

## Jack Austin – 1927- 2005



Retired chemistry reader Dr. Jack Austin died at the age of 77 on April 14. His adult life was centred on the University of Canterbury. Jack spent four years as a student graduating with an MSc, met his wife Margaret (later a Labour MP and Cabinet Minister) when she was a science student, completed his doctorate while a junior lecturer, and taught chemistry for 41 years. Dr. Austin was known by the wider University community as *the man who did the timetable*.

John Maurice Austin was born and raised in South Canterbury, attending Timaru Boys' High School before coming to what was then Canterbury University College. He studied mathematics, physics, and chemistry, but it was the distinctive lecturing style of Hugh Parton that persuaded him to continue with physical chemistry. In 1949, after finishing his MSc, Jack was appointed as a junior lecturer and enrolled as a PhD student. This was a significant departure from tradition, with the Chemistry Department leading the University in having junior lectureships. The four-year term was conditional on the holder enrolling as PhD student and dividing their time between doctoral study and department duties.

Dr. Austin became the second PhD graduate from the Department. He worked on the thermodynamics of reactions using electrochemical techniques in a primitive basement laboratory where he designed and built a sensitive calorimetric system to measure the heats of associations of ions. Upon completion of his doctorate in 1954 he was appointed to a lectureship, was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1962, and to a Readership in 1967.

Head of Chemistry Dr. Bryce Williamson said Dr. Austin was a very clear and precise lecturer who was very fair *with students and paid sympathetic attention to their problems and added that he will be remembered for his great organising ability and attention to detail which served the Department, as well as the wider University, very well.* After retirement, Jack remained a cherished and respected member of the Department. He was a regular attendee of seminars and often joined the Department for morning tea up to within a few weeks before his death. Retired colleague Emeritus Professor Michael Hartshorn said that the Department Dr. Austin entered as a student in 1945 was a very different place than that today, having just five teaching staff. During his PhD years Jack held a sequence of temporary assistant lectureships, often as replacements for others heading off overseas, and had a heavy load of teaching duties, including running the first-year laboratories and giving the lab talks on the second floor in C5 of the Old Chemistry Building. *I understand that in honour of his first lab talk he bought a new sports coat*, said Prof. Hartshorn who also described his friend as *a good servant of the University* who would be remembered *with fondness as an academic, colleague and friend.*

He was also known as an *expert timetabler*. He assumed the responsibility in the early 1960s and one of his last duties before retiring in August 1990 was to complete the 1991 timetable. The heavy dependence of the University on his expertise became quite evident over a period of study leave he took during 1967. In his absence two people undertook to produce the timetable but, on his return, he declared their efforts unworkable and proceeded to make critical amendments. Dr. Austin was involved extensively in administration, serving as Acting Head of Department, on the Professorial Board, and as Chairman of the Timetable Committee. He also served as a University representative on the Burnside High School Board of Governors from 1966 to 1976. Outside of the University, he was a keen cricketer, badminton player, gardener, and tramper.

Dr. Austin is survived by his wife, Margaret, and their three children.

