

Memories of David Watts BSc. MSc. PhD. DSc.

August 5th 1931 – December 22nd 2015

David Charles Watts, an energetic man, grew up in a small house in Enfield, survived a V1 buzz bomb during the Blitz, attended the local Grammar School and did a paper round to increase his pocket money. His father, Charles, was an engineer on a cable laying ship in the West Indies before returning home to help keep the power stations running during WWII. Charles died in 1946, survived by David, his sister Christine and mother Daisy.

Serendipitously, lodgers Tom and Rosie Brogan were taken in: Tom introduced David to photography, which led to developing photos for people all round the neighbourhood. The photographic work continued throughout David's time at Enfield Grammar, kindled a life-long passion for photography and laid the foundation for his later interest in chemistry. David then went on to university at Kings College London to study zoology. On one field trip he met Rosemary Randall, also studying biology and the two fell in love. They were married in 1957 and went by motorbike on honeymoon in Wales. After graduating from Kings, David entered University College where he studied chemistry, leading to an MSc.

Rationing and conscription were still in force; so he had to join the army and was caught up in mobilisation for the Suez crisis. At the end of his service, he was asked if he wanted to stay on, receive a promotion and possibly officer training. He decided not to take the opportunity, turned the offer down and after being demobbed returned to University College to do a PhD. conversion course in Biochemistry. At that time Biochemistry was in its infancy but it appeared to be a logical step forward, based on David's zoology and chemistry background.

Today we take DNA for granted, and it is a little extraordinary to think that Watson and Crick only made their discovery in 1953. When starting his PhD, DNA had only been taught at university for two years. David researched an enzyme known as Creatine Kinase which is related to the storage and use of energy in our bodies. In 1960, David published a paper on Creatine Kinase in the world-renowned journal 'Nature', leading to the completion of his PhD. in 1961 and the title of Doctor.

David then joined University College as a lecturer in Biochemistry before moving on in 1966 to Guy's Hospital Medical School as a Reader in Biochemistry at the young age of 35. He joined his wife Rosemary, who already had a job in the Guy's Paediatric Research Unit. Whilst there, he researched the role of enzymes in the disease process and the diagnosis of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Working with Rosemary in the Paediatric Research Unit, David was able to develop a much more accurate screening test for muscular dystrophy, saving the lives of dozens of babies who would have previously been terminated. David and Rosemary were committed to this work and fund-raised for the Muscular Dystrophy Society charity; their test has since been superseded by more accurate DNA based techniques.

David gained his DSc. for research into muscle biochemistry in relation to animal evolution and disease. Throughout his academic career he was an active member of the Biochemical Society, serving on the editorial board of its Journal. In 1977 David became Managing Editor of the journal 'Biochemical Society Transactions' (an unpaid, but time-consuming role) and

attended as many Biochemical Society meetings as he could around the UK. By the time David retired from Guy's in 1996, he had published a prodigious number of research papers, including over 30 in the 'Biochemical Journal' and several others in 'Nature' and elsewhere. His son, Ben, tells us of former students remembering him as an "old school" scientist who brewed coffee in his office over a Bunsen burner and who made his own painkillers out of chemicals from the store!

David's love of glass in all its forms grew out of drains! Back in 1964, after purchasing a cottage near Yeovil (in those days, on offer for the price of a Morris Traveller), the need to obtain gravel from Bridport for embedding a new drainage system, took him through Beaminster. He passed by an antique shop which had in its window a solitary opaque twist stem glass, standing on a highly polished table. He stopped to investigate and under its eighteenth century charm and the old world salesmanship of the dealer, Montague Rumsey, he not only purchased the glass but became hooked on the mysteries and pleasures of glass; an interest which continued unabated for the rest of his life.

Almost at the same time, Elville's 'English Table Glass' was published with information on measuring glass density as a method of characterisation and it became apparent that the equipment available to him for biochemical analysis might also be applied to solving problems with glass, particularly the then prevailing – and now disproved – idea that less lead was put into glass after the imposition of the 1745 glass duty.

Technical aspects of glass and glassmaking had always been uppermost in David's interests; he firmly believed that without this knowledge, much of the pleasure of old glass is lost. He also considered it essential to put together at least a small collection of old glass, as he had with Rosemary – helping to foster an understanding with old glass that comes with ownership.

As with many collectors, David began with 18th century drinking glasses, but soon became interested in cut glass, particularly goblets, thought at that time to have been made only from about 1775 but now known to date from the first quarter of that century. As his hobby progressed, he became fascinated in the manufacturing processes and technology involved in early English glass making.

In 1973 he joined the Glass Circle, a few years later becoming a member of the Glass Circle committee and in 1976 founding the Circle's publication '*Glass Circle News*', which he edited until 2009. For his outstanding contribution, David was made an Honorary Vice President of the Glass Circle; he was also an early member of the Glass Association and helped to found the Contemporary Glass Society, serving for a while as its Honorary Treasurer. David was invited to present lectures on areas of glass interest at Glass Circle meetings and later to the Glass Association, Guild of Glass Engravers and the National American Glass Club. He also became interested in American glass, became a member of the National American Glass Club and was elected a Fellow of the Corning Museum of Glass.

David was known for researching and writing on glass. He authored chapters on glass history in several books and wrote two scholarly books: 'Glassmaking in London' and 'Glass Recipes

of the Renaissance'. Towards the end of his life, David worked hard to complete the second edition of his book 'Glassmaking in London', making sure that everything he knew on this area of special interest was set down in writing. Double the size of the first edition, this second edition was published in 2014 to critical acclaim.

David's life was one of achievement. A passionate academic, a restless creator, a mentor, caring husband and a father who was always there for his son. In the glass world, we'll especially remember his scientific mind bringing arguments to bear on minutiae of detail, his thoughts not always agreed with, but respected. His presence will be missed.

Picture Caption

David Watts at the Art-workers' Guild London, presented with a vase, made by Peter Layton, a gift from the GC on the occasion of his retirement as editor of the Glass Circle News.. *The picture is dated 29/10/2008, courtesy of Ben Watts.*