



## Who was Alan Ansell?

The SAMS research aquarium is named after the late Dr Alan Ansell (1934-1999) who had spent most of his professional life at the Association studying bivalves and other animals on the shores around the world and in the 'old' aquarium at the Institute.

The refurbished aquarium was opened by his widow, Joyce, on 20 October 2008.

**"Despite all of the fine accomplishments in his career, being an excellent scientist with a humble demeanour, possibly his greatest attribute was enthusiasm."**

For many years Alan Ansell was to the fore of research in molluscan ecology and physiology, with a publication record that spanned five decades.

After graduating from Reading University in Zoology in 1956 his research career began with a PhD at Glasgow and then post-doctoral studies on *Venus* at Southampton, assessing the benefits of growing them in the heated effluent from Fawley power station. In the early 1960s Alan moved back to Scotland with a position at the Millport marine station, and then moved to the Scottish Marine Biological Association (now SAMS) at Oban in 1969, where he stayed until his death.

In the 1960s and 1970s Alan Ansell produced seminal molluscan papers on behaviour, metabolism, biochemical composition, growth rates, circulation, temperature tolerances, population energy flows, and many other subjects. He was especially fond of *Donax*, on which he wrote a major review in 1983. In more recent years he worked extensively on interactions between fish predators and bivalve populations, and focussed on siphon regeneration. He had also recently carried out a video study of echiuran worms. And I will never forget his description of the explosive nature of their defaecation cycle. He published nearly 200 papers, was an honorary lecturer at the University of Stirling and was awarded a DSc by Glasgow University in 1981. After retiring in 1994 Alan continued his active participation in science. He was managing editor of *Oceanography and Marine Biology Annual*

*Reviews.* When he died Alan had published a paper the previous month in the *Journal of Molluscan Studies* on recovery from siphon damage in *Donax vittatus*. He also had two more papers in press and more close to submission on burrowing rates in Antarctic bivalves and anemones.

Alan's technical capacity was also great, embracing calorimetry, cinematographic and video analysis, and biochemistry, as well as being one of the first biologists to use a physiograph in the study of pressure cycles in burrowing and boring bivalves. He also conducted significant work on crustaceans, fish and brachiopods, but his main love was for bivalve molluscs.

Alan will be remembered dearly by his many students, for he was a conscientious and gifted supervisor who always made time and was good at gauging when a student needed leading and when they needed pointing in the right direction. His collaborators and colleagues will miss him too, for his great efforts and detailed contributions. Alan had an understated way of working, was quick to see the good in others and their work and usually met life with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his lips.

Despite all of the fine accomplishments in his career, being an excellent scientist with a humble demeanour, possibly his greatest attribute was enthusiasm. His thirst for understanding took him to many places around the world from Oman to Chile, India to Venezuela and South Africa to Brazil. Alan was most at home on a seashore. He had the true curiosity and enthusiasm of youth for the animals living there, and this stayed with him throughout his life. He especially enjoyed working in the malacological workshops in Hong Kong and had strong links with New Zealand and France, having supervised and examined students for French colleagues and published joint papers with many authors from Brittany.

At home Alan had a wide circle of friends, and he was well liked in the Oban community. He was a keen gardener as the surroundings of his house on Ardconnel Hill attest. In this area too Alan had successes. He was president of the Oban and Lorne Horticultural Society, he judged at local shows, and won prizes for his rhododendrons and azaleas. Above all else Alan placed his family. He was proud that his two children had become successful in their own right in Portsmouth and New Zealand. Both he and Joyce shared immense pleasure in their grandchildren.

Alan finally succumbed to cancer after a struggle that characterised the way he had lived throughout his life. He continued to work from his computer at home when he could not get in to the laboratory. His sense of humour stayed to the fore, and in his discussions with me it was apparent that his caring for other people and his passion for science was still as bright as ever.

I, amongst others, will miss a fine intellect, a high quality scientist, a gentle friend, and above all a genuinely fine human being.

Lloyd Peck, British Antarctic Survey