

## John Anthony Chaldecott (1916–98)



Photograph kindly supplied by the Science Museum/Science and Society Picture Library.

It is with deep regret that we record the death of John Anthony Chaldecott on 2 May 1998 at the age of 82. He was a founder member of the BSHS and served as Honorary Secretary and as President.

After graduating in physics at London University, John took up teaching and lecturing, but this was interrupted by war service in the RAF Meteorological Branch. In the fighting in the Netherlands, he was mentioned in despatches. In 1949, he joined the Science Museum as Assistant Keeper in the Physics Department. There, he was in charge of the Optics Collection and also the Heat and the George III Collections, for which he produced catalogues. For some years, he acted as Secretary to the Museum's Advisory Council.

In 1961, John became Keeper of the Science Museum Library, a post he held until his retirement in 1976. His time there was active and eventful. First, the transfer of the Library's nation-wide loans service, together with many of its periodicals, to the National Lending Library of Science and Technology in 1962 entailed a redirection of the Library's resources and services. Then, he was closely involved in the planning of the present Library building on the Imperial College campus in South Kensington, opened in 1969. He made a thorough study of the latest library design and equipment, so as to incorporate as many modern features as possible within a very tight budget. The success of the building owed much to his untiring and meticulous attention to detail.

While building was in progress, his attention was assailed from a fresh quarter, this time from the National Libraries Committee. Their conclusions disconcerted the Science Museum and the fact that the Library remained under the Museum's wing, with a redefined role, owed much to John's skill and determination in negotiation. The Library was to specialize in the history of science and he did much to turn the Library towards the new direction. It was his decision to assemble the Library's scattered books and periodicals in this field and house them in a special history of science reading room. All this chimed in with his own interest in this subject. He had gained an M.Sc. in the history and philosophy of science at University College London in 1949, followed up later with a Ph.D. He was active in the BSHS from the beginning and he was Honorary Secretary during 1963–68. He was elected President for the year 1972–73; his presidential address was entitled 'Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795), scientist'. He published a number of papers on historical subjects, but his abiding interest lay in scientific instrument makers; he formed a massive record of information about those active in London from 1750 to 1840, now deposited in the Science Museum Library Archives Collection. Soon after his retirement, he was responsible for a major exhibition at the Science Museum illustrating Wedgwood's life and work and he published an accompanying monograph.

Throughout his life, John preserved that calm and even-tempered manner which made him such a pleasant colleague and genial, good-humoured friend. He was always fair and even-handed in his dealings with others.

LANCE DAY