

Obituary

Professor Colin A. Russell, DSc, FRSC (1928-2013)



An eminent historian of science and energetic communicator of his subject, Colin Russell began his academic career as an Assistant Lecturer in Chemistry at Kingston Technical College before moving to Harris College, Preston (now the University of Central Lancashire) where he became Principal Lecturer. In 1970 he moved to the newly established Open University where he founded the Department of History of Science and Technology, which rapidly expanded under his leadership. As an Affiliated Research Scholar,

he later enjoyed an association with the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge University.

A Chartered Chemist, Colin's many activities included Chairmanship of the Historical Group of the Royal Society of Chemistry and Presidency of the British Society for the History of Science (1986-88). Additionally he served on the Royal Society's History of Science Awards Committee, the Centre for the History of Science steering group of The Royal Institution, and as President of Christians in Science.

Colin was the author or co-author of some twenty books and about sixty research papers and articles. His authoritative research in the history of chemistry illuminated such topics as the development of electrochemistry and valence theory, culminating in his definitive biography, in which he was ably assisted by his wife Shirley, of the Lancastrian chemist Edward Frankland, pioneer of organo-metallic chemistry. Many of Colin's publications, especially his books *Cross-Currents* (1985) and *The Earth, Humanity and God* (1994), addressed issues concerning the interplay between science and religion and the inadequacies of what he dubbed the *conflict thesis*, that ubiquitous notion of an enduring warfare between them. The title of an article 'Some founding fathers of physics' could be translated into a fitting epitaph for so much of Colin's work, particularly in the area of science and religion, where he was, *par excellence*, an innovator. Over a prolonged period he educated students in the historiography of science, technology and religion, developing original inter-disciplinary courses, such as *Science and Belief from Copernicus to Darwin* (1974), one of the first university courses to incorporate a critique of the conflict model within pedagogy.

At the OU Colin relished the educational technology and media support

OBITUARY

that was available and was a 'natural' when fronting television and radio programmes. He rejoiced that he had been able to film the last working lead chamber acid plant just before its demolition. It is salutary to reflect on the report by one of his OU colleagues, Dr Gerrylynn Roberts, that "over the period through 1993, when he retired from the OU, the department's own courses attracted some 25000 students and ... two interdisciplinary courses ... reached another 35000 students; and those are only the OU students; the materials were used throughout the UK and around the world." This amazing statistic was revealed to those attending a packed Thanksgiving Service for Colin on 30th May 2013 at Bunyan Meeting, Bedford, the church to which he belonged. It featured in one of many moving tributes from family, friends and colleagues. For those present, the grief, which was shared with the many family members, was tempered by feelings of celebration, encouragement and challenge, along with a touch of Colin's sense of humour!

The underpinning of Colin Russell's professional and private life was his strong and, where appropriate, uncompromising Christian faith, in which, as in his work, he was constantly encouraged and supported by Shirley. In saying farewell it is to an outstanding academic, a delightful family man and a loyal friend to many. He is sadly missed.

John Hedley Brooke & Michael Poole