Dedication to Lord Lewis: the new chemistry of the elements

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We wish to dedicate this Discussion Meeting Issue to our friend and mentor, the late Prof. Jack Lewis, Baron Lewis of Newnham (figure 1), who is widely recognized as one of the father figures of modern inorganic chemistry and who died on 17 July 2014. It is particularly fitting since the Scientific Discussion Meeting between the Royal Society and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, whose proceedings are presented in this Issue, had its origins in a meeting held at the Royal Society, London, UK, on 11 and 12 December 2008, also entitled The new chemistry of the elements, which was arranged to commemorate Jack Lewis’s 80th birthday. Jack was able to attend and participate enthusiastically in that meeting.

Jack Lewis had a glittering career spanning more than half a century of innovative research. He made pioneering and unique contributions to the chemistry of the transition elements, most notably for his seminal work in opening up a new phase of transition element chemistry, based on complexes containing metal–metal chemical bonds.

Jack Lewis’s outstanding achievements have been recognized by numerous awards and prizes, most notably his knighthood in 1982, the award of the Royal Society’s Davy Medal in 1985, his elevation to the Peerage in 1989 and the award of the Royal Medal from the Royal Society in 2004.
Jack Lewis retired from the Chair of Inorganic Chemistry at the University of Cambridge in 1995. He was also the first Warden of Robinson College, from its foundation until 2001. He was President of the Royal Society of Chemistry from 1986 to 1988 and played a pivotal role in the establishment and implementation of policy for both the UK and Europe regarding major environmental issues. He was Chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and continued to work on environmental issues until a few months before his death.

Not only was Jack Lewis one of the most innovative and influential scientists of his generation, he also continued to give outstanding support and encouragement to whole generations of scientists. It is this fact that has allowed the new chemistry of the elements to be developed as those of us who follow stand on the shoulders of a true giant.

Figure 1. Portrait of Lord Lewis of Newnham. (Copyright The Royal Society/Anne Purkiss.) (Online version in colour.)