

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

JOHN L. HOLMES

American Society for Mass Spectrometry

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Michael A. Grayson

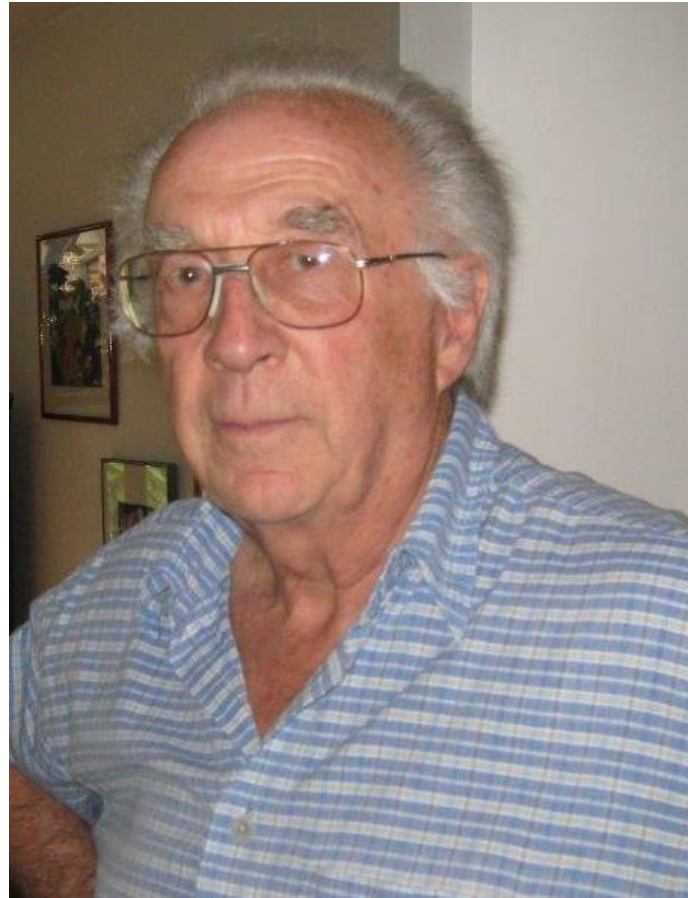
at

University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Canada

on

12 December 2013

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)



John L. Holmes

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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This project is made possible through the generous support of the
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JOHN L. HOLMES

1931 Born in Cricklewood (London), United Kingdom, on 29 November

Education

1954 BSc, University of London, Chemistry
1957 PhD, University of London, Chemistry
1983 DSc, London University

Professional Experience

1958-1960 National Research Council
Postdoctoral fellow

1960-1961 Edinburgh University, Chemistry Department
I.C.I. Fellow
1961-1962 Lecturer

1962-1965 University of Ottawa, Chemistry Department
Assistant Professor
1965-1973 Associate Professor
1973-1997 Full Professor
1997-present Emeritus Professor

1971 University of Ghana
Nuffield Visiting Professor

1973-1974 University College London
Sabbatical Leave

1979 University of Utrecht
Overbeek Visiting Professor
1988 Visiting Professor

1984 University of Adelaide
Distinguished Visiting Scholar

1984 Australian National University
Visiting Research Fellow
1993 Visiting Professor

2000 Visiting Professor
University of Bern
1993 International Exchange Fellow

Honors

1970 Fellow, Chemical Institute of Canada
1980 Barringer Research Award, Spectroscopy Society of Canada
1986 Fellow, Royal Society of Canada
1988 Award for Excellence in Research, University of Ottawa
1989 Chemical Institute of Canada Medal
1990 Herzberg Award, Spectroscopy Society of Canada
1998 Life Member, British Mass Spectrometry Society
2000 F.P. Lossing Award, Canadian Society for Mass Spectrometry
2008 Fellow and Life Member, Royal Society of Chemistry

Festschrifts

1993 *Organic Mass Spectrometry* 28, no. 10
2004 *European Journal of Mass Spectrometry* 10, no. 6

ABSTRACT

John L. Holmes was born in North London, United Kingdom, the son of a civil servant and a stay-at-home mother. From an early age, Holmes was encouraged to read, write and experiment. World War II disrupted his education, when the pupils of the Westcroft School were evacuated from London to the West Country, but by Christmas 1939 Holmes had returned to London to be with his parents. He remained in London for the duration of the war, and vividly recalls the London Blitz.

A mere 'pass' in chemistry on his Higher School examination meant that Holmes was bound for employment, rather than university. He accepted a position as a trainee analytical chemist at Glaxo Laboratories, where he learned to assay penicillin samples and to devise new analytical methods for novel synthetic products. While working at Glaxo, he pursued his education one day and three evenings per week at Acton Technical College, eventually passing the London External BSc examination in chemistry. His score earned him admission to graduate studies at University College London. There he studied thermal decomposition of alkyl iodides under the mentorship of Allan Maccoll.

After earning his PhD, Holmes fulfilled his National Service requirement at the National Coal Board then took up a postdoc in Ottawa at the National Research Council (NRC) of Canada, doing photochemistry of trifluoromethyl radicals with aromatic substrates. It was at NRC that he met Fred Lossing and got his introduction to mass spectrometry. After a frustrating two-year interlude at the University of Edinburgh, Holmes returned to Ottawa, accepting a position as assistant professor in the Chemistry Department at the University of Ottawa, where (with the exception of sabbaticals and visiting professorships abroad) he spent the remainder of his career. He began his work at Ottawa on the kinetics of hydrogen atom reactions, but soon found himself volunteering to take on a leadership role in the department's nascent center for mass spectrometry. Throughout the interview, Holmes recounts his evolving research interests, his collaborations with Fred Lossing, Hans Terlouw and others, his teaching and mentoring work, as well as the changing funding climate in Canada, the growth of the University of Ottawa, his experiences at international scientific meetings, and his work as editor of *Organic Mass Spectrometry*. Holmes concludes the interview with a discussion of his passion for sailing.

INTERVIEWER

Michael A. Grayson is a member of the Mass Spectrometry Research Resource at Washington University in St. Louis. He received his BS degree in physics from St. Louis University in 1963 and his MS in physics from the University of Missouri at Rolla in 1965. He is the author of over 45 papers in the scientific literature. Before joining the Research Resource, he was a staff scientist at McDonnell Douglas Research Laboratory. While completing his undergraduate and graduate education, he worked at Monsanto Company in St. Louis, where he learned the art and science of mass spectrometry. Grayson is a member of the American Society for Mass Spectrometry (ASMS), and has served many different positions within that organization. He has served on the Board of Trustees of CHF and is currently a member of CHF's Heritage Council. He currently pursues his interest in the history of mass spectrometry by recording oral histories, assisting in the collection of papers, and researching the early history of the field.

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