



Alan W. Postlethwaite

October 9, 1924 - August 7, 2014

“Other duties as required” is the phrase in the Smithsonian’s job descriptions dreaded by most employees, but for Alan Postlethwaite, with a science background from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Sheffield University in England, problems were meant to be solved and resolved whenever possible. Alan cheerfully took on tasks that no one else could or would deal with.

During his tenure at the Conservation Analytical Laboratory (CAL) as Acting Director and then Deputy Director, Alan inherited an impossible situation, a directive to handle the pest treatment for artifacts and works of art. Federal regulations were being promulgated that outlawed what had been going on, and new equipment needed all sorts of calculations, permits, and tedious study. It was something that no one wanted to tackle. Alan took charge and changed the landscape of pest management in museums. He not only got himself licensed and attended Integrated Pest Management entomological classes, he had several conservators at CAL (now the Museum Conservation Institute, MCI) take the classes and get licensed. He organized the contract with Keith Story to write a book, *Approaches to Pest Management in Museums*, the seminal text for museum pest control world-wide. He put together a one-day seminar, open to museum professionals, to attend a course on the topic, taught by Keith Story in 1985. It was the first course ever conducted at the Conservation Analytical Laboratory in its new home at the Museum Support Center. He also wrote technical papers on the revamped operations of a

fumigation chamber and ran the “Control of Biodeterioration” Working Group of the Conservation Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CC) for eight years.

Alan was a pleasant, practical presence at the Smithsonian’s center for materials research, preservation, and conservation education. As with the fumigation issue, he managed operations that kept the laboratory functioning smoothly. Those problems he couldn’t resolve, he would sympathize and commiserate, “What can I say?” If he had to say “no” to your request, he would at least give you a reason why. The white board behind his office door occasionally showed IOU’s from the “Bank of Postlethwaite” to employees short of cash. In 1994, Alan retired to enjoy life in Washington, D.C. with his lovely wife Mary, to travel, and to visit with children and grandchildren. He kept in touch, calling when he had a conservation question, and to report that retirement was fine.

Mary Ballard and Ann N’Gadi