

Peter P. Williams FNZIC [1932-2005]



Peter Williams passed away on September 10 shortly after his 73rd birthday. Peter joined the Chemistry Division of DSIR as a bursar student in March 1950, graduating from Auckland University with an MSc in 1954 returning to the Physical Chemistry Section in 1955 to apply IR spectroscopy to the study of clay minerals. In 1957 the X-ray diffraction equipment was upgraded with a new generator and X-ray crystallography then became Peter's main area of expertise. However, he was the operator of choice for the early ^1H NMR equipment and demonstrated a wide understanding of spectroscopic techniques. With DSIR support, he gained a crystallography-based PhD degree at King's College (Cambridge) in 1962.

Peter was into drugs well before they became known to general public! Actually, he was *into* their structures and chemistry. He focused particularly on barbituric acids and their derivatives and was associated with Dr. Rob McKeown in this work; the studies were designed to support drug identification problems in the toxicology and forensic work of the Division. Peter used diffraction studies wherever they were required so that quantitative X-ray diffraction was developed under his tutelage for the estimation of mineral phases in cement and rocks. One of his fellow-workers noted that Peter was one of the quiet achievers of the lab; his publications included a 1959 *Nature* article.

He served as Section Leader and Manager, Special Projects. In the latter part of his career, he became a computer-coding specialist, playing a major role in the use of small computers in implementation of blood alcohol anal-

ysis automation systems. He was justifiably proud of how much information he could store and manipulate in 16-bit (computer) words. He worked with the late Dr. John Bailey, and was the perfect collaborator as he handled the early days of the system as it was tested through the NZ Courts. Peter was a strong supporter of the Institute editing the 50th jubilee book *Chemistry in a Young Country*. He retired in 1991 just before the demise and restructure of DSIR.

Personal reminiscences

Peter hired me in 1974 as a computing support person to enable interactions with the remote DSIR and Ministry of Works mainframe computers. However, Peter knew my first love was X-ray crystallography and he allowed me and other members of Physical Chemistry considerable latitude in developing our own style and research contacts. This was one of his strengths; one of the others was his ability to craft words. I remember the masterly way he would assess and place the crystal structures I was studying into one of the major high-level goals of the government of the day; I am grateful for his continued interest and support throughout my career.

Peter was a quiet and unassuming member of staff, fondly mentioned as parts per Williams when ppm became common measure! He was approachable, using a leadership style that was thoughtful and *hands-off*: qualities that retain their virtue. There was something of the English gentleman in Peter that stood him out from other managers: somewhat private and considerate.

Science in New Zealand is poorer for his passing.

Graeme Gainsford, September 2005.