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Publisher *Taylor & Francis*

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Liquid Crystals

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713926090>

Editorial: A Commemorative Issue for Alfred Saupe

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Online publication date: 06 July 2010

To cite this Article Luckhurst, Geoffrey R.(2010) 'Editorial: A Commemorative Issue for Alfred Saupe', *Liquid Crystals*, 37: 6, 617 – 618

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/02678292.2010.495523

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02678292.2010.495523>

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EDITORIAL

A Commemorative Issue for Alfred Saupe

The death of Professor Alfred Saupe at his home in Badenweiler, Germany on 3 August in 2008 robbed the liquid crystal community of one of the founding fathers of the modern physical era. He is famous for the seminal contributions that he made to numerous and diverse areas of liquid crystal science. These include lyotropic biaxial nematics, studies of molecular structure based on nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) using liquid crystal solvents, the molecular field theory of nematics, experimental studies of orientational order, lyotropic and chromonic liquid crystals, dielectric relaxation of calamitic nematics, director dynamics, defects and blue phases, elasticity theory and experiment as well as smectics usual and unusual. The list is unbelievably impressive and so it is eminently understandable that the Editorial Team of *Liquid Crystals* should have decided to mark Alfred Saupe's towering contributions by the publication of this Commemorative Issue of the Journal. I was delighted to be invited to be its Guest Editor.

Of course, part of my delight was associated with the honour of helping to commemorate his major place in the liquid crystal pantheon. I was also pleased because he had played a significant role in my early research career. As a student in Cambridge together with my Supervisor, Alan Carrington, I had performed the first electron spin resonance (ESR) experiments using liquid crystals as the solvent. We then discovered that just a year earlier Alfred Saupe and Gerhard Englert had performed the analogous but wider ranging NMR experiment. On completing my doctorate I moved to the Varian Research Laboratories in Zürich where I was allowed to pursue my research into liquid crystals, now using both NMR and ESR. Since Freiburg was close to Zürich, I eventually invited Alfred to visit me and I was delighted and not a little surprised when he accepted. We spent a wonderfully stimulating day together discussing our mutual interests in the spectroscopy of liquid crystals. Surprisingly, at least



Alfred Saupe (far left) at the Royal Society of Chemistry with (from left to right) Geoffrey Luckhurst, Frank Leslie, Martin Schadt, George Gray, Peter Raynes, Cyril Hilsun, John Goodby, Alan Leadbetter and Harry Coles.

for me, he took a real interest in what I was doing which certainly encouraged me to continue. Since our formative meeting my research has followed a path, often unknowingly, that he had clearly laid.

Given the responsibility of creating the Alfred Saupe Commemorative Issue I decided that the topics to be included should reflect, in large part, those areas to which he had made such important contributions. Then came the selection of the authors; in the event this proved to be an easy task not only because the areas are still vibrant but more importantly because colleagues were so eager to contribute. This undoubtedly results not only from the quality of Alfred's science but also from the warmth in which he was held by the liquid crystal community. The nature of the contributions was to take a variety of forms spanning reviews to original articles. Each of the contributions has been subject to an external oversight aimed primarily to see if there was any way in which they might be improved. My final role was to arrange them in this Commemorative Issue. Rather than doing so chronologically I have placed the articles so that the themes of neighbouring papers are related, to a greater or lesser extent, thus giving a scientific continuity.

A particular feature of many contributions is the personal accounts that they contain relating not only to Alfred as a scientist but also as a person. They are often

accompanied by photographs of Alfred usually in an informal setting. Not least of these is that on the front cover of this issue and I am grateful to Brigitte Saupe for allowing its use. I also have a photograph of Alfred Saupe, taken in 1994, but in the more formal setting of the Library of the Royal Society of Chemistry with a group of liquid crystal scientists. The occasion was a dinner organised by the Materials Chemistry Forum to mark the retirement of George Gray from active research. During the dinner I had the pleasure of talking with both Alfred and Brigitte for much of the evening, which was a fascinating and charming experience. Earlier in the day Alfred had delivered a characteristically thought-provoking lecture during which he had described his work on lyotropic biaxial nematics. He had remarked that the minute area in the phase diagram occupied by the biaxial nematic meant that the creation of a thermotropic biaxial nematic should be expected to be particularly problematic. As with so much else, how right he has proved to be.

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