

I first met Jack in the early summer of 1972 when I was invited for interview for the post of lecturer of biochemistry at RHUL. Fortunately for me, I was appointed and so began a wonderful 40 year relationship with Jack. He immediately struck me as atypical of most HoDs and professors that I had met previously. He wasn't pompous, dictatorial or patronising. In fact he was quite the opposite - kind, generous with his time and advice and treated everyone with the same friendliness and respect. Those qualities had a huge impact on a 24 year old, new lecturer, fresh from his PhD.

In turn, Jack hated pomposity in others and took great delight in deflating those who acted in that way, often using his mischievous (some would say wicked) sense of humour, laced with enough science to be convincing. His classic articles in the College newsletter, *On Campus*, are typical of this. Who can forget his spoofs about a heliport being constructed on Bourne for the senior management of College or better still, his article on the wood-destroying larvae in the cladding of the International Building that would necessitate application of organophosphorus insecticides and evacuation of the campus? So many HoDs and senior managers believed every word, much to the delight of Jack for many weeks afterwards.

Behind Jack's humour and kindness was a man of enormous intellect and academic success, which was evident from early in his career. He was appointed to the Department of Chemistry in 1957 and soon developed his interests in plant carbohydrate chemistry and biochemistry. His research reputation became international and he was pre-eminent in his field for decades. I am reliably told that Jack frequently spent the weekend identifying novel carbohydrates from plants and submitted the manuscript to *Nature* the following Monday. No worries over weekend lone working in those days. Indeed, if there had been a RAE at that time, Jack would have had to choose which four of his *Nature* papers to submit.

As well as establishing an international reputation for his research, Jack had the foresight and determination to establish the Department of Biochemistry at RHUL in 1967. This was both timely and far-sighted, as biochemistry was a burgeoning subject and popular with undergraduates. In the same year, at the age of 38, Jack was awarded a DSc and then a personal chair in 1971 – what an achievement.

The department continued to expand and flourish under Jack's leadership to 16 academics in 1983, prior to the merger with Bedford College. Jack remained as HoD until 1990 – an amazing 23 years. So much for the 5 year stints that current HoDs are given! Throughout that period he continued to publish regularly, and amassed over 100 publications, many of which reflected Jack's fundamental belief that it is essential to have a good knowledge of chemistry in order to understand and appreciate the intricacies of living organisms. This view also shaped our UG curriculum.

On top of these remarkable academic achievements, Jack was Vice Principal from 1976-79 and warden of Kingswood Hall from 1981-1992. He became a College Fellow in 2000. His official retirement was in 1993, but Jack continued to teach to UGs, who loved his approach. He became active in national debates on topics such as GM crops and electricity pylons and a keen advocate for the public understanding of science and outreach programmes. His web site [ChemoPhilia](#) was dedicated to counteracting misleading information about chemicals.

It was, quite simply, a privilege to know Jack and work for and with him. Most of us will never reach the heights of his academic and professional achievements, but all of us that knew him have benefitted in some way. And when Jack reaches those pearly gates, I suspect there will be many others who start to appreciate the fascination and wonders of chemistry and biochemistry and no doubt he will be checking for any novel carbohydrates in the flora.

Peter Bramley, May 2012.