

Denis Hogan on Chemical Education - The Last Comments

Denis Hogan served as the Registrar of the Institute from 1961 until 1988 during its professional days, and then as Convening Editor of *Chem NZ* from 1989. His remarkable service to the Institute spanned the tenure of 45 Presidents (one had two separate terms), 6 Honorary General Secretaries (14 years with Dr W. E. (Ted) Harvey) and 6 Editors of this Journal; it was recognised by a Queen's Service Medal in 1990.

On October 24 last Denis returned to his Wyn Street home in Christchurch from St Helena's hospice to receive the 2006 NZIC Chemical Education Award. As it transpired this was his last visit. His wife, Helen, had no idea he was intending to make the speech concerning chemical education that follows. "I thought he was just going to say thank-you but he asked me to bring in pen and paper" she said. "Without access to material he put his ideas together despite the fact that for the previous three weeks he had been confined, mostly lying, unable to turn over without help, and unable to concentrate for more than a few minutes at a time." Within 16 hours of giving the speech, he was lying on the floor of St Helena's, and was soon afterwards diagnosed with tumours on the brain. Sadly, he passed away on November 15 2006.

What follows is lightly parenthesised to provide better continuity and understanding for the reader.

Editor

I'm going to be struggling. However, some things I need to say. First of all, many, many thanks to the Institute, particularly for the future naming of the NZIC Chemical Education Award. That's just tremendous.

My mind races back to 1944, I think it was five o'clock on a Monday when I sat in a lecture in the big old lecture room, Room 15, which belonged to the History Department. We had had a late start; the students had been man-powered—that is a word you won't remember. They were man-powered for harvesting; the students were compulsorily required to work on the wharf or to go out harvesting—to do something useful instead of going to university. So we had a delayed start for the year.

The professor, Denham [who did the spade work to set up the Institute and was President 1934-36], had died early in 1943. In the wonderful way they had in those days it took them until late March or early April [1944] to make a new appointment. So, at this late stage, we came to the first chemistry lecture of the year. I doubt whether any one will remember when Hugh Parton ruled the roost [Editor, *this Journal*, 1940-46; President 1961-62]. Parton was the Department and that was a change. John Davies, who was John Pollard's brother-in-law [President 1976-77], was one of a group of physical chemists in the Parton days. Before the five o'clock lecture started, he came into Room 15 and said it had just been announced that John Packer [President 1949-50] had been appointed to the Professorship. So the audience, having been suitably primed, produced a tremendous uproar when Packer walked in to take the lecture. He was a very modest, unassuming man; the reception quite overcame him. It was a great occasion and marked in my memory an important step in chemical education.

Maybe the next most important thing that happened in chemical education (and I wasn't involved at all), was the appointment of Jack Vaughan in 1949 as lecturer in chemistry. He had been selected by Hugh Parton from interviews in Swansea, UK. I remember at the time of John Packer's retirement, Vaughan remarked that he had not

read all of 'Packer and Vaughan' [*Modern Approach to Organic Chemistry*, Clarendon Press: Oxford 1958] but he had certainly read more of it than any other book of the same title; that became a fruitful partnership. This is where we tie up with chemical education, because one of the things that Vaughan wanted to do as he moved up the [academic] scale was encourage the teaching of chemistry in schools—he had that as a very real commitment. He automatically, of course, became Branch Chairman [and President 1969-70]. It was at that point, or shortly before, that I became Branch Secretary and we worked on that endeavour together.

I'm delighted to see Shirley Wooff here, because one of the things I really did work hard on was persuading Alan to become a member of the Branch. Apart from Tommy Tohill and Russell Hounsell, there were not many of the younger school teachers involved in the NZIC as such at that stage. Alan [subsequently Hon. FNZIC] was the first, and probably the most influential of the group. Once we got Alan in the Institute, the rest of them followed.

And then we went on to the second generation, which I called the Wooff stable. Many, many teaching recruits came in. Terry Hitchings was already in the Institute. He came down from Wellington to what was then Christchurch West High School, from where he quickly branched to other things, but he became a very influential person in chemical education [and NZIC President in 1987]. And at that point the Branch began to take a real interest in chemical education and move on to the *Chemistry in Action* series of lectures [in Christchurch]. Some of the people here today were earlier talking about the changes in schools between then and now. I can remember in 1959 when we ran the first series. We ran it firstly in the Museum Lecture Theatre and then later in the old Drawing and Design Office of the Engineering School when the Engineering School was being refurbished and shot out to Ilam. We had an audience limit of 250 and it was a ticket-only invitation with numbers stamped on the back. Disciplinaryians like Alan Wooff recorded the number of the ticket against

the name of the individual to whom it was handed out and they were called to account if they didn't turn up. *People have gone to the trouble of organising this lecture and you jolly well turn up* was the approach. I don't know what happened to the absconders. But the sixth formers turned up at 8 pm on a Friday evening, in their own time, in school uniform. You put that in today's context and that would be something remarkable!

However, from a series of three lectures on three consecutive Fridays, we went on to collect the scripts from very, very eminent NZ working chemists all over the country. We started with Athol Rafter [Director, Institute of Nuclear Sciences, DSIR; President 1970-71], Tom Walker [soil scientist, Lincoln College] and Stan Siemon [lecturer in Applied Chemistry who became the first Professor of Chemical Engineering at Canterbury] and went on to repeat that cycle annually for quite a long time, publishing a series of what were really monographs of what was going on in chemistry in New Zealand at that time. And they're still a valuable resource!

Then we formed the *Junior Chemical Society*, which was intended for sixth formers with a real interest in chemistry; they weren't to be persuaded to chemistry, they were there because they wanted to do chemistry. The *Junior Chemical Society* had an annual fee, small, just enough to give them a stake in the organisation. And we collected these scripts into a series of sixth form bulletins on particular topics. You will still find them in libraries.

Gradually times were changing and it got to the point where the first question that was asked of the teacher was "Do we have to wear school uniform?" And when he handed out the tickets, they'd say "No thanks". They'd come along and listen to the lecture only if they didn't have to wear school uniform.

And then we had the example of the RSC publishing a journal called *Education in Chemistry*. I can remember very well one night here, at Wyn St, when Terry, Alan, Jack (Vaughan), and I had a beer and we collected up the various bits and pieces of chemical education books [from] around the world and spread them around the table and asked, "Why can't we do something like this?" So we set out to create what eventually became ChemNZ. I can remember on that night, part of the discussion was, "If you had enough money to buy the car you want, what car would you buy?" At that time, the Citroen seemed to be

I can also remember that when Terry picked up Jack (who didn't like driving particularly) Barbara, his wife, handed him over and said, "You might as well take him, he's no use to me."— he was in one of the moods that you people know Jack could get into. It wasn't a bad tempered mood, it was argumentative. We had a really great night and that led on to the foundations of Chem NZ.

We talked about it and Jack said, "I'll ask Jack Fergusson to be Editor"— the royal touch on the shoulder! Who was Jack Fergusson to say no? He did it for five years. And then it moved on. It got to the stage where it went on to Palmerston North and then to Wellington, where it nearly



got lost, but it still hadn't when I chose to retire. Here was an obvious thing that I could do with considerable enjoyment and so I offered to take up the reins of *ChemNZ* and here in Canterbury is where it stayed and it's still here, bless the Canterbury Branch for their support. [Members in] Canterbury has always started these things and it's always been a leading light, not only in doing things but in the initiatives that follow. It went from one development to another round in a circle and it has continued.

Perhaps one of the most significant things was *New Zealand Is Different* which produced a huge amount of effort by very, very many people. That brings me round in full circle because when John Packer, Jr, saw a spot he decided to do *Chemical Processes in New Zealand* up in Auckland. That was the first move really, the first initiative away from Christchurch. It has become a continuous series based on the precept that topics that were particular to NZ (a bit like *New Zealand Is Different* in a way) were selected and that a University man and a school teacher were paired and between them they wrote the articles. It was frankly commercial, as it had to be of course, and they made quite a substantial booklet out of it and sold it for a subsidised, modest price, because no-one got paid for doing it. And that's one of the blessed things about the Institute. We've always managed to find volunteers to get on and do these jobs that needed doing. I think it's a real tribute to the Institute that it has continued throughout the years to get people to carry out these initiatives. They have sometimes made money, as Manawatu Branch has done, with a financial base. I've lost my track but my link is back to John Packer. John was the son of the [Canterbury's] Professor of Chemistry I spoke about initially. He went through Canterbury. But he carried with him the torch of chemical education into Auckland and carried that on successfully.

There are other things that I could and probably should say, but I'm beginning to run out of breath. I conclude with very great thanks to the Branch for the honour of today's award and the hope that, through the work that NZIC has done over the many years and is continuing to do, chemical education will be fostered and enhanced.

Once again, thanks very much.