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Alan Leadbetter (1934–2019)

A larger than life character, Alan Leadbetter was a highly respected research scientist, who will be remembered as an inspirational leader of the ISIS facility, the Daresbury Laboratory, and the Institut Laue Langevin (ILL). His lasting legacy includes the strength and diversity of the neutron science community in the United Kingdom today.

Alan James Leadbetter was born in Southport, Lancashire in 1934, and educated at King George V Grammar School in Southport. Following a BSc and PhD in chemistry at Liverpool University, he took up a postdoctoral position with the National Research Council of Canada in 1957. He returned to the UK in 1959 as a lecturer in physical chemistry at the University of Bristol and was appointed Professor of Chemistry at the University of Exeter in 1975. Alan enjoyed an international reputation for his research into the thermodynamic properties of glasses, order disorder transitions, molecular rotations in crystals and the structure and molecular dynamics of liquid crystals.

In the late 1970s, Alan worked with the team led by Godfrey Stafford, Geoff Manning and Bill Mitchell, that was preparing the case for ISIS, an accelerator-based pulsed neutron scattering facility at the Rutherford Laboratory. As an influential member of the UK neutron scattering community, he championed a wider vision for the new facility's application to the molecular sciences, broadening its impact beyond the traditional physics focus. This proved to be a crucial factor in the future success of ISIS.

In 1982, he became Associate Director of the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and Head of the ISIS facility, where he oversaw the completion of ISIS construction, commissioning,



and early scientific success. Under his leadership, he fostered a culture of openness and collaboration, both within the UK research community and with international partners—in particular India, Italy and Japan. George Stirling, a collaborator during this period and a long-term personal friend, recalls that “Alan’s appointment to the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory at this critical time was an inspired choice, and set the foundation for the eventual world-leading success of the ISIS facility.”

In 1988, Alan became Director of the Daresbury Laboratory, where he oversaw its transition from a research laboratory focused primarily on nuclear structure to a multi-disciplinary site, including the UK’s centre of excellence in synchrotron radiation, the SRS. Upon retiring in 1994, Alan was awarded a CBE for services to UK science.

Susan Smith, current Head of Daresbury Laboratory, comments, “Alan was an engaging leader who genuinely respected his staff. When he made a commitment to meet all members of staff within his first few weeks at Daresbury, he delivered on it, building a trust that endured

throughout his tenure. He had an energy and enthusiasm that was infectious and an undying optimism. He inspired the staff to deliver the outstanding science of the day, and laid the foundations for the bright future Daresbury Laboratory still enjoys.”

Returning to neutrons, Alan became UK Associate Director at the ILL from 1994 to 1999. During his time there, he continued to play a dynamic role in its scientific life and to foster UK involvement, earning the esteem of his scientific colleagues and the respect and affection of all the staff.

During his career, Alan built up a wealth of experience in what it takes to set direction, lead by example and motivate staff at all levels in major science facilities. His leadership qualities were recognized wherever he worked. Daresbury colleague Paul Durham remarks, “Alan was an invigorating and inspiring Director of Daresbury Laboratory. He loved science and led from the front. Working with him was exciting, sometimes challenging, always fun. He was a real leader.”

Alan was a key influence on the careers of many individuals in the fields of neutron scattering and synchrotron radiation, and through his roles on advisory bodies for neutron and synchrotron facilities in the USA, Australia and Europe, he was able to share his wisdom on a wider canvas.

Upon his retirement in 1999, Alan made his home in Exeter, where he died on 11 March. He is survived by his wife Brenda, son Andrew and daughter Jane.

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