

OBITUARY

DONOVAN CHILTON

24 February 1909—17 January 1978

By the sudden death of Donovan Chilton the Society has lost one of its foundation members and one of its most zealous supporters. Don, as he was known to all, took a keen interest in the history of science and of technology. He was a regular attender at the Society's meetings, where his friendly nature and cheerful disposition endeared himself to all. He did much to further the interests of the Society and gave freely of his time, with service on Council extending from 1957 until 1974 and including vice-presidency (1962-63, 1971-74). But perhaps his greatest contribution was when as honorary treasurer (1963-69) he kept the Society's accounts without office assistance of any kind over a period when there was a rapid increase in membership.

A Londoner by birth, Don Chilton was educated at Latymer Upper School, Hammersmith. In 1928 he entered the Imperial College of Science and Technology, as a Royal Scholar, and two years later took a first class honours degree in physics. Research in electron diffraction under the direction of Professor G. P. Thomson occupied his third year at Imperial College and resulted in the award of the DIC. There followed a year of study in the Mineralogy Department of Göttingen University before Don entered industry as works physicist to Ilford Limited, with responsibility for testing and monitoring the factory production of photographic film.

His involvement with the history of science began in 1938 when he was appointed to the Science Museum as Assistant Keeper in the Department of Physics. During the war years he was seconded to the Air Ministry for duty in the Meteorological Office, and from 1942 to 1945 saw service at Ottawa with the United Kingdom Air Mission. Shortly after his return to South Kensington Don mounted a special exhibition of British and German naval mining and degaussing material used during the 1939-45 War. Subsequently his early Museum responsibilities were for the Surveying and Meteorology Collections, both of which were developed extensively under his direction. In the early 1950s he produced two more exhibitions: 'Science of weather' which commemorated the centenary of the Royal Meteorological Society, and 'Navigation today', an exhibition which largely through Don's enterprise and industry formed the basis of a new Museum Collection illustrating the history of navigation. In 1949 Don became a Deputy Keeper with added responsibilities for staff training and for public relations. Promotion to Keeper occurred in 1960 when he took charge of the Department of Electrical Engineering and Communications. From then until his retirement in 1974 his energies were largely employed in guiding the development of two collections to take account of modern technical advances in their respective fields: Telecommunications, and Printing & Paper-making.

Throughout his Museum career Don took part in the activities of several learned societies and professional associations. In 1950 he joined the Newcomen Society, and his interest in the history of surveying was later exemplified by the presentation of a paper on land measurement for estate survey in the sixteenth century. From 1950 to 1954 he was a member of the editorial board of the Royal Meteorological Society's monthly magazine *Weather*. From 1951 to 1968 he was a member of the Royal Institute of Navigation, serving for a time on the Insti-

tute's technical committee; and from 1963 to 1971 he served on telecommunications committees of the Institution of Electrical Engineers. On the professional side Don joined the Museums Association in 1947, became a Fellow in 1952, and for many years represented the Science Museum at the Association's annual conferences. He was admitted an Associate of the Institute of Physics in 1948 and a Fellow in 1961.

Shortly after his retirement from the Science Museum Don was appointed a Research Fellow to work on the history of the Royal Institution and he was later called on to write the Introductions to three volumes of the facsimile publication of the Minutes of the Managers of the Royal Institution (*The archives of the Royal Institution of Great Britain*, vols. xiii-xv). Don's studies of the experimental facilities provided for education and research shed new light on the laboratories and equipment of the Royal Institution, and on aspects of laboratory practice in general. In 1977 he spoke to our own Society about his findings, and he also contributed a paper on 'Research facilities at the Royal Institution, London, in the nineteenth century' to the XV International Congress of the History of Science. Don's death occurred only days after he had completed his studies at the Royal Institution, and it is sad to think that he did not live to publish the results of his research. However, his research notes which also include much interesting information on hitherto neglected aspects of the work carried out in London by James Dewar are currently undergoing examination to assess their suitability for publication; we can only hope that this may turn out to be possible.

J. A. CHALDECOTT