

John Aitchison 1926 - 2016

John Aitchison, Krumbein Medalist (1997) and Vicepresident (1989–1993) of the International Association for Mathematical Geosciences (IAMG), Honorary President of the recently founded Association for Compositional Data (CoDa-Association), died in Glasgow on December 23, 2016, after a short illness.

John Aitchison was born in East Linton, East Lothian, Scotland (UK) on July 22, 1926. He studied Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh (1943-1947) and Mathematical Statistics at the University of Cambridge (1949–1951). He married Muriel Shackleton in 1952, and they had three children from which there are now five grandchildren.

The same year, 1952, John started his rich and fruitful academic life. He started as a statistician in the Department of Applied Economics at the University of Cambridge (1952–1956), then moved to the University of Glasgow, where he was a Lecturer in Statistics in the Department of Mathematics (1956–1962). From there he went to the University of Liverpool as a Senior Lecturer and Reader (1962–1974), as well as Head of the Sub-Department of Mathematical Statistics. He returned to the University of Glasgow as Titular Professor of Statistics and Mitchell Lecturer in Statistics (1974-1976). He started the second half-century of his life as Professor of Statistics at the University of Hong Kong (1976-1989). After retirement, he went to the United States, to the University of Virginia, where he was Professor of Statistics and Chairman of the Division of Statistics until 1994. That year he closed the circle and returned to Glasgow. The list of societies he is or has been a fellow or member is long: the Royal Statistical Society (since 1960); the Royal Society of Edinburgh (since 1968); the International Statistical Institute (1974–1994); the Hong Kong Statistical Society (since 1978, First President and now Honorary Member); the Bernoulli Society for Mathematical Statistics and Probability (1979–1994); the International Association for Mathematical Geology (since 1980, Vice-President 1989–1993); the Institute of Mathematical Statistics and the Association for Compositional Data (CoDa-Association, Honorary President 2015-2016). He has been joint Editor of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B (1963–1965) and Associate Editor of *Biometrika* (1966–1969).

John's scientific activity was centered in statistical inference, with special emphasis on practical Bayesian techniques; in multivariate analysis, particularly in compositional data analysis; and in statistical prediction analysis and in medical statistics. This research activity has seen the light in many publications, specially books, and research papers. His first book, *The Lognormal Distribution* (Cambridge University Press, 1957) co-authored with J. A. C. Brown, is still one of the standard references in statistical libraries. His last book, *The Statistical Analysis of Compositional Data* (Chapman and Hall, 1986), has been seminal to all recent developments in Compositional Data Analysis and the inspiration of the next generation of researchers in this field.

Out of his many research papers two have been particularly important: *The Statistical Analysis of Compositional Data (with Discussion)* (*Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B*, 1982), for which he received the Guy Medal in Silver from the same society, and "A New Approach to Null Correlations of Proportions," published in *Mathematical Geology* in 1981, for which he received the Best Paper Award from the journal. These papers, among many others related to the subject of compositional data analysis, have meant a real breakthrough in a field that has been stagnant in its theoretical evolution since Karl Pearson identified the problem as the spurious correlation problem in 1987.

In his last years of activity he said goodbye with the gift of a series of "last talks" and performances both as a singer and as a magician during the CoDaWork social dinners. Thanks John for your legacy. The scientific community deeply regrets your loss. Our thoughts are with your family and friends at this sad time.

*Vera Pawlowsky-Glahn
December 2016*