



*Merry Christmas
from
Biochemistry at Otago*



15th December 2010

2010 has been a big year for the Biochemistry Department. We have a new HOD, Professor Kurt Krause; we had a departmental review; we embraced the “new technology” and made a Facebook page; we had some success in grant funding; we lost two senior members of staff to retirement; members of staff won a number of major awards; and we gained another professor.

To take the last of these first, Iain Lamont was promoted to professor in December 2009 and gave his inaugural professorial lecture on the 7th of October. After an amusing and informative overview of his educational (school in St Andrews, undergraduate degree at Edinburgh, DPhil at Oxford) and career (Post-doc in Adelaide) history pre-Otago, Iain gave a summary of his research findings over the last 23 years here. The video of this lecture is supposed to be appearing on iTunes U at some stage, but the people in charge of getting it there seem to be having a few problems. Hopefully it will turn up soon. Iain did a superb job of making a complex subject interesting and accessible to the lay audience, so it will be well worth watching when it does.

Iain was also the recipient of the New Zealand Microbiological Society’s distinguished speaker (orator) award for 2010 and presented the annual distinguished speaker oration at the NZMS/NZBMB joint conference earlier this month.

At the same conference, Catherine Day was awarded the New Zealand Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Life Technologies award. This is the premier award of the Society and is awarded annually for outstanding scientific research. Catherine gave a great talk on her research team’s work on RING domain proteins, their role in apoptotic pathways, and the regulation of their activities.

Saving the most prestigious award for last, Warren Tate was this year awarded the Rutherford Medal, New Zealand’s highest scientific honour.

Warren was recognised for “outstanding scientific achievements in molecular biology and molecular neuroscience, for enthusiastic support and mentoring of young researchers, for tireless contributions to science policy and funding at national and international levels, and for public outreach with respect to molecular science”.

The Rutherford Medal recognises an exceptional contribution to the advancement and promotion of public understanding of science as well as excellent science practice.

Remarkably, the only other University of Otago scientist to have received the honour is Warren’s PhD supervisor, and the Department of Biochemistry’s HOD from 1968 to 1990, Emeritus Professor George Petersen, who won the medal in 2003. George still has an office in the Department by the way, and is working on a history of the Department.

Kevin Farnden and Mary Thompson both retired this year, Kevin in August and Mary at the beginning of December. We had morning teas and dinners to see them off, and wished them all the best for a relaxing future. Kevin has been swimming and cycling, still plays bridge, and goes dancing at least once a week. Mary plans to enroll half-time at the Fine and Visual Arts Academy at Kings High taking art history, drawing, printmaking and painting so that will hopefully kick-start her creative side. She also wants to devote more time to her role as Regional Rep. for Otago Branch of the Ornithological Society and be actively involved in some bird monitoring projects, as well as endeavouring to lower her golf handicap.

We are currently in the process of finding replacements for Kevin and Mary, with a different candidate giving a seminar each day this week.

Warren Tate, Catherine Day, Kurt Krause, and Parry Guilford all received major HRC funding this year; Sigurd Wilbanks and Sally McCormick were granted money from the Anderson Trust; Peter Dearden, Mike Legge, and Martin Hohmann-Marriott received money from the Marsden Fund; and Parry Guilford and Cushla McKinney received Lotteries Health money.

The Departmental review took place in the first week of December, so we haven't had the full report back yet. The preliminary report was very supportive, however, with the overseas reviewer saying he didn't see how we managed to get the results we do in such cramped quarters. Wouldn't a shiny new **big** building be great! The review was a massive undertaking, with the entire front office pitching in. Special thanks are due of course to Teena and Frances who had to shoulder a huge chunk of the work in addition to all of their usual duties.

John Cutfield stood down as Head of Department in February after five years at the helm, and was succeeded by Kurt Krause. He is a Texan crystallographer who came to Otago in late 2005. Kurt is a fully qualified physician and his research focusses on infectious diseases, enzyme mechanism and bioluminescence. In the time Kurt has been here he has really become a part of the department, rivalling Warren in the area of punning - which is not necessarily a good thing.

We'd really love to know what you are all doing with yourselves. We tend to lose touch with the students who don't continue on in academia, and they are frequently the students who have the most interesting stories. Please drop us a line, let us know where you are and what interesting employment (and/or family developments) you have had since leaving us. You can also "like" our Facebook page in order to be kept up-to-date with the happenings in the Biochemistry Department.

Email your news to: biochemistry@otago.ac.nz

or

Post your news to : The Secretary, Department of Biochemistry, PO Box 56, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand
and

"Like" us at <http://www.facebook.com/Biochemistry.Otago>

Best wishes for Christmas and the coming year,

from

Bronwyn Carlisle, on behalf of

the Biochemistry staff and students

2010 Graduations

This year the Biochemistry Department's alumni ranks were increased by eleven BSc graduates in Biochemistry, fourteen in Genetics, and two in Plant Biotechnology; one PGDipSci graduate in Biochemistry; three BAppSci and one BAppSci(Hons) graduates; six BSc(Hons) graduates in Biochemistry and four in Genetics; eight MSc graduates in Biochemistry and one in Genetics; and one Genetics and seven Biochemistry PhD graduates.



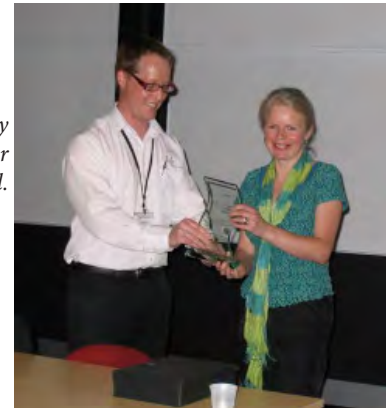
Warren receiving the Rutherford Medal, and (below) the medal itself.



New HOD Kurt Krause (right) with his lab group on an outing.



Warren's students decorated the lab in preparation for his return from the award ceremony.



Catherine Day receiving her award.



Photos taken at this week's Biochemistry Graduates' Reception



Kurt and Mary at her farewell morning tea (above), and Mary with the previous three HODs at her dinner (right).



Kevin and Kurt at Kevin's morning tea (above), and Kevin wearing one of the many gifts he received at his farewell dinner (left).



Department Publications for 2010

- E.A Ariazi, E Brailoiu, S Yerrum, H.A Shupp, M.J Slifker, H.E Cunliffe, M.A Black, A.L Donato, J.B Arterburn, T.I Oprea, E.R Prossnitz, N.J Dun, V.C Jordan. The G protein-coupled receptor GPR30 inhibits proliferation of estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer cells. *Cancer Research* (2010) vol. 70 (3) pp. 1184-1194
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- R.W Bentley, I Cleynen, R.B Gearry, M.L Barclay, P Rutgeerts, T.R Merriman, M Ferrante, R.L Roberts, S Vermeire. Evidence that glioma-associated oncogene homolog 1 is not a universal risk gene for inflammatory bowel disease in Caucasians. *Genes and immunity* (2010)
- Bernhardt and Tate. The transition from noncoded to coded protein synthesis: did coding mRNAs arise from stability-enhancing binding partners to tRNA?. *Biology direct* (2010) vol. 5 pp. 16
- A.A.M Bokor, J.A.L van Kan, R.T.M Poulter. Sexual mating of *Botrytis cinerea* illustrates PRP8 intein HEG activity. *Fungal Genetics and Biology* (2010) vol. 47 (4) pp. 392-398
- Rachel J Brace, Brie Sorrenson, Dmitri Sviridov, Sally P A McCormick. A gel-based method for purification of apolipoprotein A-I from small volumes of plasma. *Journal of lipid research* (2010) vol. 51 (11) pp. 3370-6
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- Day. Laser microdissection of paraffin-embedded plant tissues for transcript profiling. *Methods in molecular biology* (Clifton, NJ) (2010) vol. 655 pp. 321-46
- Gemma C Dickson, Russell T M Poulter, Elizabeth W Maas, P Keith Probert, Jules A Kieser. Marine bacterial succession as a potential indicator of postmortem submersion interval. *Forensic science international* (2010) pp.
- Andrea E Donaldson, Nicole K Walker, Iain L Lamont, Stephen J Cordiner, Michael C Taylor. Characterising the dynamics of expired bloodstain pattern formation using high-speed digital video imaging. *International journal of legal medicine* (2010)
- A.E Donaldson, M.C Taylor, S.J Cordiner, I.L Lamont. Using oral microbial DNA analysis to identify expired bloodspatter. *International journal of legal medicine* (2010) pp. 1-8
- Duncan and Dearden. Evolution of a genomic regulatory domain: the role of gene co-option and gene duplication in the Enhancer of split complex. *Genome research* (2010) vol. 20 (7) pp. 917-28
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- Ryuji Fukuzawa, Sarah K Holman, C W Chow, Ravi Savarirayan, Anthony E Reeve, Stephen P Robertson. WTX mutations can occur both early and late in the pathogenesis of Wilms tumour. *Journal of medical genetics* (2010)

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