

John White Symposium



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John White, the Years in Europe

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John came to Oxford in 1960 on an 1851 Fellowship to do a doctorate in the area of magnetic resonance with Rex Richards. Within 5 years he had completed his doctorate, obtained a full university post, and started a research programme using the very new techniques associated with the scattering of neutrons.

John's early neutron research was done at the reactors at Harwell from about 1963 onwards but discussions had begun in Europe on the possibility of building a high flux reactor with more advanced capabilities. John played a significant part in the preliminary scientific discussions and an agreement was signed in 1972 for Britain to participate as an equal partner with France and Germany in the Institut Laue Langevin (ILL). John was appointed to be the first full British director of ILL (deputy director in 1975-7, and main director 1977-80). During his first 12 years of neutron research John not only made substantial steps forward in his own research but also drew others from a range of different fields in on the act. John's early neutron research in this area was also a significant factor driving the decision to create the neutron spallation source (ISIS) at the Rutherford.

John's research covered a wide range of structural and dynamic phenomena in physical chemistry, e.g. protein structure and dynamics, surface chemistry, and colloids, and his contribution helped to give Europeans an unusual advantage in this field over their American counterparts. In 1985 John left Oxford to return to Australia, where he contributed to a similar strong advance in neutron scattering science.

I was one of John's first undergraduate students in the early summer of 1963. However, my introduction to neutron scattering did not start until 1975, when John appointed me to supervise his group on Oxford while he was an ILL director.

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