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4. Bengt Rånby (1920-2000)

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Personalities in Polymer Science



Bengt Ranby
1920-2000

It is with great sadness, that we have to report the unexpected death on October 10, 2000 of Professor Bengt Ranby, a dear friend, and a member of the Advisory Board of POLYMER NEWS since its inception.

When we think of **Cellulose Chemistry**, when we think of **Photochemistry**, especially the **photochemistry of polymers**, we remember **Bengt Gustaf Ranby of the Royal Institute of Technology**.

Several months ago, we celebrated Bengt Ranby's 80th birthday with a small Symposium for students and close friends in Stockholm (see the Conference Report on page 64 of this issue). The rest of the world celebrated Ranby's 80th birthday at an International Symposium in China, shortly thereafter.

Bengt Ranby was born in Nierisöl, Ranea, Norrbotten, in Sweden on April 5, 1920. He was raised and educated in Sweden, receiving his baccalaureate in Lund in 1938. Bengt then studied at the world-famous University of Uppsala, Sweden, receiving the B.Sc. in 1940, his M. S. in 1945, the licentiate in chemistry in 1950 and the Ph.D., with the famous Professor and Nobel Laureate, The Svedberg, in 1952 on the Structure of Cellulose. He was soon appointed "Docent" and University Lecturer in Physical Chemistry at Uppsala.

While a member of the staff at Uppsala, he went abroad to Brooklyn, NY where he spent one year at "Brooklyn Poly" working on synthetic polymers with the legendary Professor Herman Mark. After two years in Sweden, Bengt Ranby returned to the US as

a Research Scientist at the American Viscose Corporation and then went to the State University of New York, College of Forestry in Syracuse, NY as Research Professor.

In 1961, Ranby was invited back to Sweden to become Professor of Polymer Technology at the Royal Institute of Technology, a chair he held for 25 years until his retirement. For a 4-year period Bengt Ranby was also the Dean of the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering.

Ranby had a tremendous impact on polymer science worldwide and especially on polymer science in Scandinavia. His department became a leading institution of higher learning in polymer science in the world. Ranby achieved this leading position because of his personal scientific competence, his leadership in science, and his exceptional and warm personality. He has traveled, lectured, and consulted extensively worldwide in polymer science, catalysis, on photochemistry and on radical reactions.

Ranby supervised a total of 32 doctoral and 25 master students and published more than 420 papers in scientific journals, he was on the Editorial Board of a number of those journals including *Polymer News* and wrote or edited eight books. Ranby's research reached many fields. His work in cellulose, starch, and synthetic polymer chemistry is considered a classical contribution to worldwide science.

Many honors have been bestowed on Bengt Ranby: Honorary doctoral degrees (honoris causa) from the University of Wrocław, Poland (1978), the University of Helsinki, Finland (1982), and the Polytechnic University in Brooklyn NY (1995).

Bengt Ranby was a Member of the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences, Uppsala, the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences, Stockholm, the Finnish Academy of Sciences, the International Academy of Wood Science, and the Polish Academy of Sciences. Since 1985 Professor Ranby was a Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and, for some time, also a member of the Executive Board.

Ranby received a number of Awards including the Anselme Payen Award, The Great Prize of the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, the Herman F. Mark Medal, the Distinguished Service Award of Polymer Science, Society of Polymer Science and the Wilhelm Exner Medal, of Austrian Industrial Federation, Vienna, Austria 1996.

Bengt Ranby served on the Boards of several Scandinavian organizations as a consultant and advisor for industry and Government. For 10 years, he was the Chairman of the Swedish Polymer Society, which he had founded. He was also one of the founders of the European Polymer Federation.

These examples show Ranby as scientist, teacher, lecturer, and scientific politician of global stature. He was an exceptional personality well known for his keen wit, excellent sense of humor, and gentle manner. Over the years he was until his death in demand as a lecturer on subjects ranging from photochemistry, polymer chemistry and general philosophy.

Bengt Ranby represented the "Renaissance man". He knew the Latin names of all the European plants and many of the plants of the world. After all, he came from the school, the University of Uppsala, where Linnaeus was teaching, named the plants and revolutionized the thinking of the world of Botany.

He is survived by his wife Aina, nee Aina Ingeborg Charlotta Hulcrantz, his 3 children Mats, Brigitte, Hans and several grandchildren.

This article was prepared by **Gerald S. Kirshenbaum**, Ednoe, Polymer News, Summit, NJ, USA, and **Otto Vogl**, Herman F. Mark Professor Emeritus, Amherst MA, USA.

Please also see POLYMER NEWS 26(2), 64-67 (2001), 21(2), 66-74 (1996), and 20(2), 49-50 (1995).

