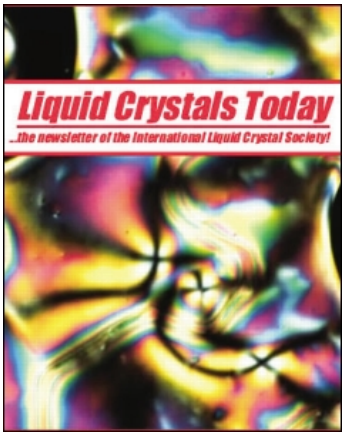


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# Pierre-Gilles de Gennes

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# PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

## *Pierre-Gilles de Gennes — a tribute from Jacques Prost*

Our community is extremely happy to hear of Pierre-Gilles de Gennes' Nobel prize. Of course we all knew he would win this award some day, and the only question was "When?". Today the good news has arrived and we can express our satisfaction.

Right from the very first contact it was clear that P-G de Gennes was a special kind of person. When he entered the Liquid Crystal field his prestige was already impressive although he was, I now realise, fairly young. We knew he was famous in the superconductivity community in which he had introduced original ideas (among which was surface conductivity), and that he had written a book. I did not know then that his very first research was on semiconductors, and that he had been brilliant dealing with neutron scattering!

It is very hard to sum up de Gennes' activity on Liquid Crystals. He has shown interest in all aspects of the field. I remember witnessing passionate discussions on the chemistry of mesogens, and suggestions on what kind of molecules could be synthesised. Elastic, hydrodynamic, electric, magnetic and optical properties of all phases known at that time were theoretically investigated and tied in to excellent experiments. Phase transitions were also thoroughly investigated: how many "Landau — de Gennes" free energies have been written? Most striking is perhaps the analogy with superconductors recently revived with the discovery of the twisted smectics, equivalent to the Shubnikov phase.

Although P-G de Gennes has been following the action closely in Liquid Crystals, he has also been involved in seminal work in other fields. The harvest has been very impressive: wetting, adhesion, sedimentation, turbulence and of course the whole field of polymer science! We have all heard of the C* and n=0 theorems, and of course reptation: these are abstract concepts which allow us to deal with concrete situations. Industries interested in his activities range from electronics to the food industry, and include the cosmetic, pharmaceutical, textile, oil, automobile, and aeronautical industries — and I probably forgot some of them!

In short, the Swedish Royal Academy has chosen a man devoid of prejudices, interested in communicating his enthusiasm to younger generations, and caring about the usefulness of his activity. We all feel a member of our family has been honoured.

## *George Gray awarded CBE*

Congratulations to Professor George Gray, who was awarded the CBE in the Queens Birthday Honours. He has been active in Liquid Crystal research for over 40 years (most of them at the University of Hull), and among his many achievements the best-known is probably the development of electro-optic liquid crystals, which form the basis for digital display devices throughout the world.

Professor Gray became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1983, and was awarded the Leverhulme Medal in 1987. As well as being Research Coordinator at Merck Ltd, he still maintains a Professorship at the University of Hull, (UK) and a visiting Professorship at the Univiversity of Southampton, (UK) a combination which enables him to develop the interaction between Merck and the University sector in the UK.

## *Anselm Griffin goes to Cambridge, UK*

Professor Anselm C Griffin has recently relocated from the University of Southern Mississippi to the University of Cambridge (UK). He is Director of the Melville Laboratory for Polymer Synthesis — a newly established inter-departmental unit at Cambridge.

Major activities will involve the design, synthesis and characterisation of polymers and model compounds in an effort to correlate chemical (and polymer) structure with physical and materials properties. Although the Laboratory is not intended to be exclusively oriented towards liquid crystalline materials. many of the projects have a flavour of liquid crystallinity.

There are several broad areas in which work is currently underway. These include microblock fluoro-polymers in which the intrinsic segregation of fluorocarbon segments and other parts of the polymer is expected to lead to unusual (lamellar) solid state properties. Rigid rod polymers are also being examined to try to modify their structures to render them processable.

The Laboratory is involved in the general area of reactive oligomers, to prepare macromonomers with special monomer sequences leading to polymers having an ordered sequence of repeating units.

In addition studies are under way in the area of liquid crystalline hydrogen bonded 'polymers' in which the monomer subunits are attached by hydrogen bonds to generate an association complex having a polymeric composition. Polymers for nonlinear optics is also a topic being pursued collaboratively with others in Cambridge.