

Obituary

Savile Bradbury: 1931–2001

Savile Bradbury was born on 6 February 1931, in Halifax, and moved to Derby at the outbreak of World War Two, when his father went to work there. He attended Derby Grammar School between 1939 and 1949, when he was awarded a State Scholarship to the University of Oxford. National Service still existed at that time, and he chose to serve this before taking up his place: he joined the Royal Air Force. He was already a fluent flautist, and passed a trade test as a musician, and so served most of his two years in the Central Band of the RAF, which allowed him to travel widely.

He went up to Brasenose College in 1951, and took first-class honours in zoology in 1954, staying on under John R. Baker to take a DPhil in 1958. He was by then expert in both light and electron microscopy, and became Demonstrator in the Department of Human Anatomy until 1963, when he was appointed University Lecturer in Human Anatomy, which post he was to hold until early retirement in 1990, following open-heart surgery.

He was elected Fellow of Pembroke College Oxford in 1966, and remained so until 1990, when he was elected Emeritus Fellow. He joined the Royal Microscopical Society in 1959 and first served on its Council in 1962: he then served the RMS for most of his professional career in one capacity or another, including Honorary Secretary, Editor of the *Journal*, Editor of the *Proceedings*, Vice-President, and General Editor of the RMS Handbook series. He became a Life Fellow in 1975, and was elected as HonFRMS in 1997. This was an honour of which he was particularly proud. He was awarded the Diploma of the RMS in 1973, his examination being waived by order of the Council.

He joined the Quekett Microscopical Club in 1965, and was elected to Honorary Membership in 1999 – one of the few to achieve honorary membership of both societies. He was President of the QMC from 1992 to 1994, and also acted in many other capacities there: he was editor of the *Bulletin* when he died.

Another distinction that pleased him was the award of the Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society in 1985, and he continued to apply his wide-ranging photographic skills in both scientific and non-scientific areas throughout his life.

He was a member of the Anatomical Society, and served on its Council from 1976 to 1980, and was also a member of the British Society for the History of Science.

All the above bare facts fail to reveal his quite exceptional personality and enthusiasms – Savile Bradbury was a doer in a big way. His lectures on embryology and histology in the Department were legendary in their time, conveying detailed information in a memorable manner, while his tutorials in his



own College were equally thorough but pleasant (providing only that his pupils worked as he thought they should): I have been present at quite a few of his lectures and tutorials, so I speak from personal experience. His skill in the dissecting room was extraordinary – a nerve plexus or the like would appear in the body as if by magic, while to see him pop out a few Pacinian corpuscles from the finger-tip, stain them whole on the slide, and have them covered and viewable within ten minutes was quite astonishing! In his laboratory in the Department he ran image analysis equipment of successive vintages in an exemplary way, right from the times when data were recorded on nine-inch discs (as I recall), and active intervention with the circuits was imperative on occasion. He applied these quantitative methods to work on cervical carcinomas and dysplasias, and to immunocytochemical reactions. However, it is as a teacher of renown that he will be remembered – not least on RMS courses, from their beginning until the

course held in Leeds last year. Since his retirement he had fostered his earlier historical interests in microscopy, and was finalizing a paper on test objects for the light microscope the day before he died.

All this is only part of his extraordinary range of activity and enthusiasm. He was a most accomplished small-scale mechanical engineer, making large model railway locomotives (most of them 5 inch gauge) and other steam-powered devices in his garden shed (some shed!), and operating them with his local Society of Model Engineers in a local park (naturally, he also edited their newsletter for years). He was innovative in his mechanical work, and won awards for it.

He continued to play his various flutes and piccolos, and it was an astonishment to hear him play pieces that had more black than white on the score, with a fluidity which seemed to be highly marked to those in a position to know rather than merely to marvel. He had only recently given up travelling to play with various significant orchestras.

Savile's published papers started in 1955, and totalled more than 80 in more than 20 journals by 2001. He had written

more than 13 books, some of them as co-author. More even than all of these, his spoken advice and lectures had instructed and enthralled thousands. Nothing was too much trouble for those asking his help, and it was always given with gusto!

He devoted himself as selflessly to work in his College, even after his retirement, and served it in many capacities: again, his energy and devotion were exemplary.

In his private life he married Sheila Macpherson (met while both were working for their DPhil degrees) in 1957, and they had a long and happy marriage with two sons – David and Michael. In his 'leisure' years of retirement he and Sheila had visited countries such as Egypt, and taken a number of cruises in the Middle East and elsewhere, much to their mutual satisfaction. When he didn't return home from his morning walk on 29 November, it was because he had collapsed and died.

He leaves many holes to be filled, and he leaves those who knew him with an enormous sense of loss, and of wonderment as to his many faceted achievements. He was a one-off, and we grieve with his family, for we shall all miss him.

BRIAN BRACEGIRDLE