society of Chemistry, an award for outstanding contribution in research and teaching in Radiochemistry.

Clearly he was well recognized for his many contributions to the advancement of isotopic chemistry and it is therefore appropriate here to list some of his scientific achievements in the area.

John's early research focused on various aspects of 'The Ionisation of Carbon Acids', the title of his first book which was published in 1972. The book made a significant contribution to physical organic chemistry and helped to popularise the use of tritium for studies in this area.

In 1967 he was instrumental in forging a link via Dr Tony Evans with the then Radiochemical Centre, now Amersham, and with Prof. John Elvidge also of Surrey University. This productive collaboration, ably supported by spectroscopist James Bloxsidge, led to the extensive development of the technique of tritium NMR spectroscopy. The many papers associated with this development were finally codified in 'The Handbook of Tritium NMR Spectroscopy', published in 1985.

The development of this technique marked a seminal point in the uses and applications of the tritium isotope. Many, perhaps most, users of the tritium isotope would have been affected in some way by the availability of the technique. Most directly of course, those radiochemists involved in the synthesis of tritium-labelled compounds who can now specify the quality of their labelled products with great confidence and who can employ the technique in the discovery of new labelling procedures. In addition, the technique has benefitted metabolists, pharmacologists, biochemists, analysts, etc. whose data are underpinned by the quality of the radioligands, photoaffinity probes, tracers and labels which they employ. Indeed, even

general customers of the isotope supply companies worldwide benefit from the routine use of tritium NMR in their commercial research, development and quality control procedures.

John's interest in the tritium NMR area had continued to the present time and the technique blossomed under his direction in a productive collaboration with Bruker. The early work at Surrey required fairly large amounts of radioactivity, typically many tens of millicuries but more recently the application of cryoprobe technology has meant that 10–20 microcuries of tritium are sufficient for detection with good signal to noise, opening up new opportunities for exploitation of this versatile isotope.

Recently, in collaboration with another Surrey colleague, Professor John Hay, John was instrumental in developing sol–gel-based scintillators which have considerable potential in this period of greener chemistry.

However, the work that gave him the most pleasure over his last few years was the development of a whole range of microwave-enhanced deuteriation and tritiation procedures. When John's interest was first aroused these techniques were cutting-edge and indeed are still under-exploited. However, microwave applications in the area of tritium and carbon-14 chemistry are beginning to appear and it is a case now of 'watch this space'. Clearly, therefore John and his co-workers, in particular Shui-yu Lu, have contributed much to the advancement of this scientific area.

There we have it then, stature, influence, professionalism and a substantial contribution to the advance of isotopic chemistry.

John will be missed not only at the professional level for his many contributions to science but also personally. John was a very keen sports fan, particularly of Welsh rugby and of cricket. He had a keen sense of humour and fund of excellent Welsh jokes and would always be ready with warm words of encouragement and sound common sense.

Throughout his career John was supported by his devoted wife, Eirlys and his two loving daughters Carys and Sian. He was recently delighted by the birth of a granddaughter, Grace.

John will be very sadly missed by myself and all the colleagues who regarded him as a friend and mentor who never failed to give us his full personal and scientific support.

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