

OBITUARY

Alan Arthur Turner 1934 – 2012

Alan Turner loved chemistry. From a very early age he wanted to be a chemist wearing a white laboratory coat. At the age of 18, he left school to join Shell New Zealand as a laboratory technician. There, his talent as a chemist was recognized and he was encouraged to go to university. He gained his Chemistry degree in 1958 from part-time study at Victoria College, where he met his future wife, Iivi Alet, who was completing her MSc degree; they were married in the early 60s.

Upon graduation, Alan went back to Shell full-time, was recognised as a careful and methodical chemist, and was quickly given major responsibilities that included the development of the first NZ-based grease making plant, then under construction. He spent many months at grease plants in the UK learning the black art of making grease, returning in 1962 to develop the new operation at Seaview. In 1963, he moved to Auckland as a Technical Sales Adviser and then to Christchurch in the same role. He was promoted to Industrial Markets Manager in the Head Office and, in the late 1960s, became Technical Manager responsible for all product development, quality control and customer service activities with a staff of ca. 25. He was a strict but fair boss.

While Technical Manager, the oil shocks of the early 1970s hit and the price of oil increased from \$US3 to \$US12 a barrel almost overnight! This price increase contributed substantially to a worsening of NZ's terms of trade; weekend petrol sales were banned and carless days introduced on 30 July 1979. Much of Alan's energy as Technical Manager was then directed towards the development of alternative transport fuels, initially compressed natural gas (CNG) and then LPG. For the latter a new car was purchased, converted to LPG, and test driven by Alan throughout the North Island for a year to prove the performance of LPG in petrol engines. Later, the trial was extended to a taxi fleet in Wellington and eventually to general use by the public. With the advent of Maui gas, the use of methanol as a transport fuel was Alan's next challenge. He organised a large international symposium in Auckland involving world experts that led to an industry unit in New Zealand to evaluate methanol/petrol blends in our vehicle fleet.

In 1978, the Government established the Liquid Fuels Trust Board (LFTB) to evaluate alternative automotive fuels for NZ and, because of his expertise, Alan was soon seconded to it. He much enjoyed this challenge involving, as it did, investigations as varied as Southland lignite coal and the European butter mountain as possible fuel sources. Alan's secondment to the LFTB ended in 1990 and he retired from Shell at the same time.

Throughout his career with Shell and the LFTB both Alan and Iivi were actively involved with the Institute's Wellington Branch. They both served on the committee over many years taking on various roles and were regular at-



tendees at monthly meetings. After such meetings Alan would often claim, with a twinkle in his eye, that he didn't understand the point of the lecture, but when he asked a question it was clear that he had understood much more than he let on.

In 1989, Alan was asked to help NZIC at the National level. The Institute had, for many years, been run by Ted Harvey (the Hon. Gen. Sec.) and Denis Hogan (the Registrar). Both gentlemen retired at about the same time and the Institute needed to find someone who could not only take over their role but bring the office functions of the Institute up to date. Alan accepted this, set up an office in IPENZ offices in Molesworth Street, and for the next eight years he was both Honorary General Secretary and Executive Officer of the Institute. This was effectively a half-time position, which Alan undertook on an honorary basis. He transformed the way in which the Institute conducted its business and he ran the operation like clockwork.

One of Alan's duties was to liaise with the myriad of national chemical societies and he developed a real interest in what those societies were doing for chemical education in secondary schools. As a result of this liaison, a Canadian quiz, *Chem 13*, was introduced to NZ schools with Alan as administrator. The Australians were next off the block and Alan was appointed coordinator for what became the Australian National Chemistry Quiz. This quiz still provides a major focus for secondary school students on the relevance of chemistry in an exciting and stimulat-

ing way. Last year this quiz had more than 117,000 entries, from 1,467 schools and 15 countries. Alan and Iivi coordinated the ANCQ quiz from their Brooklyn home for 20 years - Alan believed passionately in the value of this type of activity.

At the end of Alan's term as Executive Officer he returned to the Branch Committee serving as Treasurer and providing advice to the younger chemists on the committee. He was always supportive; Brian Halton, the recently retired editor of this journal, tells me that he would frequently receive phone calls from Alan saying how much he had enjoyed a particular article in the latest issue, and if he had any criticism to make it was always very gentle.

Apart had wide interests beyond chemistry: he loved his wine and kept an excellent cellar. He and Iivi were founding members of the Magnum Society, Wellington's

leading wine appreciation society and they were founding shareholders in the Te Kairanga winery in Martinborough. He also loved music, cricket and good company. His wife Iivi was born in Estonia and Alan and his family were prominent members of the small, but close-knit, NZ Estonian community, hosting many of its functions in their home. He and Iivi made several trips to Estonia after the break-up of the Soviet Union and made contact with her relatives there. On the day of his funeral, the Estonian flag was flown at half-mast over the consulate in Wellington.

Alan Turner died from cancer on April 17 and is survived by his mother, his wife, two daughters, and four grandchildren.

David Weatherburn [with thanks to Roscoe Turner (no relation) for details of Alan's career]