The 25th anniversary of Arkivoc

C. Dennis Hall

The year 2024 is the 25th anniversary of the first publication of Arkivoc (Archive for Organic Chemistry). The journal was founded by Professors Rees (Imperial College, London) and Katritzky (University of Florida) to provide a platform for sound organic research and to give a voice to less well established institutions whose efforts went often unrecorded. This tradition continues today with the publication of general papers coupled with Reviews and Accounts, Regional Issues and Commemorative Issues the latter recognizing the efforts of selected researchers throughout the world.

There follow tributes to Professors Katritzky and Rees in recognition of their outstanding contributions to chemical science.

During 60 years of research, Professor Katritzky’s output was prodigious with over 2170 papers in the primary scientific literature and authorship or editorship of more than 200 books. His work was recognized throughout the world by 33 honorary professorships and awards including among the latter, the Tilden and Meldola Medals of the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Cope Award of the American Chemical Society. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society, England in 1980. His annual worldwide lecture tours were legendary and he served as a consultant to 32 companies throughout Europe and North America. His academic career included the supervision of more than 300 graduate students and he worked with innumerable visiting faculty and postdoctoral fellows. His collaboration with some 80 companies brought revenue in excess of $30 million to the University of Florida. He had a major impact on the secondary literature of heterocyclic chemistry when the first volume of Advances in Heterocyclic Chemistry was published in 1963; volume 143 is due to appear soon. He and Charles Rees, as editors in chief, together with over 350 authors, produced Comprehensive Heterocyclic Chemistry published by Pergamon (1984) followed by three more editions, (1995, 2007, and 2022) published by Elsevier.

All this activity took an enormous amount of drive and energy, but he still found time to express his humanitarian principles by founding, in 2000, in collaboration with Professor Charles Rees, the free on line journal “Arkivoc”, designed to offset journal costs and provide less well-endowed research workers, especially those in the developing world, with the opportunity to publish in the primary literature. The project was financed at the outset by a generous donation from the Katritzky family and supported by revenue generated from the highly successful FloHet conferences in heterocyclic and synthetic chemistry initiated by Professor Katritzky in the year 2000. The journal continues to be supported by the ongoing voluntary work of the Arkivoc board of editors.

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Professor Alan Roy Katritzky  1928-2014

A tribute
Alan Roy Katritzky was born in London, England on Aug 18, 1928 and after a distinguished school and university education, was awarded a BA with First Class Honours (1952) followed by a D.Phil (1954) from Oxford University under the supervision of Professor Sir Robert Robinson, at that time one of the most distinguished organic chemists in the world. From 1954 to 1958 he served as a postdoctoral fellow and college lecturer at Oxford University (Pembroke and Magdalen colleges) then moved to Cambridge University for 5 years as a university lecturer. In 1963 he was appointed Professor of Chemistry and Dean of the School of Chemical Sciences at the newly established University of East Anglia, England. In 1980 he moved to the University of Florida and so began an extremely fruitful research career as the Kenan Professor and Director of the Center for Heterocyclic Chemistry at UF.

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Professor Katritzky’s teaching, mentorship and research are a tribute to his phenomenal talent and industry and his name will rightly stand in perpetuity with the creation of the Katritzky Chair at UF endowed by Alan and the Katritzky family. He has been sorely missed by the worldwide chemical community but especially by his devoted wife, Linde, who provided lifelong encouragement and support in pursuit of Alan’s goals. As one of his senior colleagues commented just after his death, “When they made Alan Katritzky, they broke the mold.”

C. Dennis Hall
Professor Charles W. Rees 1927-2006

A tribute

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Charles W. Rees CBE was a renowned British chemist known for his significant contributions to organic chemistry. He was born in Egypt on October 15, 1927, where his father was serving in the British Army. On his return to the UK, Charles attended Farnham Grammar School before working as a laboratory technician at the Royal Aircraft Establishment in Surrey.

In 1950, he graduated from University College Southampton with a Bachelor of Science degree. He obtained his PhD in 1953 at the same institute under the guidance of Professor Norman B. Chapman, studying the reactions of chloropyridines and chloropyrimidines with nucleophiles. He went on to post-doctoral studies with Professor Adrian Albert at the Wellcome Research Institution in London, where he worked on antimicrobial compounds.

In 1955, he began his career as an Assistant Lecturer at Birkbeck College, London. He became a Reader at King's College, London in 1963, and went on to hold Chairs at the University of Leicester (1965), University of Liverpool (1969), and Imperial College, London (1978), where he remained active after his official retirement in 1993 until his death in 2006. He left behind his wife, Patricia, three sons, and seven grandchildren.

His scientific career was primarily focused on two themes: reactive intermediates, such as carbenes, nitrenes, and aryynes, and unusual ring systems, particularly strained and novel aromatic systems. He explored these themes in mechanistic and synthetic organic chemistry, with a focus on heterocyclic chemistry, particularly heterocycles that were aromatic or antiaromatic and contained high proportions of nitrogen and/or sulfur atoms.

Charles published over 450 papers and mentored over 100 PhD students and 50 postdoctoral researchers and visiting scientists. He also co-founded/edited major reference works including Organic Reaction Mechanisms and with Alan Katritzky, FRS, Comprehensive Heterocyclic Chemistry I & II (1984 & 1996), and Comprehensive Organic Functional Group Transformations (1995). The long-standing friendship with Katritzky led, in the year 2000, to the establishment of the free, open access journal ARKIVOC.

He served on several boards, including President of the RSC Perkin Division (1981), RSC President (1992), and President of the Chemistry Association for the Advancement of Science. Honours received include the RSC Tilden Medal (1974), Fellow of the Royal Society (1974), RSC Award in Heterocyclic Chemistry (1980), RSC Pedler Medal (1984), Honorary DSc (University of Leicester) (1994), International Award in Heterocyclic Chemistry (1995), Fellowship of King’s College London (1999) and an Honorary DSc (University of Sunderland (2000). In light of his contributions to chemistry he was appointed Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the New Year’s Honours List (1995). The RSC continues to honour his memory with the Charles Rees Award for excellence in the field of heterocyclic chemistry, covering the synthesis, properties and applications of all types of heterocyclic compounds.

In addition to his significant contributions to chemistry, Charles was also known for his love of bow ties, his quick sense of humour, and his ability to captivate audiences. Personally, I remember him for his open-mindedness and support in allowing me to explore unconventional lines of inquiry. Our one-on-one meetings in his office were always relaxed and friendly, often accompanied by a bag of crisps and a glass of chilled white wine. His legacy lives on through his family, mentees, and published works, which continue to inspire and inform the scientific community.

C Dennis Hall