



VALE: Emeritus Professor Cameron Rolfe Howlett FBSE FRSN (1940-2022).

It is with great sadness that we heard of the recent death of our colleague, Rolfe Howlett, who was one of the co-founders of the Australasian Society for Biomaterials and Tissue Engineering (ASBTE). He had a distinguished career as a university educator and researcher, and as a veterinary pathologist, and will be much missed.

Rolfe was a Professor in Pathology in the Faculty of Medicine at UNSW with interests in the pathology of skeletal disease which developed into a passion for understanding tissue interactions with prosthetic devices. His contributions to the field of biomaterials also spanned the modification of materials to control cell adhesion and tissue integration. After his retirement, Rolfe became an Emeritus Professor at UNSW, with a visiting appointment at the Graduate School of Biomedical Engineering (GSBME) awarded in 2008. Rolfe maintained activity as a consulting Veterinary Pathologist, and supported GSBME research in biomaterials and tissue engineering through advising on research grants, and mentoring PhDs and post-doctoral researchers.

In 1989, Rolfe was a founding member of the Australian Society for Biomaterials (now called the Australasian Society for Biomaterials and Tissue Engineering – ASBTE). He was President of the Society from 1991 to 1992 and again from 1993 to 1994 and represented ASBTE on the International Union of Societies for Biomaterials Science and Engineering (IUSBSE) from 1998-2008. He was appointed as a Fellow of Biomaterials Science and Engineering (FBSE) in 1996, the first Australian to achieve this status. Rolfe was an active and strong supporter and advocate for the ASBTE throughout his career and he was Chairman of the 7th World Biomaterials Congress in Sydney in 2004. His significant contribution to the society was recognised by the award of the ASBTE Medal in 2015. In 2019, Emeritus Professor Rolfe Cameron Howlett was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales.

However, our memories of Rolfe are founded in his irrepressible humour and his incredibly giving nature. He was a person who was always willing to support the efforts of researchers to better understand the tissue response to materials. It was always with a wry grin and a (slightly) raised eyebrow that he would gently correct you if you strayed too far from biomaterials into his province, which was the in-depth knowledge of the pathology of tissue-device interactions. In addition to science, he also had a love of language and his description of the cell types in tissue sections was almost poetic (“a sprinkling of eosinophils” is one that comes to mind).

Rolfe was also always up for adventure. From scaling Mt Washington at the Gordon conference in 1997 to exploring the Kerala backwaters in a houseboat after BITE & RM in 2007, Rolfe embraced new experiences and was wonderful company.

At this sad time, our thoughts and those of all of our ASBTE and GSBME colleagues are with his wife, Annette, and their children and grandchildren.

John Ramshaw and Laura Poole-Warren

August 2022



Buffalo, 1996, 3rd Implant Tracking Meeting (with Klaus Schindhelm (left) and Jerome Werkmeister (middle))



Taking time out at the Gordon Conference on Biomaterials, New Hampshire, in 1997.



Rolfe (centre) as part of the official opening ceremony of BITE &RM at the SCTIMST, India, 2007



At the 20th ASBTE Meeting, Brisbane, 2010 with the Geoff McKellar (left) and Jerome Werkmeister (right)



Rolfe with his wife Annette at the 21st ASBTE Meeting, in Queenstown, in 2011



Receiving his ASBTE Medal in 2015, Doltone House, Sydney (with Tim Woodfield)