Sir Jack Baldwin with his Ferrari

Organic chemistry, although a part of the physical sciences, has a strong creative possibility. This quality brings an artistic element into the practice of the subject, just as for example a beautifully engineered motor car shows elements of art.

JEB

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SYNLETT

Editorial

Laudation for Professor Sir Jack Baldwin FRS

So Jack Baldwin celebrates his seventieth birthday! It was unthinkable that his colleagues and past co-workers would allow this event to pass without marking it in some way and so it was that two of that contingent decided to co-edit a special issue of *Synlett* dedicated to Jack as a gesture of respect and appreciation of the many and great contributions that he has made to Organic Chemistry specifically, and science and society in general, during his long and productive career. The result – with Jack's permission of course – is this issue containing contributions from co-workers, both current and those who have gone on to academic positions of their own, and other UK chemists who wanted to join with us in sending our best wishes and congratulations to Jack as he turns seventy.

Jack Baldwin was born on the 8th of August 1938 within the sound of Bow bells which means he can lay claim to being a genuine Cockney. After evacuating to Haywards Heath from London in 1941 he attended the local primary school and then Brighton Grammar School followed by Lewes Grammar School for Boys after the family moved to Maresfield. In 1957 he obtained a scholarship to study Chemistry at Imperial College in London and, after graduating in 1960, he remained to carry out his PhD studies with Barton, obtaining his doctorate in 1964. He continued at Imperial College as an Assistant Lecturer until 1967 when he moved to the United States taking up an initial academic position at Penn. State, then moving to M.I.T. in 1969. After a brief sojourn as Daniell Professor at Kings College London he returned to M.I.T. where he stayed until 1978. Then came the move to Oxford University to take up the Wayneflete Professorship at the Dyson Perrins Laboratory and a Fellowship of Magdalen College, retaining an Emeritus position after his retirement in 2005.

Jack Baldwin's academic contributions to Organic Chemistry have been many and profound, with highlights including his work into the 2,3-sigmatropic rearrangement of sulfonium ylids, the first synthesis of a cephalosporin, rules for ring closure (his first paper on this topic in 1976 became the most cited paper published in *Chemical Communications* with over 1500 citations), capped porphyrins, the elucidation of the biosynthesis of penicillin and the whole area of biomimetic synthesis exemplified by, *inter alia*, biologically modelled syntheses of the manzamines, panepophenanthrin, and spectinabilin. Of particular relevance, Jack Baldwin published an Account in the very first issue of *Synlett* on the total synthesis of isonitrin B with co-workers who include two contributors to this special issue (L.M.H. and I.A.O'N.). At the latest search of the database, his research output came to 696 publications so it won't be long until he will have published over 10 articles for every year of his life.

The importance of Jack Baldwin's work has been recognised internationally in many ways with awards and named lectureships. They are too many to list, but within the last few years he has received the Nakanishi Prize and Medal for Bioorganic Chemistry (2002), the Paracelsus Prize and Medal of the Swiss Chemical Society (2006), the Longstaff Prize and Medal of the Royal Society of Chemistry (2008) and the Sir Derek Barton Gold Medal of the Royal Society of Chemistry (2008). His most recent invited named lectureships include the Lilly Distinguished European Lectureship (Namur, 2004), the Sir Edmund Hirst Memorial Lecture (University of St Andrews, 2006), and the Chatt Lecture (John Innes Centre, Norwich, 2006). He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1979, was made a Foreign Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994 and received his Knighthood in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 1997.

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Baldwin has been a tireless campaigner for greater academic freedom; an outspoken critic of organisations that hinder free expression of scientific curiosity, and of politicians or industrialists who attempt to meddle with the academic framework and bend it to their means. As a research supervisor he has always been inspirational, setting the highest scientific standards and demonstrating a level of insight achieved by few in the history of Organic Chemistry. He could be humorous, incisive, self-effacing or incandescent with rage (an impressive sight when in full spate) but his impatient drive and desire always to extend the limits of knowledge and understanding never slackened and remain undiminished to this day. Working with Jack Baldwin, one experienced at first hand the intensity of his passion and felt pride at being allowed to participate in and share his scientific quest. He was at his best and most comfortable in group meetings when he would quiz students and postdoctoral workers about their progress, pose mechanistic problems, bestow little snippets of advice ("Carbene is a funny species for curved arrow pushing so just think of it as $C^{\pm}$") or recount anecdotes. Such meetings were uplifting, but everyone knew that "J.E.B.'s" baleful gaze would come their way if they had not prepared their presentation properly. Life outside the laboratory was lived at the same breakneck pace; he has always maintained a passion for fast cars and motorbikes (nowadays he apparently prefers four wheels to two), good food and wine. Stories of some of his escapades in his younger days have passed into chemical folklore. Famously, he was once described by a colleague, George Fleet, in a television programme entitled *The Chemistry Set*, as an "Intellectual Thug"; a label that he wore with some pride, along with the T-shirt emblazoned with the words and presented to him by his research group. In his last years as Wayneflete Professor, the chemists decanted from the Dyson Perrins Laboratory into the new Chemical Research Laboratory on the other side of South Parks Road; a stunning facility by any standards. Although retired these past three years, Jack retains an active interest in chemistry but now has more time to spend with his wife Christine, walking their two Labradors, Lucy and Niblet, in the woods behind his house, enjoying the views over the spires of Oxford.

We are sure that chemists and scientists around the world will join with the contributors to this special issue of *Synlett* in wishing Jack Baldwin a happy and healthy seventieth birthday and many, many more years at the vanguard of Organic Chemistry.

Happy Birthday Jack!

Special Issue Editors

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