

Obituary

DR JOHN ROBERT ASHWORTH, 1946–2012



John Ashworth was a distinguished mineralogist and petrologist who served the Mineralogical Society as a member of Council in the 1980s and as Vice-President in 1988.

Born in Manchester and brought up in Derby, John attended Derby Grammar School from where he won entrance to Christ's College, Cambridge, to read Natural Sciences. He went on to obtain his doctorate at Cambridge University, in what was then the Department of Mineralogy and Petrology. His thesis work on Scottish high grade metamorphic rocks started an interest in migmatites that lasted throughout his career; this was a research area in which John went on to make distinguished contributions and to write one book of which he was the sole author, and to co-edit another key textbook. The latter was the second volume in the Mineralogical Society Series *High-temperature Metamorphism and Crustal Anatexis*, J.R. Ashworth and M. Brown, editors. After completing his doctoral studies, John moved on to the Physics Department at the University of Essex where he worked with Professor David Barber. This period saw him

making important contributions in what was to be his other great area of research interest, the study of meteorites. Using a range of petrological techniques and, in particular, using the transmission electron microscope to study the microstructures of these fascinating extra-terrestrial materials, John played a key role in unravelling the story of planetary history locked in these rocks. His contribution to the literature on meteoritics included four papers published in the journal *Nature*. Overall, in a research career of over 30 years, John published more than 70 highly cited papers in a range of prestigious international journals.

In 1976, following on from his postdoctoral research, John was appointed to a lectureship in geology at the relatively new Department of Geological Sciences at Aston University in Birmingham. In 1988, with the major reorganization of UK university Earth Sciences departments, the Aston Department merged with the long established Department of Geology at the University of Birmingham to form a new School of Earth Sciences. John was a lecturer in the new

School from 1988 until his retirement in September 2003.

As a person John was self-effacing and modest to a fault. Notwithstanding his international academic status, he never sought promotion despite strong encouragement to do so, and remained a lecturer until his retirement. Alongside his research work, he taught mineralogy and petrology to undergraduates with rigour and enthusiasm, and was also a highly competent field geologist. Undergraduates, initially in awe of this academic with wild bushy hair, nicotine-stained fingers and a rather scruffy old jacket, came to appreciate John and develop an affection

for him, despite his idiosyncratic ways. A very private person, he was nevertheless always generous with his expertise. Whether you were an academic colleague or a first year undergraduate, John would always be prepared to give of his time. Never patronising he would deal with queries from us, his intellectual inferiors, with patience and kindness. His scientific contributions have stood the test of time, and surely will continue to do so, and generations of students have reasons to be grateful for his excellence as a teacher.

ANDY CHAMBERS
DAVID VAUGHAN