



A day in the life of *a retired librarian* **Dr Diana Leitch MBE, FRSC**

The sun was shining as my husband, David, and I woke up early in Didsbury, Manchester, on Thursday 10 July 2014 for what was to be a very intensive day and the culmination of over 18 months of planning.

Bolton-born Nobel Prizewinner for Chemistry, Professor Sir Harry Kroto, now based in Tallahassee, Florida, was taking time out of his intensive travel schedule to visit the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum in Widnes, Cheshire, where he was going to do one of his famous 'buckyball' presentation workshops with 100 primary school children. I had become involved with Catalyst (www.catalyst.org.uk), which is the oldest science discovery centre in the UK and the only one specializing in the promotion of chemistry and the chemical industry to children and the general public, about two years ago, and in early 2013 I became a Trustee of the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre Trust. So why was Harry Kroto coming?

Well, in May 2013 I had attended the 300th Anniversary of the Chemistry Department of the University of Edinburgh, my alma mater, for the award of Honorary Degrees to my former research supervisor, Professor Evelyn Ebsworth, later Vice-Chancellor of Durham University, and Professor Sir Harry Kroto, by Sir Timothy O'Shea, the Principal of Edinburgh and former Chairman of Jisc. So I was able to renew acquaintance with Sir Timothy and Harry, whom I had last met when the John Rylands University Library of Manchester (JRULM) was involved in the John Dalton 200th anniversary celebrations of his first paper on atomic theory, held in Manchester in 2003. I asked Harry if he would come to Catalyst. After several months of waiting, Harry's wife, Margaret, contacted me to say that they could come on the morning of 10 July 2014 between visits to Rome, the Galapagos Islands, Sheffield, Bolton, Sussex and Moscow!

After a speedy breakfast for us, our dog and cat, and arranging for a neighbour to take our dog on her usual three-mile run by the Mersey valley, we drove the 30 miles to Widnes to get there before the Year 4 children (from three primary schools) and 20 teenagers (from the Liverpool UTC), who were coming to the event. Planning beforehand had been going well

288 despite one of the Widnes schools having to pull out because of the threatened teachers' strike on 10 July. A substitute class was found at short notice from my own two children's former school, Didsbury C of E Primary School, and all the children arrived for Harry's demo and their opportunity to make a C60 buckminsterfullerene (buckyball) model.



Diana with Nobel Prizewinner, Professor Sir Harry Kroto (photographed by David Leitch)



Harry Kroto making C60 buckyballs with a group of children from Didsbury C of E Primary School (photographed by David Leitch)

I introduced Harry to everyone, told them a bit about Nobel prizewinners, and the children were thrilled by the whole experience. An up-and-coming Widnes Vikings rugby league star, Declan Hulme, who is a sports science student at Edge Hill University, turned up to present Harry with a 'C70' rugby ball. After lunch Harry departed for Sussex and the children had an exciting workshop on the 'Origins of the Universe' before leaving for their schools. This left me to breathe a sigh of elated relief and to have a brief fundraising meeting with fellow Trustees and the Outreach Manager from the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC), who had come up from Cambridge. Fellow Trustee, Professor Alan Dronsfield, ex-Derby University, who was there, and I are members of the RSC Historical Group (RSC HG) and I am currently Treasurer of the Chemical Information and Computer Applications Group (CICAG) of the RSC, so we have been working closely with the RSC regarding support for Catalyst.

David and I arrived home by 4:30pm so, as the sun was still shining, we set off to the allotment to continue to pick the large quantities of redcurrants we had this year. These had to go straight in to one of my five freezers as there was no time that day to make any jams or chutneys, as I do most days, to raise funds for our 13th-century church. The apocryphal story in Didsbury since June is that I was awarded my MBE for the 'chemistry of jam making' not 'services to chemistry'. As we were picking, the mobile phone rang, and it was our granddaughter, Mhairi, aged two-and-a-half, wanting her usual chat with Grandma and Grandad, while being driven home from nursery in Glasgow by our surgeon daughter, Fiona. As we don't get to see them very often, for work reasons, phones and Skype are great assets in keeping in touch.



Daughter, Fiona, granddaughter, Mhairi and dog, Maisie (photographed in late July 2014 by Diana)

After dinner and a quick snooze in a chair, the day ended with my catching up with e-mails about various activities, including plans for the two RSC conferences in October 2014 for which I am acting as bookings administrator: one organized by CICAG, where I am working again with Helen Cooke (née Schofield), ex-UMIST Library and GSK, and the other organized by RSC HG on the chemicals of World War I. E-mails were also coming in about a meeting

289 with Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society Council members about the John Dalton 250th anniversary birth celebrations in 2016, an illustrated talk I was giving the following week to a U3A Group and thanks from former school friends for the highly successful 50th anniversary reunion four of us had organized on Saturday 5 July at our old school. (Was it really that long ago that we last saw each other and left Chester for pastures new and careers?) Sadly, 11 of our group of 60 have died already, which makes you determined to make the most of retirement whether in charitable activities, working on professional committees, doing consultancy work, undertaking grandparent duties or the other myriad of activities the retired are needed to undertake while also keeping their brains active. Carpe diem.

So finally, around midnight, to sleep “perchance to dream” about our forthcoming cruise in late July to Iberia and Morocco, an Edinburgh University dinner in September at Holyrood Palace and even a quick prayer that it might be possible for us retirees to have greatly reduced fees for a part-day’s attendance at the UKSG Conference in Glasgow in 2015 to meet up with ‘old mates’.

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