A celebration of the life of Professor William Chaloner FRS
1928-2016

Saturday 4 November 2017
Professor William (Bill) Chaloner was one of the world’s leading authorities on the study of plant fossils. He pioneered new methods for their study and is considered one of the founders of the rising research field of palynology (the study of fossil pollen and spores) that developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Among the areas to which he contributed were reconstructing the plants of the coal age (300 million years ago), understanding the diversification of plants on land and using fossil plants to infer ancient climates and the composition of the atmosphere in the distant past.

In 1979 Bill became the Head of Botany at Bedford College, University of London. When Bedford College merged with Royal Holloway College in 1985, Bill became Head of Botany and then the first Head of the School of Life Sciences.

Bill received numerous honours for his services to science, including election to the Royal Society in 1976. He was a Trustee of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, President of the International Organization of Palaeobotany and President of the Linnaean Society in its bicentennial year. The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology sought his services as a scientific adviser to their subcommittee on Biological Systematics. He received both the Linnaean and the Lyell medals and also served as Vice-President of the Geological Society of London.

After his retirement in 1994, Bill became Emeritus Professor in the Department of Geology (now Earth Sciences) at Royal Holloway, University of London. He was made an Honorary Fellow of the College in 2002 and continued to publish research until his death. Bill was a true polymath, technically astute, unflappable, manually adept. With a warm sense of humour and a self-effacing manner he was ever approachable, especially for young researchers. His thoughtful, polite and generous approach won him many friends in a long career characterised by excellent research, inspirational teaching and astute leadership.