

**Paul R. Jones Outstanding Paper Award 2023**  
**Peter E. Childs**



The winner of the Paul Jones Outstanding Paper Award for 2023 is Peter E. Childs for his article, “Peter Woulfe (1727-1803): The Last of the Alchemists,” *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry*, **2023**, 48(2), pp 136-154.

Professor Childs has graced the history of chemistry with an article about a famous Irishman who spent most of his life in England written by an Englishman who spent most of his life in Ireland. Peter E. Childs was born in Yorkshire in 1943 and did his undergraduate and graduate degrees in Chemistry at the University of Oxford (1965 BA, 1968 DPhil. with Sir Brian Fender) He carried out research as a postdoctoral Fellow at Northwestern University with J.B. Wagner, Jr. from 1968-69.

Professor Childs has had a lifelong interest in both the history of chemistry and the teaching of chemistry. During the six years he spent in Uganda, he started a magazine for chemistry teachers: *A Modern Approach to Chemistry*. Upon his return to England in 1976, and two further research fellowships, he joined Thomond College of Education (now merged with the University of Limerick) in 1978. He became Emeritus in 2009 but continued to pursue his passions.

In 1980 Childs founded the magazine: *Chemistry in Action!* for Irish chemistry teachers. In 1982 he started the ChemEd-Ireland Conferences. Both efforts are still vibrant parts of the Irish chemical community. As part of his efforts to improve the chemical literacy of the Irish chemical community, he wrote many historical articles for *Chemistry in Action!*.

He is a past President of the Irish Science Teachers' Association (ISTA) and the Institute of Chemistry of Ireland (ICI), and past chair of the EuChemS Division of Chemical Education. He has received awards for chemical education from ISTA, ICI, RSC and Pharmaceutical Ireland.

One of the advantages of being Emeritus is the time to conduct serious historical research. Childs has produced both a highly informative treatise on Peter Woulfe, and a major contribution to our understanding of chemistry in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Woulfe was a member of the Royal Society of London and gave three Bakerian lectures (in 1776, 1777 and 1778). He is memorialized as the “inventor” of the three-necked Woulfe’s Bottle used in pneumatic chemistry to “wash” gases. Woulfe was rich and followed his own star. He both collected and sold minerals and chemicals. He was well-known in both London and Paris and learned chemistry with Rouelle. Since the classic practice of Alchemy by true adepts was a “secret activity,” very little is known in detail about his research. What is known is that he sought the favor of the Almighty in his attempts to obtain the “philosopher’s stone.” In this aspect, he was a true disciple of Robert Boyle!