

Nobel prize winner at A&M has diverse set of interests

'Sir Barton' makes sure he knows his subject

By Suna Purser
Reporter

Sir Barton, as he is called by some staff members in Texas A&M's chemistry department, likes to think he has fashioned himself after the author Somerset Maugham.

"I like to think that I have patterned my style, if I have any, after him," Dr. Derek Harold Richard Barton says. "My favorite book is 'Of Human Bondage.' It evoked the same feelings as Theodore Dreiser's 'An American Tragedy.'"

Barton is an avid reader, not only of classic novels but of countless journals and publications in his field—chemistry. Barton spends approximately 25 hours a week pouring over scholarly papers and texts, keeping himself abreast of current findings.

"I start my day at five," the spry, 68-year-old chemist says. "I'm a morning thinker, and that's when I do a lot of my reading. If you want to be a successful research man, you need to know your subject thoroughly."

Being a successful research man and knowing his subject thoroughly are two things Barton excels in. He won a Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1969 for his work on conformational analysis. He shared the award with Dr. Odd Hassel of Norway.

Barton, speaking with an easygoing British accent, recalls the award ceremony thoughtfully: "There was a very lavish dinner with lots of people. The old Swedish king, who was 85 at the time, was there. He was an archaeologist and spoke five languages. It was a most memorable time."

Barton was only 32 years old when his theory of conformational analysis evolved. He was a visiting lecturer at Harvard University at that time.

It is a theory that defines the relationship between molecular shape and chemical reactivity. Barton's revolutionary work in this area has changed the face of organic chemistry and taught the synthetic and analytical chemist how to think in three dimensions.

Barton quips that the paper he wrote on conformational analysis was quite short—only four pages—because he had to type it himself.

While the curly gray-haired scientist may not be a great typist, he is certainly a great achiever in other areas.

"Anyone who has studied my family background would never have predicted that I would one day go to Stockholm (to receive the Nobel Prize)," he says.

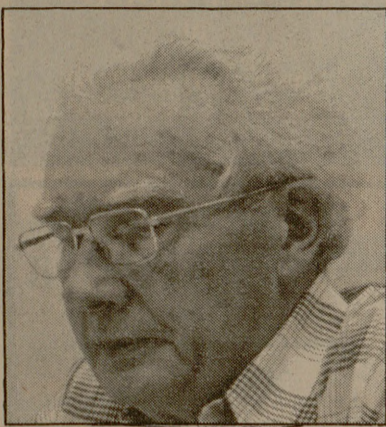
Barton's grandfather and father were carpenters. His father opened a lumber business that did well. Because of that, Barton went to a good private school.

His father died in 1935, when Barton was only 18, and he had to quit school to work in the family business.

"After two years in the wood business, doing my share of manual labor, I felt that there must be something more interesting in life," he says. "I spent one year in a technical college to pass the necessary exams. I took a bachelor of science degree in chemistry in two years at Imperial College in London and continued in organic chemistry for a doctorate, which was completed in 1942."

After completing his doctoral work at Imperial College, Barton was recruited into the World War II effort on a scholarly basis. Still at Imperial College, Barton was a research chemist for military intelligence. For two years, his research involved inventing secret inks.

At the end of his military service, Barton and his colleagues were encouraged to move into industry. He spent one year in Birmingham, England, where he worked on organophosphorous compounds.



Dr. Derek Barton

During that time, at the age of 36, Barton says his thought processes just weren't flowing.

"I did not invent the Wittig reaction, or any other reaction for that matter, as I was too immature to know how to think at that time," he says.

But now, after his thinking has matured, inventing chemical reactions is exactly what this witty grandfather of three does best.

"I am very interested in intellectual problems, and since I'm not gifted with mathematical ability, I was naturally interested in chemical intellectual reactions," he says. "I like to invent chemical reactions."

Dr. Alastair Scott, a chemistry professor at A&M, has known Barton since the early 1950s, when they were doing their post-doctoral work in London.

"He creates chemical reactions with a tremendous energy and undiminished vigor," he says. "He's never changed in all the years I have known him."

But not all of this chemical wizard's reactions have met the success his theory of conformational analysis did. He glibly refers to an incident at Imperial College that took place many years ago.

The incident involved chlorine dioxide, a very volatile, explosive substance. In this particular experiment, Barton had set a glass flask of chlorine dioxide in a container of ice. This container rested on a layer of gauze and the entire setup was supported by a metal framework.

"I'm a morning thinker and that's when I do a lot of my reading. If you want to be a successful research man, you need to know your subject thoroughly."

—Dr. Derek Harold Richard Barton

The budding scientist went to the stockroom—just for a few seconds, he says. When he returned, the only thing remaining of his experiment was the metal framework.

"It was quite impressive," he reports.

Barton's ability to speak fluent French is just as impressive as the experiment-gone-awry was at Imperial College.

Before coming to A&M in November 1986, the bilingual chemist lived in France for nine years. Part of that time he lectured and did research at the Institut de Chimie des Substances Naturelles in Gif-sur-Yvette.

Barton learned to speak French when he was 46 years old. He "didn't have anything to do," and decided to learn a foreign language. Still in London, he began taking French lessons at the Institut Francais. He went to class twice a week for three

hours per session and completed the program in two years.

"From the very first day of class, we spoke nothing but French," he says. "You really had to learn the language in order to do well. I speak only two languages. It's (bilingualism) good for the intellect and good for the brain, but terrible for the spelling."

Scott says Barton's ability to speak a foreign language is a sign of his remarkable intellect and his readiness to assimilate easily.

Bilingualism, at least for this ruddy-faced Englishman, proved to be good not only for his intellect but his love life as well. His French instructor, Christiane, later became his wife.

"I like to say I fell in love with her irregular verbs," he says mischievously. "French has lots of irregular verbs. But English has a lot of irregular verbs, too. We just don't know it."

Barton and his wife return to Birmingham once a year, usually in August, to visit his son and grandchildren; a girl and two boys whose ages are 6, 8 and 3.

They go in August because "it's too cold in the U.K. the rest of the year," he says.

But Barton's travels are not limited to just England. His work takes him all over the world. He has lived in many places, including Scotland, the United States and France.

"I have a good capacity to assimilate to wherever I am," he says. "In fact, when I retire, I want to be a sightseer."

Barton's favorite city is Antibes, a very old Greek city dating back to 400 B.C. He has a second home there and says, "It is really the nicest place to live." Antibes is on France's southeastern coast, near Monaco.

Barton also has a keen interest in Texas, especially its wildlife. A colleague gave him a gift he is particularly proud of, and he has displayed it conspicuously on his desk.

He refers to it lovingly as his "Texas ant," which in reality, is a large scorpion mounted in Plexiglass. A small embroidered applique of the Alamo is glued to a corner.

Barton has not seen the Alamo, but says he plans to. He also is impressed with the state flower, the bluebonnet. He is eagerly waiting for them to reach full bloom.

"I've heard that it's simply beautiful to see them in bloom," he says. "My wife and I plan on taking a drive to see them."

Besides an appreciation for nature, Barton likes music. His favorite artist is Gustav Mahler. He also likes Brahms and says he generally enjoys all classical music.

"I like many kinds of music, except the popular music," he says. "I don't really care for that too much."

Despite his varied interests, Barton's first love is chemistry. He has published 725 papers and shows no signs of slowing down.

Scott says it was a very pleasant surprise to have Barton join the staff. In France, Barton was at a point in his work where he couldn't continue past the government retirement age of 68.

"Since he will go on working for the rest of his life, and he was available to receive an offer, Texas A&M had the opportunity to extend him that offer," he says. "Within 48 hours, several members of the chemistry department had a meeting with Dr. Vandiver and things moved very rapidly from then on."

Charges of 'planting' drugs force sheriff out of office

RANKIN (AP) — Upton County officials said they were stunned after the sheriff was suspended without pay amid allegations that he ordered a deputy to plant marijuana in the home of a suspect.

A grand jury was expected to hear evidence in an investigation this week.

State District Judge Brock Jones issued a court order Friday night removing Sheriff Glenn Willeford from office, Upton County District Attorney J.W. Johnson Jr. said.

Willeford was also removed from his post as county tax assessor-collector.

"We're alleging he delivered that substance to (Upton County Sheriff's Deputy) Scott Taylor, and further, that he instructed Taylor to plant that marijuana in a residence of a citizen of Upton County," Johnson said.

Johnson told the *Odessa American* that he accepted the resignations of Taylor and Upton County Chief Deputy Don Pennington Friday night.

The marijuana was planted in an

Upton County resident's home Aug. 25, 1986, Johnson told the *San Angelo Standard-Times*. The resident, who Johnson would not identify, was later arrested and indicted on drug charges. Johnson would not say whether the case went to trial.

Willeford could not be reached for comment.

Jones appointed Upton County Jailor Danny Brown as temporary sheriff, Johnson said.

Texas Ranger Capt. Gene Powell said a grand jury is scheduled to hear evidence in the case Wednesday.

Johnson said Jones' order suspends Willeford until a hearing can be conducted, probably within the next month.

Willeford took office in January 1985 after winning his first term in office in November 1984.

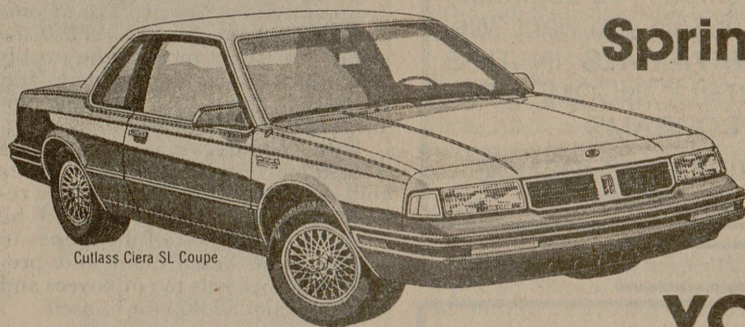
Upton County Judge Peggy Garner said, "It's an unfortunate situation. We're just waiting to see what happens. I can truthfully say none of us heard about the incident that caused this. We're all stunned."



To all recognized organizations

MSC/SPO cubicle and storage applications are now available at the receptionists desk in Rm 216 of the MSC.

Applications are due
April 15 by 5 p.m.



Cutlass Ciera SL Coupe

Spring Graduates:
GET THE CREDIT YOU DESERVE

Once again, we're proud to offer the Allen Olds Cadillac College Graduate Finance Plan. We want to give you the credit you deserve, and the keys to a new Oldsmobile or Cadillac.

For this special Allen Olds Cadillac financing, all you need is your diploma, proof of a job, a low down payment, the ability to meet monthly pay

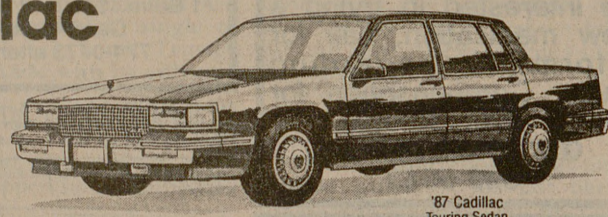
ments and no derogatory credit references.

You'll get \$400 off the purchase price, or a 90-day deferral on your payments, as a graduation present from us.

After all, graduating from college is no small achievement. We're proud to offer you one of your first rewards. Allen Olds Cadillac is an Equal Credit Opportunity Company.

Come in and see us today.

Allen Olds Cadillac
2401 Texas Ave.
Bryan, TX
779-3516



'87 Cadillac Touring Sedan

"FREE BOOKS"

You could win a \$200 voucher to help buy next semester's textbooks at The TAMU Bookstore, compliments of Lucky Leaf® Apple Sauce! look for entry blanks and the full details at participating Texas A&M campus snack bars. Rich, thick Lucky Leaf® Apple Sauce comes in handy single-serving packs that are just right for snacking, perfect for packing. When it comes to snack food, it's a natural!

No purchase necessary.
Offer ends April 10, 1987

Texas A&M University Food Services "Quality First"

ENTER LUCKY LEAF'S
BUCKS FOR BOOKS

