

## OBITUARIES

### Walter George Siller, 11 November 1924 – 23 October 2011

Walter and I first met at the Friends' School in Cumberland, also known as Brookfield, and quickly formed a close friendship. Both refugees from Nazi-occupied Austria, we had been granted, with numerous others, free school places by the wonderful Quakers, thus rescuing our broken education and prospects for life.

Walter's father was a non-Jewish oral surgeon in Vienna, his mother a Jewish physician. In 1939 Walter and his brother were sent to Scotland on the Kindertransport. They were soon followed by their mother, who had to accept humble domestic employment. Their father remained in Vienna, deluded by the belief that 'The whole silly business will soon blow over.'

I recall the young Walter as a large and jolly character, willing to take on any de-

manding task. Untrained in the British summer ritual of cricket, we volunteered to look after the open-air swimming pool during the summer term instead. This demanded damming of the 'beck' to allow the water – plus frogs, small fish and less wholesome items – to reach the feeder pipe to the pool, which we had to sweep daily. It was a fascinating biological study.

Walter had decided early on that he would like to become a vet. He took on farm work during each vacation, returning with lurid tales about how he had spent weeks having to throw large pigs and tups on their backs.

After Brookfield he spent six months as keeper at Edinburgh Zoo, working his way



around every department, before starting his studies at the 'Royal Dick' veterinary college of the university.

After the war Walter rejoined his father in Vienna. He obtained a doctorate from the outstanding Vienna Veterinary School. He developed an overwhelming interest in pathology, even taking courses in human pathology.

But the pull of Scotland proved too much and he returned to Edinburgh, where he was based for the rest of his life. He turned himself into a music-hall Caledonian, complete with accent, heavy tweeds and not averse to a wee drop. His working time was devoted to pathology research and to the investigation of animal disease outbreaks. He became recognised internationally as an authority on domestic fowl.

In 1962 his university awarded him a PhD for his work on renal diseases. In 1963 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. In 1972 he received a special merit promotion to Senior Principal Scientific Officer. For his international contribution to research, the Vienna Veterinary School elected him a 'freeman' (*Ehrenbürger*).

Walter was multilingual and translated numerous textbooks and articles into English. In 1981 he received the Tom Newman International award for 'the Most Conspicuously Meritorious Contribution to Research in Animal Husbandry'. During his working years he published over 100 original articles and lectured widely in this country and abroad.

In 1954 he married Henrietta. They had two children, Peter and Wendy; there were four grandchildren, to whom he was a devoted grandfather.

Walter retired at the age of 60 and devoted himself to family, travel, fishing and classical music, a man much loved and admired by his friends worldwide. He died aged 86, typically while feeding his beloved garden birds. His ashes were scattered partly in Vienna and partly close by his favourite Scottish trout stream.

(Dr) Hans L. Eirew

### Bryan Reuben, 12 January 1934 – 25 February 2012

The March edition of the *AJR Journal* saw the last book review written by Bryan Reuben, a scientist by training who wrote on a wide range of subjects with humour and insight. He was one of the founder members of *Mosaic*, a Jewish youth magazine, where his notion of the Divided Synagogue (a satirical version of the United Synagogue) was born. His article 'proving' that Shakespeare was a Jew was taken up by the *Manchester Guardian*.

Bryan was born in Bradford, where his father was a GP. It was in his dispensary that Bryan carried out the early and often explosive experiments that awakened his love of chemistry. From Bradford Boys' Grammar School he won a scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford, where he was involved with the Inter-University Jewish Federation and the Oxford Union and wrote songs and sketches for comedy reviews. After a post doc at Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island, he returned to England and worked for a while in industry before turning to academia.

At Battersea College of Advanced Technology, soon to become the University of Surrey, he ran one of the first industrial chemistry courses in the country with his great friend and colleague Mike Burstall. Together they wrote *The Chemical Economy* (1973), one of the 13 books and more than 140 papers on the chemical, pharmaceutical and process industries which Bryan produced. *Industrial Organic Chemicals in Perspective*, which he wrote with Harold Wittcoff in 1980, was so successful that he was working on proof-reading a third edition when he died. In 1977 he moved to the chemical engineering department at Borough Polytechnic, later

South Bank University, where he was a principal lecturer responsible for encouraging research.

He was a teacher with a gift for explaining complex problems with clarity and wit, which is probably why he was asked to give courses all over the world, including Brazil, Sweden, the USA and Israel. He had longstanding research projects with colleagues at the Hebrew University and spent time teaching at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

For many years he had wanted to write a book for the popular market ('such as people might buy at airports', as he used to say) and in 2008 *Bread – A Slice of History* was written with John Marchant and Joan Alcock, colleagues at South Bank University, where he became Professor of Chemical Technology in 1990. He enjoyed appearing as an authority on bread on the BBC Four programme 'In Search of the Perfect Loaf'. This caught the attention of Caitlin Moran in *The Times* who, to his great pleasure, called him 'the nutty professor' and said he should have presented the whole programme.

Bryan was an avid skier and delighted in taking the family to different resorts. In 1987 he had a serious skiing accident and tore his aortic valve, which had to be replaced by a porcine valve in a pioneering operation. He enjoyed the subsequent halachic debates in the *Jewish Chronicle* letters column, to which he was a frequent contributor all his life. He continued to ski, despite two further open heart operations, until last year, and his greatest joy was watching his grandchildren take to the



slopes with such enthusiasm.

Apart from the book reviews and articles he wrote for the *AJR Journal*, Bryan often worked with Rita Rosenbaum and her team recording the Journal for blind and partially sighted readers.

In 1966 he married Catherine Katzenstein, who survives him together with their children David, Debbie and Anthony and nine grandchildren.

Catherine Reuben