Neil Tanner 1930–2008

Neil William Tanner, who was well known over many years among the international nuclear physics community, passed away on 11 December 2008. Neil was born in Melbourne and, on graduation from Melbourne University in 1953, was awarded an Overseas Scholarship by the Commission for the 1851 Exhibition. He joined the nuclear structure group in the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge, working with Tony French on the reactions leading to the production of $^{12}$C in stars.

On gaining his doctorate, Neil went to California Institute of Technology, at the invitation of WA Fowler, to continue his
studies in nuclear structure on the Van de Graaff machines there. While there he made important measurements on the limits of parity violation in strong interactions, before returning to England to take up a research post in the new department of nuclear physics set up by Denys Wilkinson at Oxford University.

Using the tandem accelerators at Harwell and Aldermaston, and later the coupled electrostatic accelerators in Oxford, Neil supervised an expanding group of students exploiting new ion beams and new detectors, such as multigap spectrometers, to explore the theory of the giant dipole resonance and resonance fluctuations. In the 1960s, interest in pion physics brought him to the Synchrocyclotron at CERN and his close association with Ernst Michaelis helped him to become a valued member of the team.

Soon after arriving in Oxford, Neil was elected to a Fellowship at Hertford College, where he quickly went beyond his expected role as a dedicated tutor. Concerned about negative aspects of college admissions procedures, he initiated changes that helped applicants from state schools and improved the academic standing of the college. Outraged protests from those whose privileged positions had been undermined dwindled as the justice and the benefits of the reforms became apparent.

Neil was also an enthusiastic supporter of the college boat club and was instrumental in the construction of a new college boathouse. After retirement he became the iconic patron of the physics society, named in his honour.

In the 1990s, Neil turned his attention to neutrino studies, strengthening the Oxford-based group at the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory in Ontario, Canada. He made important contributions to the optical design of the detectors and to the reduction of backgrounds.

Neil married in 1956 and is survived by his wife, Margaret, and by a daughter and two sons.

Friends and colleagues.