

Professor Roger Parsons F.R.S.C., F.R.S.

Roger was born in London in 1926, the son of a master baker and an accountant. After secondary school education in London and in Edmonton, he returned to London to study chemistry at Imperial College. Upon graduating with a first class honours degree in 1947, he elected to stay at Imperial College to study electrochemistry under the supervision of J. O'M. Bockris. His Ph.D., awarded in 1948, concerned the kinetics of the hydrogen evolution reaction, a topic of fundamental and technological importance and with which he has been associated over many years. After a further period at Imperial College as a temporary lecturer, he moved in 1951 to the University of St. Andrews in Dundee (now Dundee University) to the department headed by D. H. Everett. There he combined his interests in electrochemical kinetics and thermodynamics in a way which would form the cornerstone of his future research.

When Everett moved to the University of Bristol in 1954, to take the Chair of Physical Chemistry, Roger was one of the three individuals to accompany him. In common with some of the colleagues with whom he moved to Bristol, Roger took something of great value from his stay in Scotland—a Scottish wife! Since that time Ruby has been a major source of support to Roger in his many endeavours, and we wish them both well.

Roger's stay in Bristol lasted almost 25 years, until his appointment in 1977 as Directeur du Laboratoire d'Electrochimie Interfaciale du C.N.R.S. at Meudon in France. He led this laboratory with distinction until leaving in 1984. Subsequently, his final professional appointment was as Professor of Chemistry at the University of Southampton, from 1985 to 1992. Although now officially 'retired', Roger's interest in electrochemistry and his level of activity are undiminished.

The factual historical record above is of course an inadequate representation of a remarkable career. Scientifically, Roger's interests have ranged across electrochemical kinetics, adsorption processes, the use of optical methods in interfacial studies, the development and interpretation of electrochemical measurements at single crystal electrode surfaces and the topic for which he is best known—the electrical double layer. These interests are documented by over 200 publications spanning five decades. Indeed, Roger's first Faraday publication dates back to 1948 and he is still publishing in Faraday Transactions in the 1990s—an enviable record. In an era increasingly obsessed with quantity at the expense of quality, it is reassuring to see a first class mind choosing quality. Roger is a model in this respect, as evidenced by the continued citation of his classic work relating to electrocapillary and capacitance measurements, to adsorption, to hydrogen evolution and to the Parsons-Zobel plot. The importance of his work has justly been recognised by the award of the Olin Palladium Medal of the Electrochemical Society, Fellowship of the Royal Society, and numerous awards from learned societies around the world.

Every electrochemist will also be aware that Roger's influence extends beyond the merely technical. Throughout his career, he has been a prolific traveller and participant at conferences. Overseas, he was the catalyst for establishing electrochemistry in a number of locations, notably in Argentina, and the continued activity of many individuals around the world is the living legacy of his foresight and vision. At home, he organised the first 'Informal Electrochemical Meeting' of what later became the Electrochemistry Group of the Royal Society of Chemistry; the story goes that the first meeting was held in his kitchen, but the popularity and style of discussion was such that it is now an annual event attracting overseas speakers and running in several parallel sessions! These many interactions with scientists around the world have been fostered through his generous hospitality and his love of non-scientific culture through music, literature and art.

Besides his own publication record, Roger is responsible for the publications of many colleagues, through his role as Editor of the Journal of Electroanalytical Chemistry and Interfacial Electrochemistry. Under his stewardship the Journal has risen from a small, relatively infrequently published volume to what is arguably the premier specialist electrochemical journal. This is of course no accident, but rather the direct result of Roger's rare combination of expertise, dedication and diplomacy.

Within the Faraday Division of the Royal Society of Chemistry, Roger has held almost every office of importance, culminating in his election in 1991 as President of the Faraday Division. It is therefore entirely fitting that an Electrochemistry special issue of Faraday Transactions should mark his 70th birthday; in both respects I join the electrochemical community in regarding this as a celebration along the way, not as any sort of final statement.

I would like to end with two observations. The first, on a personal note, is that I have trodden in Roger's footsteps during periods at Imperial College and Bristol University. It was not long before I recognised that he is a difficult act to follow, but an excellent role model in terms of intellectual dedication and integrity. The second is that Roger has been a positive influence on everything he has touched. Without wishing to end on a melodramatic note, this is nicely summed up by a quotation originally used to describe the influence of the emperor Augustus on the Roman Empire: *lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit* - "he found it brick, he left it marble".

by Robert Hillman

This text has been published as an editorial in a special issue of Faraday Transactions (Faraday Transactions vol 92(20), 1996) to mark the 70th birthday of Roger Parsons. It is reproduced here with kind permission from the Royal Society of Chemistry.