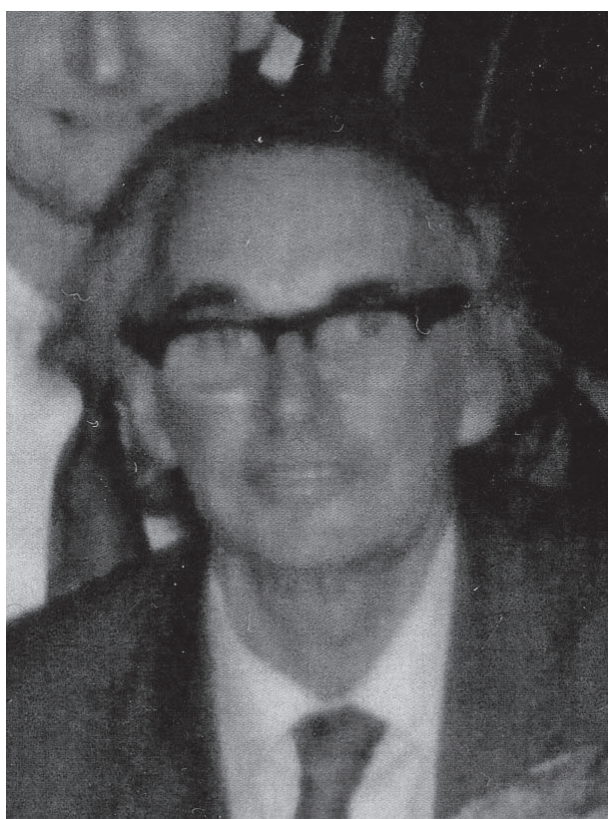


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Walter Sidney Metcalf (1928-2008)



Walter Metcalf, a long-time member of the Chemistry Department at Canterbury University, passed away on Thursday July 24. He arrived at Canterbury University College (now the Arts Centre), from what is now Victoria University of Wellington, in 1954 as a senior lecturer in charge of physical chemistry, replacing Hugh Parton who had just moved to Otago. He retired as a Reader 21 years later.

Though not driven to publish prolifically in his own right, Walter initiated into original research a number of people whose careers provide ample testimony to the blindingly obvious truth that universities are about more than just putting your name into print. Amongst these are *Robin Clark* (FRS), *Leon Phillips*, *Sally Page*, *Murray McEwan*, *Ward Robinson*, *David Natusch* (Rhodes Scholar) and the late *Terry Quickenden* (a unique and eccentric academic stimulator in the Metcalf tradition). His early career at Victoria involved *Hugh Melhuish*, who subsequently joined DSIR and became NZ's foremost physical photochemist, and

Laird Ward. Laird made his career in US industry but remained loyally fond of Walter, for whom he had synthesized many large round-bottomed flasks of brilliantly fluorescing organic liquids.

Walter was an unorthodox and often inspiring lecturer who, on one occasion, cleared everybody out of the chemistry lecture room with an *aluminium-powder-plus-finely-ground-iodine-plus-a-few-drops-of-water* demonstration that produced rather more iodine vapour than anticipated, and on another occasion (a beautiful spring morning) gave a lucid and highly memorable lecture on Förster non-radiative energy transfer in solution while leading the class of six or seven honours students on a hike around Lake Victoria and the botanic gardens. His main research field was photochemistry, for which work he won the RSNZ T.K. Sidey Medal. He did his DPhil at Oxford University with E.J. Bowen, author of *Chemical Aspects of Light* which was one of the first books on photochemistry, and subject of an oft-repeated rhyme: Says E.J. Bowen, '*I always empty my pipette by blowing*'. In later years Walter branched out into calcium metabolism.

Walter also had a bachelor's degree in music (his instrument was the viola), which he obtained simultaneously with his first science degree. He had wanted only to sit in on a few courses but his scholarship would not cover the fees for a course that was not aimed at gaining a degree, so he went ahead and completed the degree. Subsequently, he played in a quartet with friends and became chief rescuer of old violins and cellos for use by pupils of the Christchurch School of Instrumental Music.

Sally Page has commented that she only began to appreciate the quality of the advice given to her by Walter when she had to advise her own graduate students at UC London. Ward Robinson comments that: *I was privileged to participate in a modest MSc project with Walter and this had a lot to do with my reaching for the research career which is still thrilling me 48 years later. I am sure we all would want to record our deep appreciation of all the different ways in which his long life impacted upon us*, and Leon Phillips adds: *Walter was a Quaker, an exceptionally kind person and an enthusiastic individualist on almost any topic; I miss him.*

Leon Phillips & Ward Robinson