

in recent memory)." What's the matter with Phil Morse? Was he some kind of klutz, or did the fact that he once served as President of the Acoustical Society of America condemn him to the dust heap? You see that ASA paranoia is still in good form.

At a farewell meeting honoring Hans Frauenfelder on his departure as AIP Governing Board chairman, Bob opened his remarks with

I feel in strange territory tonight. First, I went off the AIP Governing Board just before this meeting began, after some 24 years. . . . I have fought my battles against Hans, against Ken, and finally against the wishes of the majority of the Governing Board. I have been defeated and that war is over. I therefore feel I have something in common with those ancient chiefs of Gaul, who, having been conquered by Caesar, marched behind him at his triumph in Rome. Of course, after that triumph, the chiefs were executed. Perhaps my going off the Board is the modern equivalent.

Bob's presence in AIP and ASA activities continues to be missed. His stu-

dents knew him as a compassionate father figure who gave them all equal time, regardless of their ability; they felt they had benefited by his council, although they were unable to emulate his talent for telling stories and jokes. His colleagues were unanimous in admiring his knowledge of many languages, his general erudition, and his success in promoting international scientific cooperation.

Murray Strasberg
Naval Surface Warfare Center,
Carderock Division
West Bethesda, Maryland

John David North

A historian of astronomy, scientific instruments, and medieval physics, John David North died in Oxford, UK, on 31 October 2008 after a three-year battle with cancer.

Born on 19 May 1934, North spent most of his childhood in Yorkshire in northern England. He attended Batley Grammar School before entering Oxford University to read mathematics, and soon switched to politics, philosophy, and economics. Later he completed a degree in mathematics, physics, and astronomy at the Univer-

sity of London. North returned to Oxford for his doctorate, for which he explored the history and philosophy of theoretical cosmology in the early 20th century. His thesis was a pioneering and comprehensive work that gave due weight to the importance of philosophical issues for cosmology. It led in 1965 to his first book, *The Measure of the Universe* (Clarendon Press), which was reprinted in paperback in 1990 (Dover Publications) with a new introduction.

Between 1963 and 1968, North was a Nuffield Foundation fellow at Oxford. In 1968 he became librarian and assistant curator of the university's Museum of the History of Science. In that position he had daily contact with the museum's magnificent collection of scientific instruments. Those encounters strongly influenced his research directions.

North's exceptional abilities at "reading" the artifacts of medieval science, allied with a natural talent for languages, would prove crucial for much of his scholarship. One of his early interests was the career of Richard of Wallingford (1292-1336), an Oxford-trained mathematician and astronomer who became abbot of the great abbey of Saint Albans and, in North's opinion, was "the most original English scientist of the later middle ages." In 1976 North published

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his monumental, three-volume *Richard of Wallingford: An Edition of His Writings with Introductions, English Translation and Commentary* (Clarendon Press). The edition included a manuscript from Oxford's Bodleian Library he had earlier identified as an account of an elaborate mechanical clock—the earliest mechanical clock for which there is a detailed description. In 2005 North published *God's Clockmaker: Richard of Wallingford and the Invention of Time* (Hambledon Continuum). The text was a one-volume study of Richard and the context within which he worked, and it was aimed at a broad readership.

North's mastery of medieval physics, mathematics, and astronomy—which, of course, was interwoven with astrology in that period—was also displayed in a series of studies of the famous English writer Geoffrey Chaucer, himself the author of a book on the astrolabe. Those studies resulted in *Chaucer's Universe* (Clarendon Press, 1988), in which North argued that Chaucer's story plots often had to be interpreted in the light of medieval astronomical and astrological knowledge. A reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* concluded that *Chaucer's Universe* was "one of the century's monuments of scholarship."

North joined the Netherlands' University of Groningen as chair in the history of philosophy and the exact sciences in 1977. He was dean of the faculty of philosophy between 1990 and 1993. Not one to be restricted by traditional academic boundaries, North turned to an examination of Neolithic structures in northern Europe after excavations of a burial mound near his home piqued his curiosity. The outcome was another big book, *Stonehenge: Neolithic Man and the Cosmos* (Harper-Collins, 1996). North argued for the centrality of sky events, particularly the motions of the Sun and the Moon between their standstill points on the horizon, for understanding just about every artifact in the Neolithic landscape. His detailed accounts, however, have proven highly controversial, with critics claiming that North had read too much into Stonehenge and other Neolithic constructions.

With *The Ambassadors' Secret: Holbein and the World of the Renaissance* (Hambledon and London, 2002), North turned to art history. He fashioned a radical interpretation of Hans Holbein the Younger's 1533 dual portrait of Jean de Dinteville, the French king's representative in Troyes, and Georges de Selve, bishop of Lavour. Despite the



John David North

array of scientific and horological instruments and globes the painting contains, readings of it had generally paid little attention to those objects. North examined them in great depth and teased out what he argued were the painting's hidden meanings, including astrological ones; he reckoned the entire painting forms a horoscope square, for example. For North, a viewer needs to see *The Ambassadors* as a profound work centered on the crucifixion of Christ and Christian redemption. While art historians have often been critical, historians of science have received North's interpretation much more favorably. As one reviewer put it, North for the first time had afforded "due seriousness to [the painting's] scientific and technical content."

North had published a one-volume history of astronomy and cosmology in 1994. A decade later he began to revise and expand it; many more and better quality illustrations were added, and it was published as *Cosmos: An Illustrated History of Astronomy and Cosmology* (University of Chicago Press, 2008). *Cosmos* bears rich witness to both North's knowledge and his fluent writing style.

John North was a modest, genial, and charming man who will be greatly missed. For anyone who met him or heard him lecture, his apparently reserved manner could not obscure for long the chief qualities at the heart of his scholarship: the remarkable breadth of his learning and his tenacity in tackling tough questions. With his death, the history of science has lost one of its most distinguished practitioners.

Robert W. Smith
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada ■

UNIVERSITY MUSEUM GRONINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS