David A. Brown

The death has occurred recently (September 27) of David A. Brown, who was Professor of Inorganic Chemistry in UCD for many years, during which time both in the former College of Science in Merrion Street and in the more recent UCD campus in Belfield he played a vital role in the development of inorganic chemistry, both in Ireland and internationally. He served the college in many capacities, including the head of the chemistry department, the dean of the science faculty and a member of the governing body.

He joined UCD in 1959 as a lecturer and was appointed in 1964 as the first Professor of Inorganic Chemistry in UCD at a young age as he was born in 1929 in High Wycombe, England. He was a student at Queen Mary College, now Queen Mary University of London, where he became the president of the student chemical society. Following his studies and research in London he worked as a post-doctoral fellow in Cambridge, where his research focused on theories of chemical bonding, that is on how atoms are held together in molecules. Following these studies in England he worked in Brussels as a European Research Associate, where he became a fluent linguist, and from there he joined the UCD staff.

While an undergraduate in 1949 David Feakins, who joined David in UCD when he became the first Professor of Physical Chemistry, as a first year student remembered David, who was a final year "Olympian" figure, as an outstanding worker. Professor Feakins recalled that David went on to be first in chemistry in the whole university.

Professor Brown was a member of the Royal Irish Academy for 52 years, having been elected in 1962. In 1996 he was awarded the Boyle-Higgins gold medal and lecture awards of the Institute of Chemistry of Ireland, of which he served as President. This is an award for research work carried out in Ireland and is made for an outstanding and internationally recognised research contribution to the advancement of chemistry. He also was a member of the Royal Society of Chemistry for over 60 years.

David, along with Dr Bill Davis of TCD, organized a very successful International Conference on Coordination Chemistry in Dublin in 1974, attended by more than 700 participants. The profit from this conference was used to establish regular inorganic chemistry meetings initially in Greystones and later in Maynooth. These conferences were attended by chemists from both the Republic and Northern Ireland as well as by prominent international speakers. During his career David also was very successful in obtaining funding both from European and other sources.

As well as his work in UCD administration, David was a very active researcher and teacher. He was a lively and inspiring lecturer and in his lectures to undergraduates he introduced developments that were topical and had practical and academic importance, as for example when he described and clarified for students the structure of a new type of compound, with a special type of bonds, ferrocene, that subsequently led on to a whole new field of science. In his research he had interests in many exciting areas, including the theory of bonding, coordination chemistry, the study of organometallic compounds that is those with both organic and inorganic parts, bioinorganic and medicinal chemistry. He published extensively and was internationally well known. His Penguin book on Quantum Chemistry opened up many insights to non-specialists in a clear, concise way and helped readers to appreciate modern developments. David formally retired in 1994 but continued his active research in retirement and his most recent publication was in 2011.

He jointly worked with many leading chemistry groups, including Professor Kevin Nolan of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and his standing is shown by the many famous chemists who visited UCD over the years. His students appreciated meeting these in David's house where he was a hospitable host.

Recently the very successful inaugural David Brown Lecture of the Institute of Chemistry of Ireland and the Institute of Nanotechnology was given by Professor Annie Powell, who received the first David Brown award. Members of the Brown family attended and this was very much appreciated by the large audience of inorganic chemists in the RCSI where the excellent lecture was given

He was very encouraging to his students, many of whom blossomed exceptionally under his guidance. If a student had personal difficulties David helped, discreetly and effectively. This support has been generously acknowledged and appreciated by former students. He worked very conscientiously himself, and his energy, drive and commitment encouraged his students, to whom he was tremendously loyal. As head of department he was exceptionally fair to all groups in sharing often limited resources in difficult times. This generosity helped to maintain a very positive *esprit de corps* in the chemistry department of UCD,

During his time there he established a flourishing nuclear magnetic resonance centre, with substantial industrial funding and also developed excellent micro analytical facilities, which

were used by both UCD personnel and others from commercial and academic backgrounds.

David was a true humanitarian and set up Unesco courses, where students from developing countries came to UCD; this project was supported by Unesco and was very successful. Through these courses and other opportunities David had many overseas students, whose careers he followed with interest, and his international commitment was shown when he was a visiting professor in Kuwait during 1979. He kept in touch with his former students, and this close contact again illustrated the appreciation that they had for David's interest and support. This acknowledgement is illustrated by the very many sincere condolences received from all around the world.

An indication of his standing in science was illustrated when at an international meeting in Florence a delegate was asked if he seen David and was told, after explaining that as he was so busy with the conference he had not time to visit the Uffizi Gallery, that David Brown was meant.

As well as his tremendous commitment to science and UCD David had other interests, including music, especially opera. Being a student in London he had opportunities to attend operas and he had the pleasure of hearing Maria Callas, and more recently in attending the Verona Opera festival. He enjoyed travel and as well as attending international scientific conferences he travelled widely all his life and as he had a very sharp memory was able to recall and entertain others with his travelling adventures.

He was also a voracious reader and was very knowledgeable about many areas of history, both military and social, being very aware and concerned about political abuses worldwide.

As well as his interests in UCD, science, music, travel and reading he was a great family person. His dedication to his family was most impressive. He was a devoted husband, a wonderful father and an adoring grandfather, as was acknowledged at his funeral service. He is deeply mourned by Rita and children, Geraldine, Paul, Suzanne, Rory, Elizabeth and Catherine, as well as by his eight grandchildren in Ireland, the UK and the USA.

David had exceptional ability as a scientist, administrator and teacher, but especially he will be membered as a person of great loyalty, integrity, energy and friendship. His students will always recall his interest in them and his help in their careers and his family will always cherish his love and dedication.