

**Professor Charles W. Rees 1927-2006**

## A tribute



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Charles W. Rees CBE was a renowned British chemist known for his significant contributions to organic chemistry. He was born in Egypt on October 15, 1927, where his father was serving in the British Army. On his return to the UK, Charles attended Farnham Grammar School before working as a laboratory technician at the Royal Aircraft Establishment in Surrey.

In 1950, he graduated from University College Southampton with a Bachelor of Science degree. He obtained his PhD in 1953 at the same institute under the guidance of Professor Norman B. Chapman, studying the reactions of chloropyridines and chloropyrimidines with nucleophiles. He went on to post-doctoral studies with Professor Adrian Albert at the Wellcome Research Institution in London, where he worked on antimicrobial compounds.

In 1955, he began his career as an Assistant Lecturer at Birkbeck College, London. He became a Reader at King's College, London in 1963, and went on to hold Chairs at the University of Leicester (1965), University of Liverpool (1969), and Imperial College, London (1978), where he remained active after his official retirement in 1993 until his death in 2006. He left behind his wife, Patricia, three sons, and seven grandchildren.

His scientific career was primarily focused on two themes: reactive intermediates, such as carbenes, nitrenes, and arynes, and unusual ring systems, particularly strained and novel aromatic systems. He explored these themes in mechanistic and synthetic organic chemistry, with a focus on heterocyclic chemistry, particularly heterocycles that were aromatic or antiaromatic and contained high proportions of nitrogen and/or sulfur atoms.

Charles published over 450 papers and mentored over 100 PhD students and 50 postdoctoral researchers and visiting scientists. He also co-founded/edited major reference works including Organic Reaction Mechanisms and with Alan Katritzky, FRS, Comprehensive Heterocyclic Chemistry I & II (1984 & 1996), and Comprehensive Organic Functional Group Transformations (1995). The long-standing friendship with Katritzky led, in the year 2000, to the establishment of the free, open access journal ARKIVOC.

He served on several boards, including President of the RSC Perkin Division (1981), RSC President (1992), and President of the Chemistry Association for the Advancement of Science. Honours received include the RSC Tilden Medal (1974), Fellow of the Royal Society (1974), RSC Award in Heterocyclic Chemistry (1980), RSC Pedler Medal (1984), Honorary DSc (University of Leicester) (1994), International Award in Heterocyclic Chemistry (1995), Fellowship of King's College London (1999) and an Honorary DSc (University of Sunderland (2000)). In light of his contributions to chemistry he was appointed Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the New Year's Honours List (1995). The RSC continues to honour his memory with the Charles Rees Award for excellence in the field of heterocyclic chemistry, covering the synthesis, properties and applications of all types of heterocyclic compounds.

In addition to his significant contributions to chemistry, Charles was also known for his love of bow ties, his quick sense of humour, and his ability to captivate audiences. Personally, I remember him for his open-mindedness and support in allowing me to explore unconventional lines of inquiry. Our one-on-one meetings in his office were always relaxed and friendly, often accompanied by a bag of crisps and a glass of chilled white wine. His legacy lives on through his family, mentees, and published works, which continue to inspire and inform the scientific community.

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