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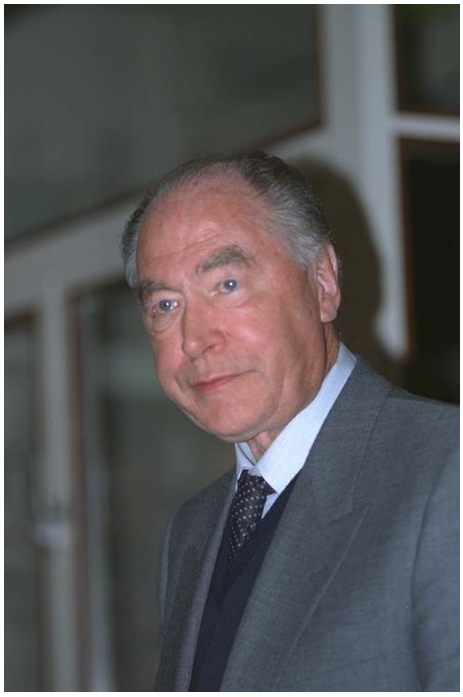
Obituary

Vagn Mejdahl (1928-1997)

Vagn Mejdahl, founder and leader of the Nordic Laboratory for Luminescence Dating at Risø, Denmark, died on the 21st August 1997, after a brief illness. He had been left partly disabled by a stroke some years ago, but continued to be very active until late July, when he suffered another stroke.



Vagn was from a rural community in western Jutland, and left school when he was 10 years old. Despite this, he acquired an education and graduated in physics from the University of Copenhagen in 1955. In 1958 he was recruited by the then Danish Atomic Energy Commission's Research Establishment at Risø. He was a pioneer in the field of solid state dosimetry, and introduced TL techniques in personnel monitoring with the aim of replacing film dosimeters. Some years later, Vagn was inspired by Martin Aitken's early work at Oxford using TL to date archaeological materials, and he started his own dating research in close collaboration with Risø's health physics group. Visits to Oxford and to the National Museum in Edinburgh in the mid 1970s further stimulated his interest in luminescence dating and after much hard work he was able to obtain results of sufficient promise to convince the Danish authorities to raise funds for the establishment of a Nordic Laboratory for TL Dating in 1983. He led the laboratory at Risø until his death, at first with funding from recurrent grants and later as a permanent lecturer in the Geological Institute of the University of Aarhus. For some years, Vagn had been concerned about the future of his laboratory after his retirement, which was due next year. He was very pleased when the University approved last year the appointment of a successor to take over the direction of the Nordic Laboratory.

Throughout his working life Vagn was internationally respected for his pioneering work. His fertile career has given us publications from the late 1950s, up to the papers he co-authored for the international Specialist Seminar "Luminescence Dating: Methods and Applications", held at the University of Aarhus in May of this year. This very successful meeting was organised specifically to celebrate his great contributions to luminescence dating.

The close collaboration between the Laboratory and the health physics group at Risø resulted in some outstanding research and development in luminescence dating methods, instrumentation and protocols. Many of Vagn's articles will continue to be cited frequently by workers around the world: examples cover the attenuation of beta rays in coarse-grain samples, the use of $CaSO_4$:Mn as TL dosimeter for determining the internal beta dose-rate of feldspar samples, and his more recent work on the SARA technique for estimating the burial dose. He also played an active role as a member of several programme and editorial committees for international conferences on both solid-state dosimetry and luminescence dating. He was much valued as a referee by many scientific journals and research councils.

Vagn was not put off by controversy. In the late 1970s, he was intrigued by the mystery of the inscribed clay tiles found at Glozel in France. He visited the site many times and published TL results that demonstrated that the artefacts were not modern forgeries, as was then firmly believed by archaeologists. He remained involved in the Glozel controversy until his death.

We have lost not only a highly respected colleague but a wise counsellor and a loyal friend. He is widely missed.

Lars Bøtter-Jensen

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