Today in History

10 December

1908 Rutherford wins Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Ernest Rutherford's discoveries about the nature of atoms shaped modern science and paved the way for nuclear physics. Einstein referred to him as a 'second Newton' who had 'tunneled into the very material of God'.

Born in 1871 near Nelson, Rutherford began his international career when he won a scholarship to the Cavendish Laboratory of the University of Cambridge, of which he was to become Director many years later. His discovery that heavy atoms have a tendency to decay into lighter atoms heralded modern techniques of carbon dating and led to his Nobel Prize.

The second great discovery of his career was that the atom consisted of a tiny, dense nucleus surrounded by oppositely charged electrons - a model that still forms the basis of atomic theory today. Perhaps most famously, in 1917 Rutherford 'split' the atom.

Read more about Ernest Rutherford

Image: Ernest Rutherford (Timeframes)

Internal links

Ernest Rutherford stamp Ernest Rutherford

External links

Rutherford: scientist supreme Ernest Rutherford (Chch City Libraries) Ernest Rutherford biography (DNZB)

1962 Wilkins wins Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

New Zealand-born Maurice Wilkins and his colleagues James Watson and Francis Crick shared the prize for their studies on the structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the genetic molecule found in all organisms. Watson used X-rays to show the shape of the double helix.

Born in the tiny north Wairarapa settlement of Pongaroa, Wilkins moved to Birmingham, England, when he was six. He received his PhD in physics from the University of Birmingham in 1940.

During the early years of the Second World War, Wilkins focused his postgraduate research on improving the cathode-ray screens used in radar before working on the separation of isotopes in bombs. In 1943 he moved to Berkeley, California, where he worked on the Manhattan Project. which helped to develop the first atomic bomb. Wilkins later confessed to feeling 'very disgusted with the dropping of two bombs on civilian centres in Japan'. Disillusioned by nuclear physics and its military applications, he would become involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

In 1946 Wilkins moved into the relatively new field of biophysics. He became a member of the Medical Research Council (MRC) at King's College in London, working on the genetic effects of ultrasound used for medical purposes. He then turned his attention to the use of X-ray diffraction to probe the structure of DNA. The patterns formed by the scattered X-rays showed that the DNA molecule appeared to have a double spiral structure.

Watson and Crick were able to build on the work of Wilkins and the British physical chemist Rosalind Franklin to deduce the structure of the DNA molecule in 1953. The discovery of the structure of DNA set the stage for rapid advances in molecular biology over the next 50 years. In the decade that followed Wilkins published a number of papers verifying the Watson-Crick Model, culminating in the award of the Nobel Prize in 1962.

Maurice Wilkins died in 2004.

Image: Maurice Wilkins c1999 (RSNZ)

Internal links

1962 - key events

External links

Maurice Wilkins (Nobel Prize) Maurice Wilkins (RSNZ) Maurice Wilkins (Wikipedia)
Maurice Wilkins: DNA enabler (The NZ Edge)

This Week in History


4 April 2001
Silvia Cartwright


5 April 1932
Death of Phar


6 April 1864 Pai
Marire ambush


7 April 1856 First
state secondary


8 April 1873
Julius Vogel


9 April 1932
Unemployed


10 April 1968
Sinking of the

Timeline Secti

Month Calendar Vi

Today in History

What happe

See historic even
the year by ente
below. Why not t

DD/M

Visit the

Kiwi of the

Julius Vogel

Premier Julius Vogel's great plan was to borrow heavily to build infrastructure and to lure migrants. It was controversial, but the money and migrants stimulated the economy and created a viable consumer market for producers.

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THIS WEEK'S QUIZ

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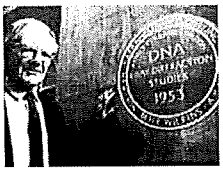

1962 Wilkins wins Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

New Zealand-born Maurice Wilkins and his colleagues James Watson and Francis Crick shared the prize for their studies on the structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the genetic molecule found in all organisms. more...

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1962 - key events

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Maurice Wilkins (Nobel Prize) Maurice Wilkins (RSNZ) Maurice Wilkins (Wikipedia) Maurice Wilkins: DNA enabler (The NZ Edge)

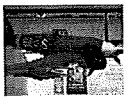
This Week in History

15 August 1951
Troop ship Wahine wrecked en route to Korean War

16 August 1944
CORSO formed

17 August 1839
NZ Company ship Tory arrives

18 August 1955
20-year old hanged for murder



19 August 1944
Kiwi pilot's sacrifice saves French village

20 August 1940
Turakina sunk by German raider in Tasman

21 August 1958
Auckland pedestrians begin 'Barnes Dance'

Timeline Sections

Month Calendar View

Today in History

What happened that day?

See historic events for any day of the year by entering the date below. Why not try your birthday?

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Kiwi of the Week

Paul Reeves

Sir Paul Reeves was Archbishop of New Zealand and in 1985 became this country's first Māori governor-general.

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