

A. Ian Scott (1928–2007)

One of the most successful and gifted chemists of his generation, Alastair Ian Scott FRS, sadly passed away on April 18, 2007, at the age of 79 following a heart attack. Noted for his pioneering contributions to synthetic organic chemistry and natural products chemistry, Ian Scott was best known for his exceptional contributions to the study of the biosynthesis of plant alkaloids, antibiotics, and vitamin B₁₂,^[1] and to biological NMR spectroscopy.



Born in Scotland on April 10, 1928, Ian was educated at Glasgow University, where he completed his PhD in synthetic organic chemistry under Ralph Raphael. He moved to USA with his wife Elizabeth (Betty) in 1952 to carry out postdoctoral research at Ohio State University, but soon returned to the UK to a post at ICI (now Syngenta). After postdoctoral appointments at London and Glasgow Universities, he was appointed as a lecturer at Glasgow University in 1957 but moved to academic posts at British Columbia (Canada) in 1962 and then Sussex (UK) in 1965. In 1968, he was appointed to a prestigious chair at Yale University and remained there until 1977, when he made what was then considered to be a surprising move to Texas A&M University at College Station. There he established the Center for Biological NMR and was one of the first to purchase a wide-bore FT-NMR spectrometer that enabled biological NMR spectroscopy experiments to be carried out. I had the honor to work in his laboratory at Texas A&M University on sabbatical as Visiting Professor in 1978–79 where, using NMR, we discovered a hitherto unknown intermediate in tetrapyrrole biosynthesis.

At a time when most of the classical synthetic organic chemists of the day would never use an enzyme as an aid to organic synthesis, Ian actively pursued research at the chemistry/biochemistry

interface and was one of the early pioneers in the now-fashionable “chem-bio” approach. He was never afraid to make unorthodox suggestions, either to solve a difficult chemical problem or simply to see what would materialize, and his imaginative and creative approach to science helped to further blur the boundaries between organic chemistry and biology. NMR spectroscopy experiments with enzymes or living bacteria growing on isotopically labeled substrates or even using a whole cockroach in the NMR tube bore testament to his versatile and inquisitive mind. Most recently, he achieved the remarkable synthesis of advanced intermediates of vitamin B₁₂ using ten of the biosynthesis pathway enzymes in the NMR tube. Despite the excursions into biological territory, his investigations were always underpinned by his brilliant knowledge of synthetic organic chemistry.

Ian’s career is notable for the number of times he moved from one university to another. He justified this because it helped build better research facilities for his group and to avoid the red tape from administrators, for which he had little time. It was always his desire to return to his native Scotland to complete his scientific days and, in 1981, he took the Cadogan Chair at Edinburgh University, securing one of the largest grants ever awarded by the SRC (now the BBSRC). However, the austerity of the early Thatcher administration prevented him from the planned expansion of his research group and this, coupled with successive bad Scottish winters that neither he nor his wife Betty could tolerate, meant that within a short time he had moved back to A&M University and the Texas sunshine, where he remained for the rest of his academic career.

Author of numerous publications and articles in prestigious journals and monographs, Ian amassed an impressive bibliography. Ian was legendary for giving plenary lectures brimming with unpublished data containing remarkable details of his work and traveling around the world extensively to contribute to learned conferences. Over his career, his achievements were acknowledged by the award of many honors and prizes, among them being the Royal

Society of Chemistry Corday Morgan Prize (1964), election to the Royal Society of London (1978), the Tetrahedron Prize for Creativity in Organic Chemistry (1995), the Royal Society of London Bakerian Prize and the Royal Society of Chemistry Natural Products Award (1996), the Robert A. Welch Award in Chemistry (2000), the Royal Society Davy Medal and the Queen’s Royal Medal from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (2001), and the American Chemical Society Nakanishi Prize (2003). Texas A&M University also honored his achievements where he held the posts of Davidson Professor of Chemistry, Robert A. Welch Chair in Chemistry, and D. H. R. Barton Professor of Chemistry. He was also selected as Texas Scientist of the Year (2002). When I asked what he thought had contributed mostly to his successful career, he answered “*I never stop writing*”.

Despite his soft and gentle voice, with its faint hint of a Scottish accent, Ian Scott was a ruthless competitor in his field and was always abreast of the latest developments. He passed on his passion for science to his students and postdoctoral assistants and was a caring and sympathetic mentor towards those who had worked with him. In his non-scientific life, he was interested in gardening and music and on occasions was seen to play his saxophone at student gigs. A dedicated scholar until the end, Ian Scott will be very sadly missed by his immediate family, and especially his wife Betty, to whom he had been married for 57 years and was totally devoted. He leaves also a son, Will, a daughter, Anne, their spouses, and six grandchildren. The world has lost an imaginative and brilliant mind as well as an endearing and charming gentleman.

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[1] A. I. Scott, *Angew. Chem.* **1993**, *105*, 1281; *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed. Engl.* **1993**, *32*, 1223.

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