

Emeritus Professor Ron Grigg, FRS

Colleagues will be sorry to learn of the death, on 10 January 2021, of Ron Grigg, Emeritus Professor and former Head of Organic Chemistry. The following tribute has been contributed by Professor Colin Fishwick, Head of the School of Chemistry.

Ron Grigg started his scientific career as a chemistry technician at Glaxo Laboratories, and worked there from 1952 to 1960, at the same time following a part-time degree course for which he was awarded a GRIC in 1960. This was followed by PhD work at Nottingham University, and postdoctoral research at Cambridge in a team led by Nobel Laureate, Alexander Todd. He was appointed to a lectureship in organic chemistry at Nottingham in 1965 and remained there until 1974 when he accepted the Chair of Organic Chemistry at Queen's University, Belfast. He returned to England in 1989 as Professor of Organic Chemistry at the University of Leeds. He became Professor of Medicinal Chemistry and Director of the Molecular Innovation, Diversity and Automated Synthesis (MIDAS) Centre in 1994.

As part of a distinguished career, Ron made important contributions in synthetic and mechanistic organic chemistry, particularly in the field of synthetic methods development with emphasis on those particularly applicable in medicines discovery. His original innovative contributions in the areas of 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition reactions and palladium-catalysed cascade processes have made him widely regarded as one of the leading organic chemists in the field.

Particularly noteworthy was his leading work in the design and development of 'cascade' processes (that is, multi-reaction 'one-pot' sequences), based on palladium-catalysed cyclisation reactions and 1,3-dipolar cycloadditions, and their applications in general organic synthesis. His early work made notable contributions to the synthesis and fundamental chemistry of natural porphyrins and polypyrrole macrocycles; some of this work was subsequently developed by others as the basis of sensing systems.

A major contribution in the area of cascade processes involved amine – imine – azomethine ylide – cycloadditions, as well as oxime – nitron – cycloadduct cascades. Chiral versions of imine-based 1,3-dipolar cycloadditions developed by Ron and co-workers are now widely exploited by industry, especially in combinatorial chemistry, and his invention of a new reagent for the detection of latent fingerprints, based on early azomethine ylide studies, won a UK Government SMART award in 1989.

His many honours and marks of esteem include the awards of the RSC Tilden Lectureship; RSC Medal for Heterocyclic Chemistry; Small Firms Merit Award for Science and Technology Pedlar Medal, RSC Synthesis Medal, and Winner of DTI Smart Award for invention of forensic reagent for detection of latent fingerprints.

He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1999 – one of only a handful of Leeds scientists to hold such a prestigious award.

Ron retired in 2001, at which time the title and status of Emeritus Professor was bestowed upon him.