

LIFE AFTER TANFIELD



NAME: Alastair McEwan

PUPIL AT TANFIELD FROM 1969 TO 1976

MY LIFE AFTER LEAVING TANFIELD

I attended Tanfield Secondary during its transition from grammar school to comprehensive. For 'A' levels I took Chemistry, Biology and Physics with Mathematics. After toying with the idea of Medicine I chose to study for a Biochemistry degree at Leeds University; the 'Chemistry of Life' fascinated me and I've built my career around it ever since.

I've spent my entire working life in universities: after Leeds I moved to the University of Birmingham (via Leicester University) where I completed my PhD investigating the biochemistry of the respiratory processes used by bacteria to generate energy. I had a great PhD supervisor and mentor who helped me think about my next steps. I decided to go to the USA and was fortunate to win a Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Science Research Council to work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I enjoyed my 3 years in the Mid-West, learned a lot about microbiology and made some lifetime friends. After a short stint back in Birmingham I moved to Oxford University as a Royal Society Research Fellow then to a lectureship at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. Moving around is not unusual for a young scientist but it's not for those who like stability in their lives. That period of uncertainty ended for me in 1989 after I met my wife, Anne, in the Golden Star pub on Duke Street, Norwich. Although we loved Norwich, we still had one more move to make; Anne is an Aussie from Melbourne and after 4 years we moved to Brisbane where I have been at the University of Queensland since 1993. I've been a professor at UQ for over 20 years and have had quite a few roles including Head of Chemistry & Molecular Biosciences and Dean, Graduate School (we have almost 5000 PhD students at UQ – a big program to manage, especially during the pandemic). I am currently Pro-Vice Chancellor (Researcher Development) and still active in research (only just), working on bacterial pathogens and antimicrobial resistance. Anne is a plant scientist and runs a large agricultural program for CSIRO – so we are both very busy. We have two sons, Chris (age 29 and working in Canberra in the Dept. of Defence) and John (age 25 and studying for a PhD in Psychology at UQ). With retirement pending I'm looking forward to getting back to the north-east more often so it would be great to hear from some old friends and maybe some of you will drop in to see me for the Brisbane Olympics in 2032!