

Personal report

Professor Herbert Leslie Holland (1947–2003) In Memoriam



It was with great sadness and regret that we learned that Bert Holland, a highly valued and respected member of our Editorial Board, died on 7 April 2003 after a typically valiant 18-month battle with brain cancer.

Bert was born in Bolton, UK and epitomized the best of his Lancashire heritage character traits of honesty, hard work, practicality, and dedication to excellence, coupled with decency, compassion and modesty. He did a B.A. in chemistry at Cambridge University, and then demonstrated his already visionary insights into the future importance of the biological aspects of organic chemistry by taking a M.Sc. degree in biochemistry (at Warwick) followed by a Ph.D. in microbiological transformations at Queen's University, Belfast. In Belfast, a most important personal chemistry event also occurred, in that it was there that he met his wife, Frances Brown. He further broadened his biological expertise during postdoctoral studies in biosynthesis at McMaster University in Canada.

In 1976, Bert became a chemistry faculty member at Brock University, Ontario at a time when organic chemistry was just beginning to recognize the seminal importance of asymmetric synthesis. Because of his earlier vision, Bert was one of the leaders in demonstrating how microorganisms could achieve asymmetric synthesis with ease. His meticulous, insightful work on stereo- and regiospecific steroid hydroxy-

lations and sulfoxide formations had high impact, and he published multiple papers, reviews, and books in this area, many with his wife Fran as co-author. Their complementary abilities made them a unique research team over many years. He was one of the pioneers who led the way to making biocatalysis the giant field it is today. Furthermore, as environmental concerns about chemical processes became a major issue, his work provided clear demonstrations of how biocatalysis was ideally suited to green chemistry.

Bert spent 26 years at Brock University, becoming professor of chemistry, serving as Chair, and as Director of the Biotechnology Centre that he founded—the first in Canada to grant Ph.Ds. He was an outstanding teacher and research director who provided rigorous, dedicated-to-excellence training, and a caring mentor who always placed his students' interests and well being above everything else.

Less well known to his scientific peers was his major reputation on the history of steam trains. He wrote widely on this topic, including a book, and had one of the finest collections of steam train photographs in the world.

He will be sorely missed by the international biocatalysis community, and particularly by the Journal, for whom he did so much in his editorial and refereeing roles.

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