

Obituary

LESLIE BERNARD HUNT: 1906–1987

The death of Leslie Bernard Hunt on 9 April 1987 in an automobile accident has deprived our Society of a member who, in addition to pursuing a long and distinguished career as an industrial metallurgist, also found time to indulge his interest in the history of metallurgy. By publishing the results of his own research and by providing the means whereby others with similar interests were enabled to have their work published, Leslie made a significant contribution to the growth of knowledge of the history of gold, the metals of the platinum group, and the development of their uses in industry and elsewhere. In 1980 the International Precious Metals Institute conferred on him its distinguished Achievement Award.

Leslie was born in Loughborough on 11 July 1906. He was educated at Luton Grammar School, entered the Royal College of Science, London, in 1925 to read chemistry, and in 1927 graduated B.Sc. with honours. He then joined Vauxhall Motors Ltd, of Luton, where he was employed until 1935 as Assistant Metallurgist, and during that period he passed the external M.Sc. chemistry examination of London University in 1931, and was awarded a Ph.D. in 1934 for a thesis entitled 'A Study of the Structure of Electrodeposited Metals'. His professional qualifications included A.M.I.A.E. (1934) which changed to A.M.I.Mech.E. (1947) on the amalgamation of those two engineering Institutions; F.I.C. (1943); F.I.M. (1953); and F.S.A. (1982). He was Vice-President of the Institute of Metals from 1962 to 1965, and was one of the first members of the Historical Metallurgy Society (1963) and also of the Society of Jewellery Historians (1977).

¹ His acceptance address entitled 'Forty years of platinum: some recollections and reflections' is in *Precious Metals: Papers presented at the Fourth International Precious Metals Conference, Toronto 2–5 June 1980* (ed. R.O. McGachie and A.G. Bradley, Toronto, 1981, pp. 1–5).

Early in 1935 Leslie became Editor of the weekly trade and technical journal *The Metal Industry*,² and served in that capacity until November 1937, when he joined Mallory Metallurgical Products Ltd [MMP], a firm then based at Croydon. MMP manufactured the Elkonite series of heavy duty contact materials used in the electrical industry, and Leslie became the firm's Technical Manager. His move from Croydon to London's Hatton Garden occurred in 1939 after MMP became part of the Johnson Matthey group of companies.

The post-war reorganization of Johnson Matthey [JM] included the creation in 1946 of an Industrial Division with Leslie as its first Manager, and while still retaining supervision of MMP's commercial and technical interests, he also assumed responsibility for the entire sales and technical publicity of JM. His first book, *Electrical Contacts* (1946), served as a reference work for electrical engineers, providing advice on the design, selection and properties of suitable contact metals and alloys available from JM, as well as on the Elkonite range manufactured by MMP using the technique of powder metallurgy. In 1962 he was appointed an Executive Director of JM with responsibility for all aspects of the Company's research and development activities.

Retirement from the Executive Board of JM in 1969 was not the end of Leslie's association with that Company. Thirteen years earlier the Board of JM and the Directors of Rustenburg Platinum Mines, South Africa, had endorsed his own proposal to launch a new specialist journal that would provide a source of current information on the properties and

² Portrait reproduced in *Foundry Trade Journal*, (1937), 56, p. 470, and in *The Metal Industry*, (1939), 54, p. 69. For a 1957 portrait see *Bulletin of the Institute of Metals*, (1958), 4, p. 48; repeated in (1962), 6, p. 66.

industrial applications of platinum and its associated metals. His earlier experiences of editing a technical journal stood him in good stead when it came to creating this new quarterly publication, *Platinum Metals Review*, the first issue of which appeared in January 1957. Under Leslie's editorship, which continued throughout the remainder of his life, the journal achieved a world-wide readership, and in 1983 JM agreed to a Japanese translation being prepared and published by a leading precious metals firm in Japan.

Leslie had always been interested in archaeology and history, and it became his policy to include in each issue, whenever possible, a well-researched article on some historical aspect of the development or application of metals of the platinum group. To that end he contributed twenty-two articles of his own, and persuaded members of our own Society to provide a further nineteen articles.

A later publication that profited greatly from Leslie's editorship was the *Gold Bulletin*, launched in 1968 by the Chamber of Mines of South Africa, as a quarterly bulletin of abstracts from the technical literature on gold. The abstracts covered both articles and patents and were prepared by JM on behalf of the Chamber. During Leslie's visit to South Africa late in 1969 he persuaded the Directors of the Chamber of Mines to enlarge that publication by including articles on specific aspects of the utilization of gold in industry. Leslie master-

mind the change and acted as Editor until the end of 1977, when he retired but served for two further years as Advisory Editor. In its new form the *Gold Bulletin* bore a strong resemblance to *Platinum Metals Review*, and included historical articles on the working and application of gold from antiquity onwards. Between 1971 and 1984 Leslie provided sixteen articles based on his own historical research, three of which were published under the pseudonym of Bernard Caccia.

In the late 1970s Leslie embarked on a complete revision and enlargement of *A History of Platinum from the Earliest Times to the Eighteen-Eighties* (1960), written by Donald McDonald, a former colleague at JM. The outcome was *A History of Platinum and its Allied Metals* (1982), in which he treated the subject in far greater detail, incorporated the results of later historical research, and extended the period of time covered by some seventy-five years to include major discoveries of new sources of supply and more recent applications of those metals in the present century.

Leslie had always been interested in the history of alloys, and early in 1987 he began writing a book on the subject. His tragic death has robbed us all of what promised to be yet another scholarly and informative work that would have been of immense value to historians of science and technology.

J. A. CHALDECOTT