

BERNARD DYER

My Lady and Chancellor,

Bernard Dyer is a distinguished industrial chemist who spent much of his working life at senior levels in ICI, initially in its Plastics Division where he was concerned with all major projects and ultimately responsible for all of its new products. Latterly he was a member of the Board Support Group at the company's Millbank HQ. In retirement he has tirelessly served the British Association for Advancement of Science at its head office in London, and as founder-Chairman of the Wessex Branch. He has greatly enriched the life of this county as President of the Poole Maritime Trust, Chairman of the Poole Harbour Heritage Project, co-founder of the Dorset Education-Industry Partnership, and Chairman of *Dorset Life* magazine.

Bernard was born in Parkstone and has maintained links with this area throughout his life. From Poole Grammar School, with its reputation for excellence in science education, Bernard went to University College Southampton where he obtained a First Class Honours Degree in Chemistry from the University of London. During World War 2 he began as a chemist in the Admiralty munitions factory at Holton Heath between Poole and Wareham. Modesty makes him reluctant to speak of what happened there in 1942, but others tell the story for him. A very heavy air raid took place on the night of 3 – 4 June. Bernard was in charge of the nitroglycerine plant, where even a near miss could trigger a devastating explosion. To reduce this risk the plant had to be shut down: an hour-long operation, and no mean feat with bombs (and anti-aircraft fire) going off around the area. Bernard's colleagues remain surprised that his remarkable leadership and skill, which prevented a catastrophe and a disastrous interruption to the production of essential naval munitions, were not recognised by a decoration.

Bernard was also a qualified glider pilot; he would have liked to join the RAF but could not be released from his vital work at Holton Heath. His ingenious and characteristic response was to obtain a commission in the RAF Volunteer Reserve which gave him command of a Gliding School at Christchurch in 1944 - 45.

After the War he joined the Plastics Division of ICI. One Margaret Roberts, later to be Margaret Thatcher, was interviewed by ICI at about the same time as Bernard. He was appointed; she was not. What, he wonders, if the decision had gone the other way? But ICI was to be his home for the rest of his working life, and he joined it in the early days of the plastics industry. It was then the largest company in this country, and second only to Dupont in the USA. He worked successively and at increasingly senior levels in the Plastics Division (where he was involved in the development of PVC), Research, Technical Planning, Production, Technical Service, and Development. Among the many projects which he led was a mission to Indonesia, looking into the possibility of setting up a large petrochemical factory there in co-operation with the Indonesian Government. This was the kind of role he relished: the scientist, the expert advising politicians and other

leaders. With this wealth of experience he rose rapidly in ICI until he moved into company planning, and served as a member of the Board Support Group, at ICI's head office in Millbank, from 1974 until his retirement (after the normal retirement age, it should be said) in 1981.

Retirement is not perhaps the best description for what followed. ICI nominated Bernard as a staff member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He was always concerned at the poverty of links between science and industry, and through the British Association he has worked hard to get science better understood and applied. In the early 1990s he founded the Wessex Branch of the Association, working with the Dorset Institute which of course later evolved into this University. With Pamela Seaton, who was at that time Chairman of the County Education Committee, he set up the Dorset Education-Industry Partnership, which later became part of the County Council as the Dorset Education-Business Partnership. These and other involvements with Dorset activities and charities were stimulated by the late Peter Allsebrook – 'Mr Dorset' – who introduced him to John Newth, then the editor of *Dorset County Magazine*. John and Bernard together launched Dorset Magazine Ltd, the company which ever since has published *Dorset Life*, the popular periodical which celebrates this County's life and heritage. And he still managed to maintain his role as a scientific expert in political circles as a Member of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee from 1990 to 1998.

Bernard's interests in chemistry, industry and history have combined in the work of the Poole Harbour Heritage Project which he set up, in association with Professor Tim Darvill of this University, in 2000. This Project has carried out ground-breaking research into the history and archaeology of Poole Harbour. A summary is to be published next year in a book, *The Heritage of Poole Harbour*. Of particular personal significance to Bernard is the work which now shows clearly that the British chemical industry started at Poole in the sixteenth century. Later, technology from this area was combined with the raw materials found on the north-east coast, where much of ICI has been located. So his career and interests have in many ways turned full circle.

Bernard Dyer's scientific and professional distinctions have been widely recognised and honoured. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Chemistry in 1979 (later transformed into Fellowship of the Royal Society of Chemistry), and an Honorary Fellow of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 2004. He is much admired as a very skilful and energetic leader of high-profile projects, a determined and highly resourceful organiser and a master of diplomacy and persuasion. Time and again he has brought key people together and 'made things happen', as his late ICI boss Sir John Harvey Jones would say. An exceptional communicator, he has written and edited a number of papers on industrial matters and lectured to international, national and regional societies. Since the 1980s he has been a staunch and inspirational supporter of this University and its predecessors.

My Lady and Chancellor, I have the honour to present Bernard Dyer, and ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.