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Liquid Crystals

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Preface

Geoffrey R. Luckhurst^a; Edward T. Samulski^b

^a University of Southampton, ^b University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,

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Preface

20th Anniversary Issue

When the very first issue of *Liquid Crystals* was published in February 1986, we, the Founding Editors, Geoffrey Luckhurst and Ed Samulski, had been duelling in print for years, publishing alternative and even conflicting views of very similar topics in liquid crystals. What a pleasure it was, then, to confound our colleagues by coming together in such an unexpected display of solidarity in print! This collaboration, however, was not easily won. The launch of *Liquid Crystals* was preceded by over a year of intense activity, discussion and angst.

It all began when Geoffrey approached the Publishers, Taylor & Francis, with the suggestion that they should publish a journal devoted exclusively to the area of liquid crystals. Taylor & Francis had a long tradition of service to and collaboration with the scientific community; they were a natural choice. The details of the proposal to the Publishers were next discussed by Alan Leadbetter (Associate Director of the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory), Michael Dawes (Director of Journal Publishing, Taylor & Francis) and Geoffrey Luckhurst at the end of 1984. Together, all three were quick to identify the need for an American Editor as well as one based in Europe. So the name Samulski arose as a prospective candidate for co-editor, a provocative American counterpart to Geoffrey's prominence in Britain. Needless to say, the Samulski half of us was as surprised by the invitation as the Luckhurst half was pleased to extend it, surprise being ever a good competitive strategy. Samulski surprised himself even more by accepting the invitation, and so began a series of intense discussions intended to produce a journal of the highest quality possible in this critical scientific area.

Soon afterward, Alan discussed, informally, our ideas for the new journal with George Gray; this was an important requirement before proceeding, because he had such a high standing in the field. We then set about creating a strong, international and multidisciplinary Editorial Board; we were pleased with the warm and positive support offered by the liquid crystal community for our venture. We had agreed to use the journal, *Molecular Physics*, also published by Taylor & Francis, as a model for the policy and style to be adopted for the new journal. In creating this we were supported splendidly by Eric Hulley who had the uncanny knack

of spotting errors not only in the typography but also in authors' manuscripts.

In the early years of the Journal, at the request of conference organisers, we also published three conference proceedings. The first was for the 8th Specialised Colloque Ampère held in Lisbon, 1987, followed by that for the 12th International Liquid Crystal Conference in Freiburg, 1988 and finally for the 14th International Liquid Crystal Conference held in Pisa in 1992. Now, it is often said that the quality of the science appearing in such proceedings is not as high as for a normal issue of a journal. However, the papers submitted for these three Proceedings were subjected to the same rigorous refereeing process as for our normal papers. Indeed, it is of considerable interest and perhaps significance that three of the papers selected for this 20th Anniversary Issue were published as part of these Conference Proceedings. However, the Editors, with the agreement of the Editorial Board, decided that *Liquid Crystals* should not publish any more proceedings. An implication of this decision was that special issues of the Journal would be rare. In fact, including this issue, there have been just three; the other two were to mark the birthdays of Geoffrey Luckhurst and George Gray who has contributed so much to the field of liquid crystals.

Both were Editors of the Journal which has had a remarkably small number of editors. Thus in 1992 Geoffrey was replaced by George, then in 1994 Ed was replaced by Noel Clark and in 2002 George was succeeded by Corrie Imrie. Each Editor has brought something new to the Journal, frequently related to his area of expertise in this multidisciplinary subject and also to his high standing within the community. They have all brought a hands-on approach to ensuring the high standards and the validity of the papers published. This is achieved by their personal selection of the referees and their informed decisions based on the referees' advice. It is this editorial guarantee that provides the readers with the essential confidence in the validity of the papers that are published. Equally the editors, with the invaluable aid of the referees, play a key role in ensuring that fair and constructive advice is given to the authors to allow them to present their research in an optimum manner.

Now, 20 years and 4000 papers later *Liquid Crystals* is recognised as well-established and a major success. It

provides a vital service to the liquid crystal community and, in return, is well supported by it. To celebrate the achievement, this Anniversary Issue of the Journal was conceived, to republish 20 of the most influential papers in its history. In addition, each of the reprinted papers was to be accompanied by a Commentary describing the background to the research, placing the work in a human context and describing how the subject has developed as a result of the original paper. We were then faced with the awesome task of selecting these 20 influential papers from the 4000 that had been published. As it happens, our scientific rivalry had continued unabated in the intervening years since 1986 (and continues up to this day!), and once again it served us well in arriving at the highest quality of submissions among what we felt were superb papers. So, rather than argue or engage about the relative merit of one paper over another, we decided to be guided by the number of citations that the papers had received. This is, of course, a somewhat mechanical procedure and does not always reflect the quality and timeliness of a paper, but it provided a scientifically objective way to produce a first cut. In a second phase, we tempered the selection by our knowledge of the field and through discussions with colleagues. The resulting papers, so chosen, describe a rich variety of liquid crystal research that certainly make fascinating reading and merit being made more widely available. The associated Commentaries provide intriguing new insights, equally varied, into the papers and those who created them.

What of the future? The continuing involvement of the editors in all aspects of the review process and in the oversight of their preparation for publication should continue. However, the introduction of information technology will facilitate this process and the submission of papers which will undoubtedly benefit the

editors and the authors. It will, however, need to involve the experience of a professional to ensure the accuracy and consistency of what appears in print. Once their work has been published the authors, rightly, expect it to be made widely available. Originally this was the responsibility of the Publishers to ensure a wide circulation for the Journal and that it was well abstracted. Now and in the future the situation will be different; authors and readers expect easy access to electronic versions of the Journal. This, of course, presents the same difficult financial problems for the university libraries as did the hard copy of the Journal. However, the ability of large publishers, such as Taylor & Francis, to bundle their journals does help to ensure their wider availability. Leaving this availability to the authors alone, essentially through self-publication, does not appear to be the way forward especially if the quality of the papers is to be guaranteed, but time will tell. As for the subject and those who work in it, the future seems to be bright. It is well recognised that liquid crystal science and technology does, from time to time, go through patches where very little seems to happen. These rarely last long and soon some new discovery, such as the phases formed by the so-called banana molecules, comes along and stimulates the field. As we wrote in our first Editorial '....this is a burgeoning field of interdisciplinary endeavour and now is an exciting time to be involved in liquid crystal research.' These words seem as true today as when they were written 20 years ago.

Geoffrey R. Luckhurst
University of Southampton

Edward T. Samulski
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill