

John A. Elvidge

1922-2011



John Arthur Elvidge was born in October 1922 in Finchley, London, and educated at Haberdasher's Aske's Boy's School then in Hampstead, where he gained high marks in maths, physics and chemistry. He won a bursary to Imperial College of Science, University of London, to study chemistry in 1939 and he graduated with 1st class Honours in 1943 and was selected to work in the penicillin research team for his PhD. Penicillin was secret work during the Second World War, because of its effect against pathogenic bacteria, and it was difficult to obtain in the qualities and quantities needed. Hence scientists both in the UK and the USA combined to improve its production. Professor Heilbron and Dr A H Cook's team had an important input from John Elvidge and his work led to his PhD in 1947. He was a co-author on a series of four papers in the Journal of the Chemical Society in 1949 on the synthesis of penicillins.

Imperial College London had a rule that, however good a PhD graduate was, he should spend a year at some other college, industry or government science laboratory, before returning. Thus, John had such a spell at The Royal Technical College, Glasgow (1946-7), where Professor F S Spring from Manchester University had joined and taken Dr Geoffrey Newbold along to assist him. Geoffrey and John shared both digs and laboratory, where he commenced research with Professor Spring. John and Geoffrey soon became good friends and spent holidays together, exploring Scotland. John's family lived near Watford and there Geoffrey met John's sister Betty in 1947 who he subsequently married in 1950. One of John's first

papers was in Nature with Professor Spring entitled "Synthesis of a sulphur-containing degradation product from gliotoxin". J.A. Elvidge and F.S. Spring, Nature 162, 94 (1948).

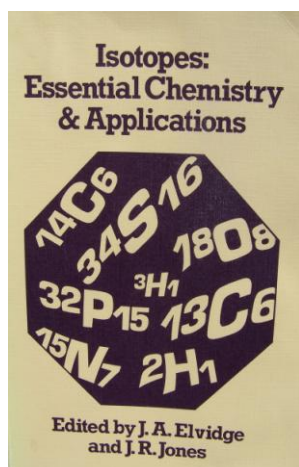
John returned to Imperial College as a lecturer in Chemistry. Later he was promoted to Senior Lecturer and then Reader in Chemistry. He was, in fact, the longest serving reader until he left Imperial in 1965 to become a Professor of Chemistry at Battersea College of Technology, then designated to become the University of Surrey, whereupon he moved to the new site at Guildford, taking several colleagues including Dennis Aldrich and Jim Bloxsidge with him. He held this post until he retired in 1988 after ten years as the Head of the Department of Chemistry, and became Emeritus Professor.

John Elvidge was regarded by all who knew him as a complete gentleman in the best sense of the word. He took an active interest in encouraging and progressing the careers of his colleagues and subordinates, no matter how junior. He was punctilious in ensuring that anyone who contributed intellectually to a publication was included as a co-author.

John Elvidge was an internationally renowned expert on many aspects of organic chemistry, including, at one time, the study of hop resins for the Brewing industry Research Foundation and perhaps later he became best known for pioneering the application of tritium NMR spectroscopy. In 1968, Dr. John Jones (later Professor at the University of Surrey) and Dr. Tony Evans (who John had taught as an undergraduate) of The Radiochemical Centre at Amersham approached John about the feasibility of measuring tritium spectra. Tony Evans supplied details of radiochemical safety precautions and the unused 64 MHz tritium probe for a Perkin-Elmer R10 continuous wave spectrometer, owned by Eric Mooney who was leaving the NMR field for a career in the USA, was purchased with the aid of a grant from Amersham. Later, in 1973, a Bruker electromagnet pulse-Fourier transform spectrometer was purchased with proton observation at 90 MHz and tritium at 96 MHz. The tritium NMR spectra were usually measured with broadband decoupling of the protons and the field was deuterium locked to a deuterated solvent, so all three isotopes of hydrogen were being used most of the time. John subsequently published a long series of seminal papers with his collaborators in Organic Magnetic Resonance where he served on the Editorial Board, such as "Tritium nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy. Part 14. Analysis of tritiated methyl groups", by James P. Bloxsidge, John A. Elvidge, John R. Jones, E. Anthony Evans, J. Philip Kitcher, David C. Warrell. Organic Magnetic Resonance, 15, 214–217 (1981). Later there

was also a book on tritium NMR spectroscopy with co-authors E. A. Evans, D. C. Warrell, J.

A. Elvidge and J. R. Jones. "Handbook of tritium NMR spectroscopy and applications". Wiley, Chichester (1985). He also co-wrote, with John Jones, a book on isotopes in chemistry, published by the Royal Society of Chemistry in 1981.



He was also active in the NMRDG and a great supporter of its activities, serving as an early chairman from 1966-1969 (the first to hold the post for three years), presiding over the first International NMR conference that was organised by the NMRDG, at Birmingham University in July 1969.

In 1956 John had married Margaret Whalley, one of his research students, and they lived at Ruislip, where their two children, Brian and Anne, were born, later moving to Haslemere, near Guildford, to be near the University of Surrey. When Margaret sadly died in 1984, John found another Scottish wife in Christine, who had been Margaret's best friend. After his retirement, he and Christine moved back to Scotland and bought a bungalow in Castle Douglas, where, surrounded by friends, they spent many happy years together. John died peacefully in Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary on 12 February 2011.