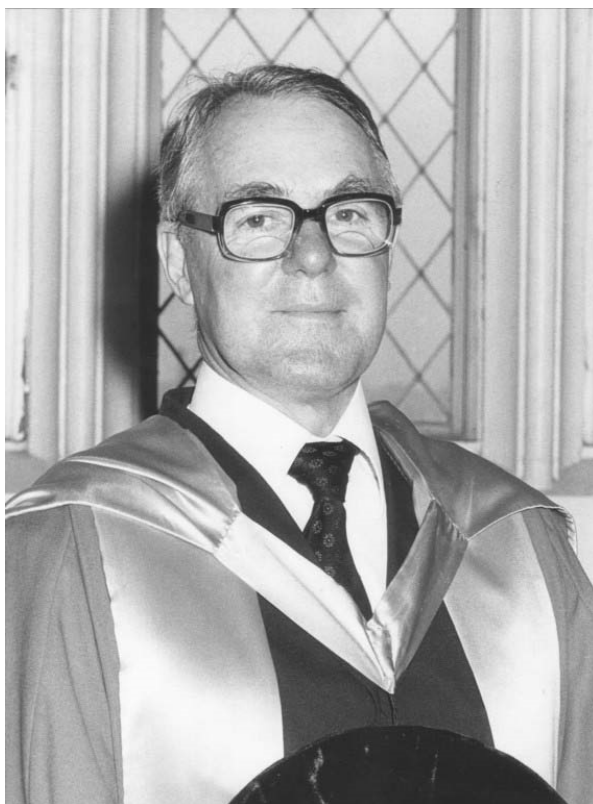


Sir John Warcup Cornforth

The degree of Doctor of Science (*honoris causa*) was conferred upon Sir John Warcup Cornforth at a ceremony held in the Great Hall on 2 November 1977.



Sir John Warcup Cornforth, *photo G3_224_1122*,
University of Sydney Archives.

Citation

A Nobel Prize-winning chemist who has been totally deaf for the past 40 years will be awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Science by the University at a ceremony in the Great Hall next Wednesday, November 2, 1977.

He is Sir John Cornforth, 60, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1975 for his work on the stereochemistry of enzyme-catalysed reactions.

He is currently the Royal Society Research Professor at the University of Sussex, and during his four-week visit to Australia he will deliver lectures in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide.

Sir John entered this University at the age of 16. The first signs of his deafness (from otosclerosis) had begun when he was 10, and although he had been able to profit from teaching at Sydney Boys' School, he was unable to hear any lecture at the University.

He was, however, attracted by laboratory work in organic chemistry (which he had done in an improvised laboratory at home since the age of 14) and by the availability of original chemical literature.

In 1937 he graduated with first-class honours and the University medal.

After a year of postgraduate research he won a scholarship to work at Oxford. Two such scholarships were awarded each year, and the other was won by Rita Harradence, also of Sydney and also a winner of the University medal.

They were married in 1941, and Mrs (now Lady) Cornforth has been Sir John's most constant scientific collaborator, and has eased the difficulties of communication that accompany deafness.

In winning the Nobel Prize, Sir John's major contribution was to reveal the biochemical pathway for the synthesis from acetic acid molecules of the substance, squalene, and its conversion into the fundamentally

important cholesterol molecules.

His most recent and consummate achievement has been the synthesis of the "chiral methyl group" - a carbon atom bearing the three isotopes of hydrogen and thereby made asymmetric.

He has used this group to trace the stereochemical consequences of certain enzyme processes, opening up new vistas in research.

Sir John's work in other areas of organic chemistry covers a variety of natural products, foremost being his work on the structure of penicillin and chemical synthesis in the field of sex hormones.

Following the conferral of degrees, Sir John will deliver the Inaugural Ern Ritchie Memorial Lecture, entitled "Order and Disorder in Enzymic Systems", in Lecture Theatre I of the School of Chemistry at 6pm.

This will be a fitting tribute to Ernest Ritchie, who rose to become Professor of Organic Chemistry at this University until his untimely death last year.

Ern Ritchie was one of four outstanding organic chemistry students who graduated in the late 1930's: the others being John Cornforth, Rita Harradence and Arthur Birch.

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