

Obituary

Dr. Daniel John O'Connor

13 December 1927 – 21 April 2014.



Born at Albert Park, Melbourne, the second child of Daniel and Kathleen O'Connor, he grew up in a workingman's cottage. His childhood during the depression years 'paved the way for later life: he never wasted anything and his home later became filled with pieces that might come in handy later, together with souvenirs from around the world' [Obituarist at Dr. O'Connor's funeral service].

Although claiming to have learnt nothing in primary school, nonetheless he gained a scholarship to St. Colman's College Fitzroy, then later to Parade College East Melbourne and St. Kevin's Toorak. His school ability led to a Free Place at Melbourne University and a Bursary to Newman College there.

From his youth he always involved himself in life around him – socially, politically and academically, notably in the Newman Society and as a Student Representative Councillor.

For someone with such broad and time-consuming interests, that might have

diverted him from study, Dan's academic record was impressive. He completed B.Sc (Chemistry, Physics & Engineering) in 1948, M.Sc (Mineral Chemistry) 1950 and PhD (Mineral Chemistry) 1954, both the Masters and Doctorate studies being supported by Scholarships.

Following his PhD he was awarded a Junior Harwell Fellowship to research at Harwell (UK), travelling there 'without a penny', but on a free first class ticket by ship with his new bride, Margaret Maloney. Some three and a half years at Harwell saw Dan's research abilities bloom.

Returning to Australia in October 1957 he became successively Research Officer and Senior Researcher at the Australian Atomic Energy Commission, Lucas Heights, southwest of Sydney, until December 1961, also doing some part-time Chemistry lecturing, 1959-1960 at the University of New South Wales.

Between February 1961 and August 1962 he was Research and Development Officer at Taubmans Industries, Sydney, before beginning a long association (to June 1983) at Colonial Sugar Research, which proved an important centre for the company, having at its peak 150 researchers, 40 of them graduates. Between April 1980 and June 1983 Dan was Director of Research there. In 1976 he had a brief stay as Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Cologne, the first of many invited visits to numerous overseas research bodies.

From July 1983 he had a series of short appointments, at the Energy Authority,

NSW; Senior Research Fellow Chemical Engineering, University of Sydney; Manager Research and Development at Unisearch (University of New South Wales); and between January 1989 and June 1992 was Executive Director of ANZAAS, and Editor of *Search*.

In 1966 Dan returned to academic pursuits, gaining a B.Ec at the University of Sydney for work on Government and Industrial relations, and an M.Ec in 1968 on Science and Public Policy. In 1974 he studied aspects of Law through the Supreme Court Board, but did not follow this up further.

The nature of Dan's work saw much of his research work appear only as confidential Company and Government reports. Between 1955 and 1957 his Harwell work produced seven individual and five joint reports. His work at Lucas Heights produced six individual and five joint reports. His long sojourn at CSR produced 90 individual and 45 joint reports.

Nevertheless, in the public domain he was author or joint author of 40 publications in journals such as *Nature*, *The Australian Journal of Science*, *The Journal of Chemistry*, *The Australian Journal of Chemistry*, *Inorganic and Nuclear Chemistry*. Two major publications were his sole authored *Alumina Extraction from Non-Bauxitic Materials* (Aluminium-Verlag GmbH, 1988, 461pp) and the jointly authored Ashburn, A.G., Dawson, J.K., O'Connor, D.J. Waldron, M.B. & Walton, G.N. (eds), *Glove boxes and Shielded Cells for Handling Radioactive Materials* (Butterworths, 515 pages, 1988).

At various times he was President of the Sydney Branch of the Melbourne University Alumni Society and he and his wife funded a scholarship for Newman College,

Melbourne University. He was an active member of many societies including the Clean Air Society, Royal Australian Historical Society, Australian-Japan Society.

Dan was a relatively late joiner of the Royal Society, but when he did he became fully engaged, serving on the Council from 1994. He was Treasurer (April 1995-March 1998), elected President, 1998-1999. His presidential address was '*The Australian Republic and the Royal Society of New South Wales*' published in the Society's Journal. In these years he was also involved in the summer Schools for Senior Secondary Students held at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation. The Council awarded him the Society's medal in 1999.

A fan of his beloved Sydney Swans, Dan himself kept fit with tennis, squash and skiing and ran in the Sydney City to Surf seventeen times (until 1999).

Despite his major research Dan was regarded by many friends as somewhat impractical, one noting that Dan 'had little room for practical and everyday things. He often had a bandaid over his forehead from walking into a door, hitting a car boot roof'. His wife of over sixty years commented with a wry smile 'it was ever thus'.

Dan O'Connor was given a fond farewell by his family (wife, daughter Nicola and four grandchildren), local and interstate visitors at the Catholic Church, Northbridge, Sydney, followed by a wake at the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, Kirribilli.

David Branagan, from personal knowledge, and information from Margaret O'Connor