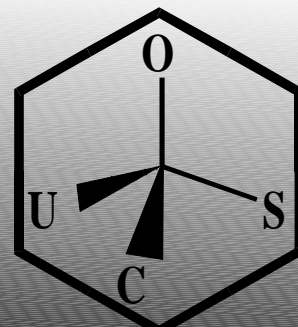


March 1998

# Touch-PAPER



The Newsletter of the Open University Chemistry Society

## Hello OUCS

### A welcome message from Ruth Williams. Ruth takes over from Mike Gagan as OUCS President in July.

#### Dear Chemistry Students and OUCS Members

I'm writing to introduce myself to you as the new President of OUCS. But first, let me pay tribute to the outgoing President, Mike Gagan. Those of you who know him will realise that he's a very hard act to follow, not least because he is a passionate supporter and very active member of OUCS and also his long and distinguished service to the OU Chemistry Department.

Like Mike I too am a staff tutor, and I am based in the Bristol Regional Centre of Region 03. Unlike Mike, I have yet to be immortalised in any OU TV or Video programmes. Although this means that I'm less likely to be recognised when I meet chemistry students at tutorials and summer school, the advantages are clear - at least students cannot comment on the long term effects of ageing in my case!

I joined the OU seven years ago and have loved every minute of it. The work of a Staff Tutor is very varied

and is divided between Faculty and Regional work. For example, about a fifth of my time is spent on course team work. This year I'm involved in writing CD-ROM questions for the new foundation course S103, and I shall also contribute to ST240 Our Chemical Environment, and to the new Maths, Science and Technology Access Modules, specifically designed to be studied by adults who are returning to study and who are not yet ready to start degree level courses. I also carry out research involving the tailoring and characterisation of novel porous materials (of interest in catalysis). My regional work involves quite a lot of administration linked to the delivery of science courses at the regional level. For example, I and my R03 staff tutor colleague (an Earth Scientist) appoint and train new Associated Lecturers - this is normally means making between 5 and 15 new appointments per year. However last year was a little busier - we made about 40 new appointments in all, 23 of which were for the new foundation

course. This involved quite a lot of interviews! We draw up the tutorial timetables for all and oversee the work of over 100 Associate lecturers who tutor at our 18 study centres. We also deal with academic queries from the 2000 strong cohort of science students in the South West Region. I too am an associate lecturer and currently teach S342 physical chemistry. I've also taught S102 and ST240 both as an Associate Lecturer and at Summer School, so some of you may well have met me then or at one of the OUCS Revision Weekends at York.

The OUCS seems to be going from strength to strength. There are currently 450 members and 216 students and 13 staff attended the Revision Weekend at York. One new development for 1998 is the addition of a second Revision Day School to the successful OUCS programme. This will take place in Bristol in late September and hopefully will enable even more students to have access to revision tutorials. More details about these events will be mailed to all students later in the year. I should also take this opportunity to alert our new students to the delights of OUCS marketing. Yes, there is a Tee-shirt (several designs in fact) - and much much more besides! Your first chance to view and buy these beautifully crafted items (sweatshirts, mugs, hats, biros, etc) will be at your chemistry summer school. They make lovely durable souvenirs and all profits go to OUCS.

With best wishes for a successful and enjoyable year of study.

**Ruth Williams**

# The Litmus Test

This month we have somebody who will be very familiar to some OUCS members. Brian Iddon's "The Magic of Chemistry" has delighted many of us. But Brian's audience has changed this year.

## Where did you go to school?

Born in Tarleton, a small village in the West Lancashire plain, I attended the local C.E Primary School. Then I failed the 11 plus: I was too interested in playing! My mother argued with Lancashire County Council and I became the first person to cross the County border to attend Christ Church Boys' School in Southport. I did well in my 'O' levels, even passing physiology, which was self-taught. For two years I attended Southport Technical College where I studied three 'A' Levels during the day and several 'OA' levels at night school! Thus, I pulled myself up by the bootstraps. No time for girls or much else though!

## Did you go to university straight from School?

After Technical College I went straight to the University of Hull. Because I had no language training few opportunities were available to me in 1958. Recently, here at the House of Commons Prof. N. B. Chapman, then Head of Chemistry at Hull, told me that he broke the matriculation rules in admitting me, since Hull in those days required a foreign language qualification. He must have taken a chance because I was very ill with glandular fever for 6 months during my Technical College days!

## Where do you work now?

On May the 1<sup>st</sup> I was elected M.P.

for the Bolton South East Constituency with a majority of 21,311. From 1964-1966 I taught at Durham University and, from 1966-1997, at Salford University. When I left I was a Reader in Organic Chemistry.

## What are your outside interests and hobbies?

Politics, politics and politics now. This job takes over your life! However, its diversity means that ones hobbies can be incorporated into the job. When I was a chemist in education, politics was my hobby. Now it's the other way round. I like

to watch cricket and occasionally football. I collect QEII stamps and keep a garden in shape. For total relaxation I read a good book or slump in front of the TV and watch a good film.

## What books do you read for pleasure?

When I have the time, usually on holiday, I read fictional thrillers although I enjoy reading about the exploits of colleagues in the Palace of Varieties, past or present. "Yes Minister" brings a smile to my face, more so now I know some of the characters!

## What is your favourite TV programme?

"One Foot in the Grave" almost puts me hospital with cracked ribs. The other day I had the pleasure of meeting Richard Wilson who told me that it had happened to someone he knows! Of course, I am addicted to news and political coverage. Channel 4 news at 7.00 pm is the best and I enjoy "On the Record."



## Why did you choose chemistry?

I inherited a chemistry set when I was eleven and I enjoyed changing one substance into another. Colour has always fascinated me and the smells, evil or otherwise, was an attraction. There was always a hint of danger too, which led me to respect chemicals early on.

## What is your current project?

I am publishing the work of my last two Ph.D. students. We have just published a novel tandem ring-opening reaction of dilithiated thienothiophenes (opening both fused thiophene

rings together) in *Chemical Communications* which provides a new synthesis of enediynes of interest as potential anticancer agents and as building blocks to more complex molecular architectures that conduct electricity. The second project involved extending the purine ring system by inserting another heterocyclic ring between the imidazole and pyrimidine rings – extended purines with potential biological activity. This has led to the best synthesis of polyfunctionalized imidazoles so far published.

**What would you like to do**

**next?**

All my life I have been promoting chemistry amongst the general public, particularly with young people and especially with my 90-minute demonstration lecture *“The Magic of Chemistry”*. “I shall continue to do this but in a different way now. I want to make science, and chemistry in particular, more important in the House of Commons.

**What are your thoughts on the future of chemistry?**

There are some who believe we have learnt to do everything it is possible to do and discovered

all the laws that it is possible to discover to explain the behaviour of materials. I happen to hold the opposite point of view. I am fascinated, e.g., by the work on self-assembly of molecules. Harry Kroto’s discovery of Buckminsterfullerene shows that there are still amazing discoveries to be made and the drive towards molecular machines (molecular turnstiles, etc.), including computers, is worth watching.

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## OUCS NEWS

### EGM

There will be an Extraordinary General Meeting on 27th June in the Chemistry department at Walton Hall to vote on some necessary amendments to the constitution. Anybody requiring further information (a copy of the current constitution, the proposed changes and a postal ballot form) should contact Pat Wilson.

### Open Day

The EGM coincides with Open Day at Walton Hall. OUCS will be present in the Chemistry Department and the OUSA tent. Volunteers will be needed to (wo)man stalls / demos for shifts during the day. If you can spare 20 mins please contact Debbie Deputy. Even if you can’t help, please come along and say hello. It really is an excellent day out for the whole family.

### Keswick Trip

A weekend is planned in the Lake District in May (22nd to 24th) by the Chemistry Society. Events and outings are being planned including a trip to Sellafield. It is likely that there will be other Societies planning events at the same time and place. Details are available from Debbie Deputy.

### New Chairman

Alas, my time as Chairman comes to an end at the AGM in October. Nominations are, therefore, required for a new OUCS Chair. Names of nominees, with a proposer and seconder (all three of whom must be OUCS members)

should be sent to Pat Wilson to arrive before 27th June. Frank

### Trip Reports

I went to Ray Jones inaugural lecture at Milton Keynes last December. This was held in the new lecture theatre in the Berrill Building. The lecture title was “One Ring leads to another” this is a tracing of Ray Jones career from his PhD at Cambridge through Nottingham to the OU and his path of interest in heterocyclic chemistry. The lecture was interesting and is to be repeated for us at the AGM in Birmingham this November 7th.

Janet Smith

### Catalyst Museum, Widnes

Last summer we took our 13 year old son to the catalyst museum to test it’s interest sustainability for that awkward age. Both my husband and son were occupied for several hours working their way around the many “hands on” exhibits which are arranged in a progressive order on several themes. The glass lift to the observatory made this a no go area for me but they both enjoyed the view and were up there nearly an hour while I tested the cafeterias tea.

Janet Smith

### Revision Events

This year there are three planned Revision Events.

The York Revision Weekend will be held from the 2nd to the 4th of October. The number of courses being covered has increased yet again to include many science course in addi-

tion to the normal chemistry selection.

Contact Carole Arnold

The Region 06 Revision Day has relocated to Colchester. As well as making access easier this will also result in a decrease in the cost.

Contact Sue Whitaker

As Ruth Williams mentions in her front page article, a second Revision Day is planned for the South West (Region 03).

Contact Jan Davidge

### Chemical Computing

Two new conferences have been added under the OUSA Chemistry section of FirstClass. These cover S342 and S327. With the Organic and Inorganic conferences (and the ST240 conference run by the Course Team) the whole of the Chemistry range is now covered.

There is also a Downloads conference which contains WebLab Viewer (see last issue of TouchPaper) and a Periodic Table program.

The offer of ISIS/Draw to OUCS members is still available (contact Frank Hollis for details).

Sometime in the next six months I’m hoping to put together a CD-ROM with the latest version of ISIS/Draw and dozens of other chemistry related shareware programs. This will only be available to OUCS members for a nominal fee to cover the cost of materials and time. At the moment I’m aiming for a £5 charge. Keep reading TouchPaper (and FirstClass) for further announcements.

Frank Hollis

# Who's Who in OUCS

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## **Thackray Medical Museum**

A party of 07/08 OUCS members spent an enthralling 2.5 hours in the museum next to Jimmy's hospital (Yes the one on TV.) We walked back in time and experienced the sights, sounds and smells of Victorian slum life in the 1840's. A character card was collected on entry. As we proceeded through the museum our task was to find out where our particular character lived or worked and what the risks were to their health.

We examined old remedies for common ailments and even walked into a model of a 'chemist's shop complete with bottles of herbs and chemicals ready for mixing. Static exhibits were interspersed with interactive touch type screens. The Museum's large collection of exhibits both amazed us and shocked us as well. One of the video's showing the ordeal of a young girl undergoing amputation before the discovery of anaesthetics. Definitely not for the squeamish amongst us.

Before joining in on a tour of discovery through 'Body works', a few of our

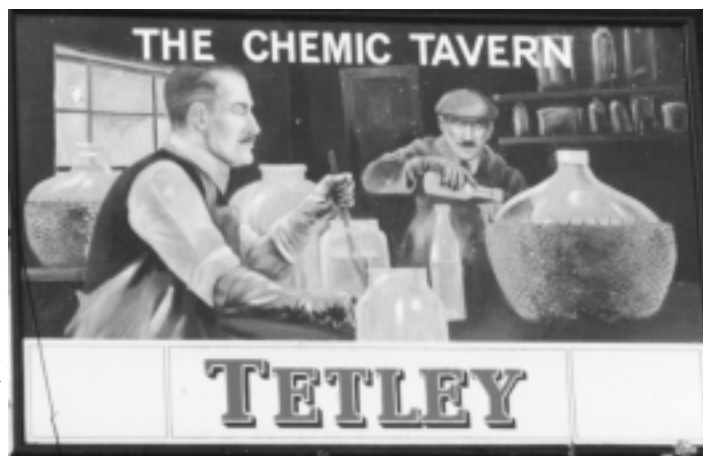
group, including our membership secretary Paul, tried on an 'empathy' belly belt in an attempt to discover what it felt like to be pregnant! Perhaps now sympathy will be felt by some for the pregnant woman!

To reach the café for our much-needed refreshment we had to follow a pea on its journey through the body (complete with sounds and smells). Our stomach's then decided it was lunchtime so

we made a beeline for the 'Florence Nightingale' (this was about a hundred yards down the road). There we had an excellent Sunday lunch for £3.50 plus good quality beer at £1.20

a pint! The only problem was that we had spent so much time at the museum and this pub we hadn't time to visit the Chemic Tavern. This we propose to do in the very near future and perhaps take another look at the Thackray Museum because exhibits are still being added. If you are interested keep your eyes open for this.

Carole Arnold



Q. What are the men in the picture actually doing?

Picture by Alec Thomson