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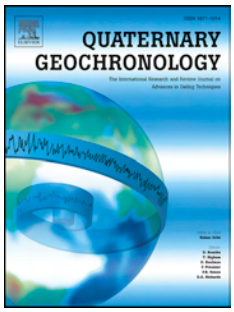

Martin Aitken: A personal recollection

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Martin Aitken: A personal recollection

11 March 1922-13 June 2017

That so many people attended the 15th LED conference held in Cape Town is due in large part to one man, Martin Aitken, who died last year at the age of 95. Several obituaries and appreciations of his life have been published (Aitken, J., 2017; Li, 2017; Pollard, 2017a,b; Sanderson, 2018; Smith et al., 2017; Tite, 2014); and an account of Martin's contribution to the field of Archaeometry by Sayre and Tite (1990) was published following his retirement from the RLAHA in 1989. In contrast to these formal contributions, in this short and personal piece, I would like to introduce the man to those who never knew him, but for whom the reference (Aitken, 1985) is the most important that they have come across. His book "Thermoluminescence Dating", a comprehensive review of the technicalities behind the methods of TL dating, was published 33 years ago - for many attending this conference, literally a lifetime ago. The book came out in the year in which the paper presenting the new measurement procedure of optically stimulated luminescence, OSL, was published (Huntley et al., 1985). The switch of research emphasis from TL to OSL has done nothing to diminish the importance of Martin's book, with its coverage of radiation dosimetry being fundamental to both dating methods.

But, what of the man and his impact on all our lives? For those of us who were lucky enough to study under him, our lives were changed for ever. Most of us who have continued in this area of research have explored our own particular interests in the diverse field that is luminescence dating. Martin's supervision was closer than for most of our contemporaries in other disciplines. I remember the weekly appearance at my office door at the end of a week to discuss progress, or otherwise, since the last meeting; if otherwise, on hearing his footsteps approaching up one staircase and along the top floor of the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and History of Art (RLAHA) at 6 Keble Road, Oxford, I would disappear down the second staircase, not to be seen until Monday morning. However, these meetings were immensely productive, his wide experience and knowledge steering one away from unproductive lines of enquiry. During these meetings, I also learnt how to present data, make arguments, write papers and make concise conference presentations. These acquired skills are vital to those continuing in the competitive world of academia. We, in turn, have influenced our own students; and I like to think that we have applied the same approaches to those whose research we have supervised.

Martin's impact on his students through his inspiration and example is shown in the "Tree of Aitken". This was commissioned in 2002 by one of his students, the late Stephen Stokes, for Martin's 80th birthday (Figure 1). Here the graduate students supervised in 6 Keble Road are shown with the date of their degree. Also shown are students supervised by these students; thus the Tree becomes the Family. In addition to the research students, the laboratory had many visitors who came for periods from a few weeks up to a year. Many were people who had experience in a TL laboratory of their own, and thus brought new discussions to the group of research students. These visitors were found desk-space in RLAHA and given access to laboratory equipment; and Martin welcomed them all. Scientists came from many countries, including China, India, Canada and Australia, with some being funded through Royal Society exchange agreements.

Martin had a long association with the Royal Society, with my first memory being of a meeting held at their headquarters in Carlton House Terrace in London on Science and Archaeology in 1969; this association culminated in his being elected a Fellow in 1983. Before that, he had received an invitation from the Royal Society to visit China to discuss both archaeomagnetic and TL research, and this visit had an enormous impact on him. Martin wrote many letters of support for