

Russell Tailby, 1917–2009

RUSSELL Tailby, who died on 19 July 2009 in Horsham aged 92, will probably be best remembered for the pivotal role he played in establishing the chemical engineering department at the University of Surrey.

Educated at the Brighton, Hove and Sussex Grammar School, Tailby took his first degree in chemistry and then started his PhD at University College London in 1938. His studies were interrupted by the war but his chemistry skills meant that his application to join the Navy was rejected in favour of working at ICI Explosives in Scotland. After work in the factory he would take his turn with the 8th Ayrshire Home Guard where he was often engaged in tackling fires caused by bombing the same explosives factory. He recalled one raid where it was said the blaze was fierce enough for people to read a newspaper two miles away – a story he also shared in a TV broadcast on the home guard a few years ago.

In between work in the factory and the home guard, he found time to study chemical



Russell Tailby sharing a joke with David Wood

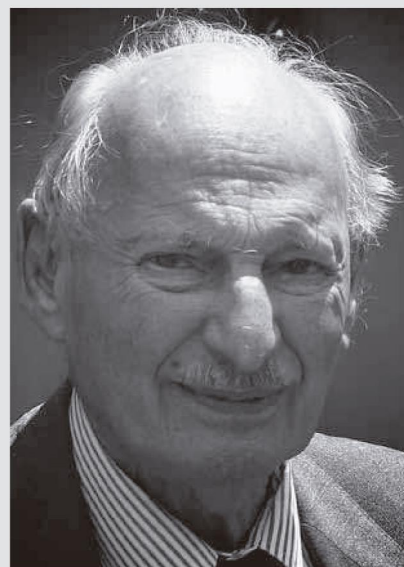
engineering at what is now Strathclyde University under Professor Rumford, passing the AMIChemE exam in 1944. He became a member and later a Fellow of IChemE and in 2008 was awarded his certificate of 70 years membership.

At the end of the war Tailby transferred to ICI Plastics at Welwyn but the lure of academia was too strong and he joined Battersea Polytechnic as its first full-time lecturer in chemical engineering. Initially an evening and summer school conversion course for ex-service graduates in chemistry and engineering, the course soon developed into a full degree programme. In 1955, chemical engineering became a separate department and when Battersea became the University of Surrey, Tailby became its first professor of chemical engineering.

Tailby retained his love of teaching and, notwithstanding the heavy administrative demands on his time, would regularly deliver at least three hours of lectures a week.

He was also much in demand as an external examiner. He was particularly pleased to be appointed to Cambridge University to “help us keep our feet on the ground”, as his appointers put it.

He also devoted a considerable portion of his time to IChemE, sitting on Council from 1949 to 1952 and as a member of the institution’s education committee and board of examiners. In 1975 he received IChemE’s Arnold Greene Medal for his services to chemical engineering technician education and just prior to retirement lectured at the two-part international symposium on the history of chemical engineering held in Honolulu in 1979



and Las Vegas in 1980.

Retiring from the university in 1981, he brought his knowledge to the developing world, with a series of lectures in Kolkata, India, in 1982 and lecture tours to Peru in 1986 and 1987.

A keen field sportsman, lepidopterist and naturalist – his butterfly collection is in the Booth Museum at Brighton – Tailby was an enthusiastic disciple of John Henry Newman whose writings led him to convert to the Church of Rome at the end of the war.

He is survived by Jean, his wife of over 60 years, two children, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren, who gave him enormous pleasure.

Christopher Tailby

Four IChemE Fellows elected to RAEng Fellowship

FOUR IChemE Fellows, Nina Thornhill, John Woodley, David Tomlinson and Donal Cronin, were elected to Fellowship of the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng) – an honour reserved for the UK’s most distinguished engineers – at the Academy’s AGM.

Nina Thornhill has been chair of process automation at Imperial College London since 2007. Between 1984 and 2007 she lectured at University College London (UCL), where she rose from lecturer to deputy head of the electronic and electrical engineering department. Prior to this Thornhill spent time at British Aerospace and ICI Plastics.

John Woodley, who holds a BSc in chemical engineering from UMIST and a PhD in biochemical engineering from UCL, is professor of chemical and biochemical engineering at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU). Woodley says he is “delighted”

about his election.

David Tomlinson has since 1999 been the president and ceo of Davy Process Technology, which licences process technologies to the oil and gas, petrochemicals, commodity chemicals, fine chemicals, and pharmaceuticals industries.

Donal Cronin, the head of global engineering and technology at AstraZeneca, has seen his studies take him from Cork Regional Technical College (diploma in chemical engineering), via University College Swansea (postgraduate diploma) to the University of Birmingham (MSc and PhD in biochemical engineering). With ICI since 1990, he accompanied the pharmaceuticals business’ spinoff as Zeneca and has headed several departments within AstraZeneca before taking up his current position around a year ago. He also sits on IChemE’s West

Yorkshire committee.

He tells *tce*: “I am extremely pleased and proud to be elected. It is good to see a good representation of chemical engineers in this year’s list.”

Speaking at RAEng’s AGM, the Academy’s president John Browne called for a greater involvement of engineers in government policy-making. “It is a weakness that, in the UK, so many policy decisions are made with little or no engineering input, even when policy delivery has a clear engineering dimension,” he said.

Government policies should be formed with a roadmap for their delivery in mind, including the necessary research, skills and supply chain. The input of engineers, with their problem-solving abilities, is vital for addressing the world’s major problems, such as climate change, poverty and disease, he said.