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In Memoriam Dr. William C. "Bill" Wake 1916-1989

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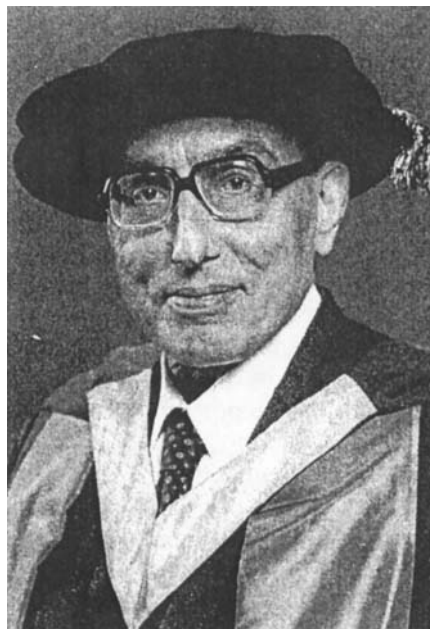
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In Memoriam

Dr. William C.
“Bill” Wake
1916–1989



Christmas Day 1989 was a sad occasion for the international community of Adhesion Science, since early that morning one of its most distinguished and loved members; Dr. William C. “Bill” Wake died.

Born in 1916, he began his education at Haberdasher Askes School in South London. Leaving during the depression, he worked at Woolwich Arsenal in the Ballistics Division, and studied part-time at Sir John Cass College. After a spell in a sanatorium, with the ill-health which was to dog him for the rest of his life, he completed his BSc degree for the University of London in 1940. Later that year he was moved to Cambridge with his department which was then being evacuated to the Cavendish Laboratory. This provided him with an introduction to the more academic side of research.

In that same year he married Lilian who was his constant support and companion for the next half century.

In 1943 he left the Civil Service and joined what was then the Research Association of British Rubber Manufacturers with its laboratories in Croydon. Here he began what was essentially his major life work; in studies first of rubber which then extended to other polymers and thence to adhesion. He was the author of three books which were quickly recognised as authoritative, edited several others and published about sixty papers in the scientific literature. In 1968

the University of London awarded him the degree of DSc for his published contributions to physical and analytical chemistry, the science of adhesion and productivity and economic studies.

On his retirement from the Rubber and Plastics Research Association, where he had been Assistant Director (Research), he came to City University as, successively, Visiting Professor, Gresham Fellow and then Honorary Research Fellow.

He served on a considerable number of committees relating to his professional interests and was Associate Editor of *THE JOURNAL OF ADHESION* and Honorary President of the Adhesives Group of the Plastics and Rubber Institute.

His ill-health prevented him from involvement in any sort of sport, so he began to explore an interest in the history of science which had been aroused earlier by an enthusiastic chemistry master at school. It was totally characteristic that he directed his interest into the necessary form to present it in the form of a thesis for an MSc degree in 1946. In the course of this work he became particularly interested in ancient Greek Science and Medicine (which led him to teach himself Greek) and in the earliest use of statistical methods in linguistic studies. Recognising the potential of this technique, he developed and applied it with the result that, in 1951, he was awarded the degree of PhD for a thesis entitled "The Corpus Hippocraticum" which was largely concerned with this application of statistics. This work with applied statistics continued alongside his more conventional scientific work and complemented and enriched much of it. However, with the advent of computers which did much of the hard work, he was less involved in the detailed linguistic studies.

He developed an interest and understanding of German life and culture and spent a number of holidays in Bavaria. As always, his interest was supported by reading and study, so that he became no mean authority both on baroque architecture and Franconian wines of South East Germany.

During a Silver Wedding Anniversary celebratory holiday in Greece it occurred to Bill to revive an early interest in sketching. As with most things to which he turned his hand, he worked assiduously at this and became an accomplished artist in several different media. His Christmas cards, which were always reproductions of one of his drawings, were keenly sought after and are highly prized by their recipients.

He and Lilian lived for the past thirty five years in a small village in Shropshire where their garden was cultivated to a standard beyond the reach of most of us. His practical skills went along with a clear understanding of the scientific principles to produce delightful flowers and delicious fruit and vegetables. For a number of years he kept a hive of bees, and he enlivened many lectures with illustrations of the strange rheological properties of honey or the problems which arose in sticking labels on jars when glass was replaced by polymer.

He was an active member of the Unitarian Church and served as President of the Shrewsbury Congregation, and conducted services there on numerous occasions.

His eminence was recognised in various ways; the Institute of the Rubber

Industry awarded him the Colwyn Gold Medal in 1965 and invited him to deliver their Foundation Lecture in 1973; in 1981 the Materials Science Club presented him with the Griffith Medal and The City University (London) awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science 'honoris causa'; and then in 1984 the Adhesives and Sealants Council (of America) honoured him with their Award—the first time it had been given either to a scientist or to a foreigner.

Anyone who worked with him will know that he was a demanding mentor; but they and numerous others could also testify to his enormous generosity. No one asked for his help in vain; it was always given freely, and with it came insight and inspiration too. The number of higher degrees which owe a significant debt to him is legion.

Lest it appear that with all his erudition he was staid and solemn, I hasten to add that he was an extremely genial and kindly person with a fine dry humour, and one of the most delightful companions or hosts it has ever been my good fortune to know.

We are all the poorer for his passing; but at the same time too, we are immensely richer for having known him, I can add no words more appropriate than the quotation which Revd. Anne Wicker used at his funeral service: "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again."

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London.