The Halton Retirement Symposium: Novel Molecules, New Materials and Small Rings

Brendan Burkett and Joanne Harvey

School of Chemical & Physical Sciences, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand
(e-mail: Brendan.Burkett@vuw.ac.nz).

Prof. Brian Halton retired on 31 March 2004 after some 36 years of continuous service at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW). During this time he supervised almost 50 graduate students including 11 PhD and 2 Postdoctoral students, published some 140 research papers and review articles, edited 10 books, and co-authored two editions of a classic organic photochemistry text. Brian is an internationally recognised scientist of the highest calibre who has dedicated more than 37 years to providing excellence in research and teaching in organic chemistry, and the promotion of, and service to, chemistry. To mark the occasion of his retirement VUW appointed him Emeritus Professor and the School of Chemical and Physical Sciences hosted a symposium *Novel Molecules, New Materials, and Small Rings* on 29-30 June 2005 to celebrate the enormous contributions made by Brian both to the university and to his discipline.

The symposium, a truly international event, was attended by some of Brian's collaborators and associates, including the current IUPAC President, Prof. Leiv Sydnes (Bergen, Norway), and representatives from the Chemical Society of Japan, Profs. Yoshito Tobe (Osaka) and Jun Nishimura (Gunma). Prof. Klaus Müllen (Max Planck Institute for Polymer Research, Mainz) was represented by Dr. Andrew Grimsdale (now at the Bio21 Institute, University of Melbourne). Many of Brian's former students were also in attendance. Most fittingly, perhaps, was the presence of the first PhD and last Honours student supervised by Brian at VUW – Tony Woolhouse, now a manager at Biopharm (Industrial Research Ltd), and Jarrod Ward, a PhD student at Auckland University. Many of New Zealand's top organic chemists were also present, including Rob Smith (Otago), Jim Coxon (Canterbury), David Officer (Massey), and Margaret Brimble (Auckland), as was the current NZIC President Prof. Graham Bowmaker.

Following the opening of the symposium by VUW Vice-Chancellor Pat Walsh, Prof. Bowmaker presented Brian with the highest honour that NZIC can bestow - an Honorary Fellowship - in acknowledgement of his services to the Institute and the profession of chemistry. At the symposium dinner, held at the university staff club, Brian was further honoured with the presentation of a commemorative plaque acknowledging his services to Pacific Basin Chemistry by Prof. Yoshito Tobe on behalf of the Chemical Society of Japan.

From a scientific perspective attendees were treated to a number of stimulating presentations. Prof. Martin Banwell, one of Brian's early PhD students and now senior organic chemist at ANU, gave an inspirational talk *Enabling Methodologies for Natural Product Synthesis*, the complex syntheses of biologically active molecules undertaken by his research group in Canberra that have their origins in his PhD studies. Another of Brian's former students, Prof. David Officer (Massey University) ,gave an account of *Designing Aromatic Molecules for Light Harvesting* and outlined their use in solar cells. From then, the topics ranged from the synthesis of large polycyclic molecules and their properties - *Generation, Characterization, and Reactions of Highly Reactive Cyclic Polyynes* (Yoshito Tobe) - to the behaviour of minute highly strained compounds - *Cyclopropanes I have met since 1972* (Leiv Sydnes); from *Cataract Research at Canterbury* (Jim Coxon) and potential cancer treatments from *Designer Chemicals for Targeting Mitocondria* (Rob Smith) to *Syntheses Directed at Complex Shellfish Toxins* (Margaret Brimble). *Phenylene-based Materials for Nano-Technology* from the Max Planck Polymerforschung were described by Andrew Grimsdale and *Cyclobutane-connected Cyclophanes* from Gunma by Jun Nishimura.

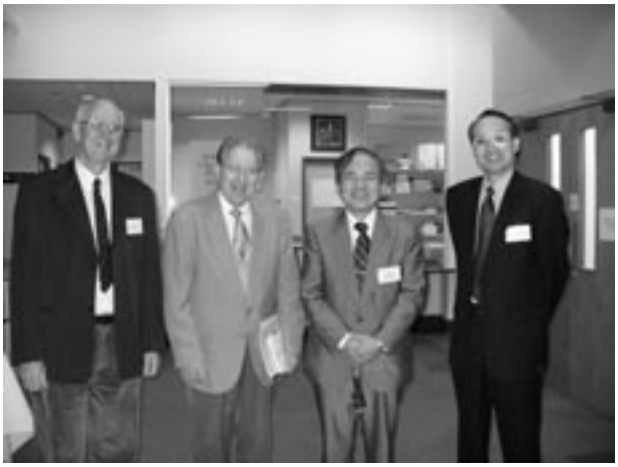
The final word was left to Brian himself, who spoke on *Life in the Strain Lane*, and his work with highly strained organic molecules, and especially cycloproparenes. For the younger chemists, this lecture was a fascinating tour through Brian's life as a researcher, and for former students and collaborators a chance to see their work in the broader context of a research career as opposed to a research project. Tracing back to his PhD studies with methylideneaziridines at Southampton University and his postdoctoral work at the University of Florida where he was involved with cyclopropene rearrangements, he outlined his research at VUW where he has cemented his reputation as a world leader in his field.

Brian's contributions to chemistry cannot be overstated as evidenced by the sheer breadth of chemistry covered by the speakers at the symposium. It is important for the younger generation of chemists now rising through the ranks to realise that contribution to science is not be measured merely in publications or the size of a group but also from the integrity of the students we train and the quality of the work they subsequently produce. Brian's continuing contribution to the world of chemistry through his former students was certainly well displayed by those who presented research at this symposium.

Equally important in terms of contribution to science is Halton's involvement in the scientific community. In this respect Brian has been very active through his promotion of the discipline and profession of chemistry. He has

IUPAC President Leiv Sydnes (right) with Andy Kay

L-R: Roger Brown, Brian Halton, Martin Banwell



L-R: Roger Brown, Brian Halton, Jun Nishimura, Yoshito Tobe

The Last Word!

L-R: Andrew Grimsdale, Graham Bowmaker and Jim Johnston

held the office of NZIC President, served numerous terms as a Council Member, and held many other positions of responsibility in the Institute at local and national level over many years. He has been Editor of *Chemistry in New Zealand* since 2001 and the Institute's representative on the organising committee for The International Chemical Congress of Pacific Basin Societies (***Pacifichem***) for the 1989, 1995, 2000, and 2005 events where he has contributed substantially to the organisation and smooth running of these very large international meetings. He has also been instrumental in facilitating financial support to enable young chemistry professionals from the developing areas of the Pacific Basin to attend the congress, and in soliciting funds for NZ graduate students to attend, especially in the earlier times. That Australasia is formally involved in this major event is due entirely to his efforts in the late 1980's. In addition, Brian served the wider university and student community as the Victoria University Newman Trustee for some 23 years and was a member of the Trinity-Newman Board that facilitated improved student accommodation at VUW.

Finally, we take this opportunity to join with chemists throughout NZ, Australia, and internationally, in thanking Brian Halton for his many contributions to chemistry and the chemical community, and to wish him the very best in his retirement: here's to many more years of fruitful chemistry Brian!