

BILL NEWTON AWARD/ LECTURESHIP



Dr G. William A. Newton - always Bill Newton to his colleagues and friends - died suddenly on 4 October 2005 at the age of 76.

Born on 9 November 1928 in Blackburn, Lancashire, Bill Newton did his National Service in the RAF and then went to work for the UK Atomic Energy Authority, first at Springfield in Preston and then at the Windscale power station (as it then was). During this period he took his HND at Preston, and then went to Liverpool Polytechnic to study for the Associateship of the Royal Institute of Chemistry, all on a part-time basis. While he was at Liverpool Ian Campbell from Manchester University came to give a lecture, which Bill attended and which excited him: Campbell was equally impressed with Newton's work and offered him a teaching post in nuclear chemistry at Manchester and the chance to study for a PhD. Bill completed the doctorate, on *The Effects of Radiation on the Surface Properties of Alumina*, in 1964 in the space of only two years, after which Campbell ensured that he was confirmed as a full-time Lecturer in Chemistry at the university. He was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1981, and also became a part-time Tutor in the Faculty of Science from 1967 to 1981, taking early retirement from the university in 1988 at the age of 60. He was a long-standing member of the Royal Society of Chemistry and became chairman of the Radiochemical Methods Group twice, and was deeply involved in the series of international conferences on environmental radiochemical analysis. Like many academics who have taken early retirement, Bill Newton continued to do consultancy work after leaving Manchester University.

As well as being a committed teacher with a loyal following of students, Bill Newton was an active researcher in the field of radiochemistry and nuclear

chemistry: not surprisingly many of his articles demonstrate his continuing interest in alumina. His research activity continued into retirement, in one case with a remarkable outcome. In 1971 he and colleagues at Harwell and Risley believed they had discovered a new superheavy element with the atomic number 112, but at the time their findings were greeted with scepticism: it was a source of great satisfaction to him that in 2004 this discovery was after all independently confirmed.

A month before his death Bill submitted to *Archaeometry* an article which he had been invited to write on another aspect of his work. It opens with the words 'In the early 1970s John Riley from the Archaeology Department at Manchester came to see me and asked if we could help with some Roman pottery they had found at several sites in Libya. At the time we were ... sceptical about the possible success of any analyses. However, there was the University Research Reactor that was underused by our group. It was decided to undertake a trial project and Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis was born at Manchester. Over 6,000 samples were eventually analysed' (covering the ancient world from Roman and Medieval Britain to the Levant, and now deposited at the Manchester Museum). This 'trial project' led to Manchester becoming one of the major British centres for the neutron activation analysis of ancient pottery, ending not with Bill's retirement but with the death of his great friend and collaborator Dr Vin Robinson. An important feature of the Manchester lab's approach was the involvement of large numbers of students, from third-year undergraduates up to post-doctoral level. For many this unexpected taste of the ancient world had a lasting effect on their lives: indeed.

It had a lasting effect on Bill Newton's life too, as he became increasingly fascinated by the stories ancient pottery could tell. Early in 1989, immediately after retirement, he and his wife Betty had worked on Kay Prag's excavations at Tell Iktanu in Jordan: with Betty in the lead, they thereupon both began going to evening classes and on specialised courses in making pottery, and were still doing so at the time of his death, Bill having meanwhile successfully taken the City and Guilds examinations. He was particularly interested in kilns and glazes, and by the time of his death Bill was no mean potter, with some beautiful and striking works to his credit.

Bill Newton was also a very happy family man. In July 1953 he married Betty Slater: they had four children, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. It was on the way back from a visit to one of the grandchildren that he developed the symptoms of what proved to be a fatal brain haemorrhage.

Bill will be sadly missed by all his many friends and colleagues in the Radiochemistry Group and the wider scientific community.

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