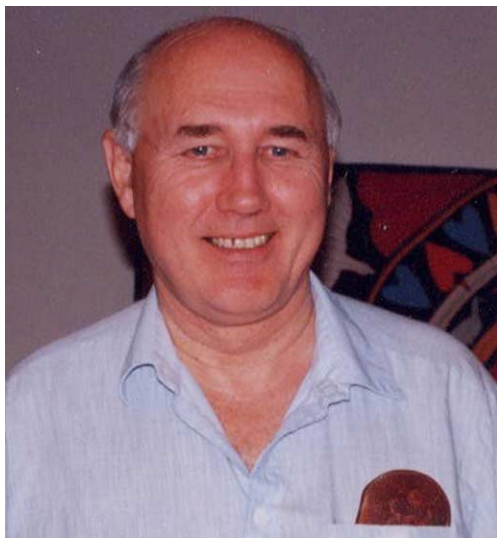


Obituary

Dr Robert James Sturgeon
1933–2003

With the death in August 2003 of Bob Sturgeon we have lost one of our most respected carbohydrate colleagues. Born in Bathgate and educated at Dunfermline High School, Bob studied chemistry at Heriot-Watt College, Edinburgh, and in 1955 was awarded the Watt Club Medal. His introduction to carbohydrate chemistry began at the University of Edinburgh, where under the careful guidance of Gerald Aspinall, he studied rye hemicelluloses, receiving his PhD in 1958. This was the beginning of a life long interest in the structure and metabolism of carbohydrates. After spending 2 years as an analytical chemist with the Distillers Company in Surrey, and 4 years in the plant biochemistry research laboratory at Twyford Laboratories in London, Bob returned to Edinburgh in 1964 to take up a lectureship in biochemistry at Heriot-Watt College, which received full university status 2 years later.

Bob was appointed to assist Professor I.A. Preece, the Head of Department, with lectures for the newly introduced honours course in Applied Biochemistry. Sadly, Professor Preece died in August 1964, and for two terms, Bob was the only lecturer for the final year honours course in biochemistry. This immense teaching load was tackled

effectively and with characteristic good humour. However, reinforcements were soon arranged, with the appointment of the writer as Head of Department from 1st April 1965, and Dr Bill Cunningham, from September 1965. A successful grant application to the SRC with Bill Cunningham funded one of the first autoanalysers for both carbohydrates and amino acids, which was used to the benefit of the whole Department. Bob subsequently played a major part in introducing an experimental techniques course and a research project into the final Biochemistry Honours year. He also contributed significantly to the introduction of Honours classes in Microbiology and Immunology, and to development of the MSc course in Biotechnology. An excellent communicator, his lectures were always enlivened with his particular brand of humour, much appreciated by students!

Also a highly competent administrator, Bob was Acting Head of Department for various periods, and served on the University's Faculty of Science and Senate and as Director of Studies for General Degree students for many years. He played a major part in planning the Department's move to the University's new campus at Riccarton.

Bob's own research interests included the development of enzymic methods for carbohydrate analysis and the use of carbohydrates for the purification of enzymes by affinity precipitation. Never losing his own ability for experimental work, he was always an interested and encouraging mentor, conveying his enthusiasm for his subject to his 15 PhD students, as well as to the many Honours biochemistry students who undertook their 4th-year research projects under his direction.

Bob was an avid reader of the carbohydrate literature, and his extensive knowledge was generously shared with any interested colleagues. In 1971 he joined the team preparing the Chemical Society's highly respected Specialist Periodical Reports on Carbohydrate Chemistry, and went on to contribute to 11 volumes in the series—a real labour of love, reviewing the carbohydrate literature on General Methods, Plant, Algal and Microbial Polysaccharides, and Glycoproteins. The modern research student who obtains his current information from a computer can have little concept of the work involved in manually scanning and extracting information from a large number of journals. Much of this work—shared with his wife, Cathie, an NHS clinical scientist who had trained in the Carbohydrate Chemistry School at Birmingham University and whom he had met while working in Professor Bill Whelan's Department in Miami—was done in the evenings, after a full day in the Department. Carbohydrate chemists of the time owed a great deal to this small band of dedicated scientists.

Bob published widely in a number of journals, also authoring patents and book chapters and editing several books, including Volume X of *Methods in Carbohydrate Chemistry* with the writer. One of his last reviews, co-authored in 2002 with his close friend and colleague Dr Barry McCleary, dealt with the measurement of α -amylase in cereal, food and fermentation products, while his last book, the second volume of *Advances in Macromolecular Carbohydrate Research*, was published after his death. Bob was much in demand as a referee for a number of journals, and served as a member of the Editorial Boards of *Carbohydrate Polymers*, *Carbohydrate Research*, and *Polymer International*. Active in the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Biochemical Society and the Society for Chemical Industry, he held official positions in all three.

Bob always loved discussing chemistry—whether with undergraduate students, technical staff or world-class scientists—and was an enthusiastic participant in scientific meetings both at home and abroad. He had numerous friends and colleagues in carbohydrate laboratories around the world. His first invited lecture was given in 1971 to a meeting of the French Chemical Society in Orsay, and he later went on to speak at meetings as far afield as Australia and Japan. Never fazed by lack of familiarity with a foreign language, he took particular pleasure in explaining the intricacies of cricket and rugby—both sports he loved—to those less well acquainted with them!

From 1980, Bob regularly attended the International Carbohydrate Chemistry meetings and the accompanying satellite meetings on cereal chemistry. He was Organising Secretary for the latter when it was held at Heriot-Watt University in 1988, and was much involved in the organisation of Eurocarb VI, also at Heriot-Watt. With Professors Roy Whistler and James BeMiller, he also organised three highly successful courses on the application of gum chemistry in the food industry. His expertise in biotechnology was recognised by the British Council, on whose behalf he visited Sri Lanka to assess a proposed link between Heriot-Watt and the University of Jaffna.

Bob maintained his interest in science in retirement, continuing to write reviews, edit books and referee papers as well as to undertake computerised literature searches for various colleagues. He attended his last scientific meeting in the Czech Republic just 6 months before he died. He was also actively involved in the organisation of an international cancer meeting at Heriot-Watt. The meeting started just 2 days after he died and was a most fitting tribute to him.

Bob was an excellent scientist with a truly international outlook, who gained the respect and affection of many colleagues in the carbohydrate chemistry world. Several have commented that Bob was one of the nicest people in their circle - or, as Professor Bruce Stone of La Trobe University in Australia put it, one of his favourite carbohydrate mates. Devoted to his family, who always came first for Bob, he is survived by his wife Cathie, his five children, and the two small grandsons of whom he was so proud.

David J. Manners