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Article in *Alternatives to laboratory animals: ATLA* · November 2015

DOI: 10.1177/026119291504300518

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THE WISDOM OF RUSSELL AND BURCH

19. Russell and Burch after 1959

Michael Balls

After the publication of The Principles, Russell and Burch didn't meet again for more than 30 years; however, when they were rediscovered, and rediscovered each other, they had a rewarding few years, during which many others benefited from their wisdom and their insight

Astonishing as it may seem, there was virtually no contact between W.M.S. Russell and R.L. Burch for three decades after the publication of *The Principles of Humane Experimental Technique* in 1959.¹

Burch had established himself as a microbiologist, and spent many years running a one-man testing laboratory in the Town Hall at Sheringham, UK, on the North Norfolk coast. Russell, after five years as a psychotherapist, and then a brief spell as a civil servant in the Commonwealth Bureau of Pastures and Field Crops, became a founder member of the new Department of Sociology at the University of Reading, where he progressed from Lecturer (1966) to Emeritus Professor (1990). He led an amazing life, building first-class reputations, not only as an academic, but also as an author, classicist, composer, correspondent, musician, philosopher, raconteur and radio quiz panellist.²

In 1990, Russell and Burch were 'rediscovered' as a partnership by Martin Stephens of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), who came from Washington, DC, to England to seek their permission to use their names for the new *HSUS Russell and Burch Award* for contributions to the Three Rs and laboratory animal welfare. From that time on, they were "in almost weekly contact by correspondence and telephone",³ and, encouraged by the HSUS and UFAW, Russell and his wife, Claire, went to see Burch in Sheringham in 1993.

Like many others, I first met Russell in Baltimore, USA, in November 1993, at the *First World Congress on Alternatives and Animal Use in the Life Sciences*, where the local host was Alan Goldberg, then head of the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing (CAAT) at Johns Hopkins University. Russell's speech at an awards luncheon revealed him as a star performer, as well as providing some fascinating insight into the origins of the Three Rs.⁴ Like a number of others, I took the opportunity to get to know him and to have some invaluable conversations.

I went to see Burch at Sheringham in August 1994, where I was overwhelmed by his warmth and enthu-

siasm.⁵ He presented me with a prefatory note for the special volume of *ATLA*, which was to mark FRAME's 25th Anniversary – this was the first joint Russell and Burch publication since 1959.⁶ In order to ensure that his reminiscences were captured and recorded, I arranged for him to have a small contract from ECVAM, which led to a report on his personal views on the progress of humane experimental technique.⁷

On my return to Italy, knowing that Burch was too ill to travel far from home, I suggested to Alan Goldberg that we should invite some Three Rs people to go to Sheringham for a meeting with W.M.S. Russell and R.L. Burch. This resulted in *The Three Rs: The Way Forward*, an ECVAM workshop which began in the Council Room at Sheringham Town Hall on a truly memorable morning in May 1995.⁸

This was the first scientific meeting which Russell and Burch had attended together since 1959. Sadly, it was also to be the last, as Burch died on 9 March 1996, after a long fight against a distressing form of skin cancer.³ However, there had been one other lasting outcome of my earlier visit to Sheringham, since, in March 1995, Russell had come to Nottingham to open FRAME's new headquarters, Russell & Burch House. On that day, as on a number of other recent occasions, Burch had taken part in the proceedings *in absentia*, via a pre-recorded audio message.⁹

Russell travelled widely on Three Rs missions from 1990 onwards. His ability to combine serious science and philosophy with song and dance, as at the Second and Third World Congresses in Utrecht (1996)¹⁰ and Bologna (1999),¹¹ was unforgettable, as was the First FRAME Annual Lecture, which he gave in London in September 1999.¹² He was also able to indulge his passion as a correspondent, and I am not alone in having a thick file containing many of his letters, in which he always had something positive and encouraging to say. He also wrote many published articles, by invitation, and his article for UFAW in 2005 was one of his last and most important.¹³ His health

declined after Claire died in January 1999, and by 2005 he was chronically ill, getting tired, and unable to stray far from home. In a letter to me in August 2005, he said, "I really hope this is my swan song about the Three Rs. I'm getting fed up with endlessly repeating myself, and would like to hand over to people like you, who are still advancing the subject and can say something new".¹⁴ Then, in June 2006, he wrote, "A couple of minor spells in hospital are making me feel my age, and more than ever do I hope I won't have to write any more long repetitive papers on the Three Rs!"¹⁵

Bill Russell died of septicaemia on 27 July 2006, when the world of the Three Rs lost a renowned source of inspiration, who deeply affected the lives of many of us, who was great fun to be with, and with whom to correspond was always a delight.¹⁶ Like Rex Burch, he had a boyish and infectious enthusiasm, which was able to survive all kinds of trials and tribulations. One of the proudest moments in my life was standing beside him on the platform in the Aula Magna of the University of Bologna in August 1999, the occasion when the *Declaration of Bologna* was made by all those present:¹⁷

The participants in the 3rd World Congress on Alternatives and Animal Use in the Life Sciences strongly endorse and reaffirm the principles put forward by Russell and Burch in 1959. Humane science is a prerequisite for good science, and is best achieved in relation to laboratory animal procedures by the vigorous promotion and application of the Three Rs. The Three Rs should serve as a unifying concept, a challenge, and an opportunity for reaping benefits of every kind – scientific, economic and humanitarian.

The story of Russell and Burch did not end with their deaths in 1996 and 2006. The W.M.S. and Claire Russell Archive has now been established at the University of Nottingham, under the supervision of the University's Keeper of Manuscripts and Special Collections.¹⁸ Thus, over the years to come, much more will be revealed about their contributions to humane science and the intriguing ways in which they came about.

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The Principles of Humane Experimental Technique is now out of print, but the full text can be found at http://altweb.jhsph.edu/pubs/books/humane_exp/het-toc. An abridged version, *The Three Rs and the Humanity Criterion*, can be obtained from FRAME.