

## **William B. Thompson, UCSD physics professor, dies**

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WILLIAM B. THOMPSON. UCSD PHYSICS PROFESSOR

William B Thompson, a pioneer in fusion energy research and former chair of the physics department at the University of California, San Diego, died Tuesday, October 17, while swimming in the ocean off La Jolla. He was 73.

Dr. Thompson's career was devoted to the development of the theory of plasma physics and how it might be applied to develop a fusion energy reactor. He was the theoretical member of a small group of scientists who pioneered fusion energy research in England in 1950--a group that ultimately developed into the Culham Laboratory for Controlled Thermonuclear Fusion.

He was co-chairman of the first international workshop on plasma physics and controlled fusion which was held in 1964 as the first activity of the International Atomic Energy Authority's Center for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy.

"He was not only an excellent theoretical physicist, but also a person with wide-ranging interests and very broad culture, enhanced by an almost photographic memory," said Thomas O'Neil, professor of physics at UCSD.

"I enjoyed talking with him about any subject," said Marshall Rosenbluth, professor emeritus of physics at UCSD. "Conversations with Bill Thompson were not only informative but enjoyable--full of wit and good humor."

Born February 27, 1922 in Belfast, Ireland, Dr. Thompson received his bachelor of arts degree in physics and mathematics in 1944 and his M.A. in physics in 1947 from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. In 1950, he received his Ph.D. in applied mathematics from the University of Toronto, Ontario. He then became a Senior Fellow in the Theoretical Physics Division of Harwell, the research laboratory of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, where he remained for 10 years. He then moved to Culham Laboratory for Controlled Thermonuclear Fusion, where he served as head of the Theoretical Physics Division.

From 1963 to 1965, Dr. Thompson was professor of plasma physics at Oxford University. In 1965, he joined the UCSD faculty as professor of physics, and served as chair of the department from 1969-1972.

Dr. Thomson was a member of the American Physical Society, the Canadian Association of Physics and the Royal Astronomical Societies. In addition, he served as a consultant to several private industries and government bodies; as a council member of the Plasma Physics Division of the American Physical Society; as associate editor of the Journal of Plasma Physics; joint editor of Advances in Plasma Physics and Plasma Physics and Controlled Thermonuclear Fusion; and on the editorial board of Interscience Tracts on Physics and Astronautics.

Dr. Thompson, a resident of La Jolla, is survived by his wife Johanna E. Thompson; a daughter and son from his first marriage (to Gertrude H. Thompson); five stepchildren; and five grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at the UCSD Faculty Club at 4 P.M., Wednesday, October 25, followed by a reception. There will be a viewing Saturday, Oct. 21, at El Camino Memorial Park and Mortuary, 5600 Carroll Canyon Rd., San Diego.

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