

Ralston Andrew Lawrie  
1924-2007  
An Appreciation

Ralston Lawrie was born in Paisley in 1924 and although he left Scotland in 1949, on meeting him no one could have any doubts as to where he had spent his formative years. After attending Paisley Grammar School he entered Glasgow University in 1941. He initially planned to study medicine but decided this was not the profession for him - which is a little surprising since he already had handwriting which most doctors take years to develop. From 1944 to 1947 he spent time working in the food and pharmaceutical industries before returning to Glasgow University in 1947 to complete a degree in physiological chemistry, which he was awarded, with first class honours, in 1948. In 1949 he migrated south to take up a post in the Scientific Civil Service. For the next 15 years he worked at the Low Temperature Research Station, University of Cambridge, being awarded a Ph.D from that University in 1952. During this time he rapidly developed an international reputation as an innovative and productive research worker and was seconded to the CSIRO Meat Research Laboratory, in Brisbane, Australia for three years from 1953 to 1956. I worked in Brisbane myself about ten years later and he was still remembered with a great deal of respect and affection by all his ex-colleagues. As well as the excellence of his research output his personality had made a lasting impression. Though invariably courteous and polite, whether walking, talking or working Ralston had only two speeds - fast and very fast - and in a typical Brisbane summer these speeds were not conducive to comfort. Thus their abiding memory was of an immaculately dressed character, in his trademark lab coat, mopping his brow as he went about his duties, exchanging pleasantries and giving them the benefit of his dry humour.

On his return to the UK he was appointed Head of the Meat Group of the LTRS, a post he held with distinction until 1964, when he joined the staff of the University of Nottingham, as Reader in Food Science. He was subsequently promoted to a Chair in 1970. At the time the facilities for the discipline were far from ideal but with the help of John Blanshard and Mendel Stein, the first students were given an education in Food Science based on a thorough grounding in the basic sciences. The undergraduate and post graduate numbers increased substantially over the next few years and more staff had to be recruited. These were interesting and exciting times and I am sure we all appreciated the hands-off management style that was Ralston's trademark. There was minimal interference but when needed he was available for advice and was invariably polite. For such a busy man I still am amazed at how he found time to listen and advise so constructively and his ability to give everybody, from student to cleaner to Vice-Chancellor, equal respect. Though a very active researcher and enthusiastic teacher, Ralston was always prepared to serve on the numerous committees that are a part of University life and he served as Head of Department of Applied Biochemistry and Food Science from 1983 to 1987 and Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences from 1979 to 1982. He retired from the University at the end of 1989. That Food Science at Nottingham is now housed in a modern purpose-built building gave Ralston much satisfaction, as from 1965 onwards this had been one of his major objectives; it is a fitting tribute to his memory.

Although the development of Food Science at Nottingham was a very significant part of his life, Ralston's contribution to research and the discipline of Meat Science never diminished. Whilst at Cambridge he started work on what is now acknowledged to be the definitive text on the discipline, his book "Meat Science". First published in 1966, it has undergone seven rewrites and was last re-issued in 2006. It has been translated into Italian, German, Japanese, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish and the last edition is currently being translated into mandarin Chinese. That one individual could write with authority on such a broad topic as Meat Science is difficult to comprehend but to continually update it over 40 years was a tremendous achievement. This is especially so given that Ralston never embraced the computer age; I recall when writing the 7th edition that each page of the 6th edition had been glued to an A3 sheet on which paragraphs, sentences or phrases had been written or pasted to be inserted at the appropriate place in the new edition. In addition whole new sections had been added, and others deleted. It must have been a publisher's nightmare. Whilst at Nottingham Ralston also founded the journal Meat Science in 1976, the first volume being published in 1977. In 1976 the journal only attracted 31 submissions and 10 years later the number had only risen to 72. However, over the last 20 years the number of submissions has increased to about 600 a year and it is now acknowledged to be the premier journal in

its field. It is the official journal of the American Meat Science Association and has attracted papers from over 65 countries. Ralston relinquished the editorship in 2003 but never lost interest in the journal and was a constant source of advice to his successors. As well as the book on Meat Science Ralston also edited, or co-edited 8 other books and published about 275 research papers and reviews.

Space does not permit the listing of the numerous awards he was given in his lifetime; for example, he was made a visiting professor at 10 universities on all the major continents and was a guest lecturer at over 19 overseas universities and associations. He received the Distinguished Research Award of the American Meat Science Association in 1967 and their International Award in 1993; he was awarded a DSc by the University of Glasgow in 1967 and a ScD by Cambridge in 1977. He also served on numerous government, academic and industrial committees and acted as consultant to governments, universities and industry in many countries. He was President of the Institute of Food Science and Technology from 1983 to 1985.

Ralston is survived by his wife Jean and children Robert and Helena, to whom we offer our deepest condolences; he was a gentleman and a scholar. Anyone wishing to make a donation in his name can send contributions to his chosen charity, the British Heart Foundation (14 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 6DH, UK ([www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)))

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