

# The Daily Telegraph

## 'IF IT'S IN DIXONS, I DON'T DO IT'

### NEW MAN AT 'NEW SCIENTIST' SETS OUT HIS STALL P23

# Roger steps off the treadmill

By Bye Roger - We'll Miss You

THE doom-laden warnings of scientists across the world were realised yesterday as, at 8.31am, a black hole developed in the science coverage of *The Daily Telegraph*.

Having served as Science Editor of the paper for more than two decades, Roger Highfield departed the offices in Victoria for a new life as Editor of *New Scientist* magazine, which is to be renamed *Old Scientist* in his honour.

Dr Highfield's singularity was so strong that, in his absence, the intellectual content of Fleet Street science suffered a massive and unprecedented collapse.

Authorities had previously laughed off the chances of such an event, saying that the best advice put its likelihood as "one in a million".

Too late did they realise that the phrase was actually being used to describe Dr Highfield himself.

Yet the long-serving journalist was no stranger to the further frontiers of science.

His explanations of the functioning of the Large Hadron Collider were often so convoluted as to only be comprehensible in a universe consisting of 11 or more dimensions. His work, too, was cited as proof of the existence of parallel universes: in one, the world known as "online", his stories were scientific, accurate and incomprehensible; in the print edition the very same words were concise, tight and usually wrong.

Despite the many tribulations he endured, however, he remained a zealous evangelist for science, convinced that if he laughed loudly enough while pitching a story, and used the word "boffins" enough, it would be accepted by his superiors whatever its level of accessibility.

Last night the leading lights

Highfield's dash for cash - a journey to the bottom of the publishing market

**The serious years**

- The Arrow of Time - The Quest to Solve Time's Greatest Mystery (1990)
- The Private Lives of Albert Einstein (1993)
- Frontiers of Complexity - The Search for Order in a Chaotic World (1995)

**The rot sets in**

- Can Reindeer Fly? The Science of Christmas (1998)
- The Science of Harry Potter: How Magic Really Works (2002)
- Hello, Dolly! Grow Your Own Clone (2006, with Ian Wilmut)

**Coming soon**

- Did the Large Hadron Collider Kill the Tooth Fairy? (2009)
- Can Harry Potter Fly a Reindeer that Eats Wasps? (2010)
- At the Foot of the Garden: Particles, Protons and Pixies (2012)

of Britain's scientific community reacted with horror at the thought of Dr Highfield leaving *The Daily Telegraph*.

"Who will be left to explain why a neutron can bounce off a soap particle? It's almost as if no one noticed it had been done," said Baroness Sinead Grunfeld, director of the Royal Institution.



Blake Colinmore, former head of the Medical Research Council, paid tribute to Dr Highfield's breadth of knowledge. "He knew his science," he said, "but there was also nothing he didn't know about Paris Hilton's latest attempts at social rehabilitation."

"Hopefully now he will stop bothering me about a cure for baldness," added a spokesman for the Royal College of Trichologists. "For God's sake, we all knew why you were ringing, whatever you said

about a possible news story. Let it go, man."

However, not all were entirely positive about Dr Highfield's tenure at the newspaper. A spokesman from the Science Media Centre said: "While we will clearly miss Roger, the thought that there may now be some biscuits left after our briefings has not gone unnoticed in the office."

This is not the first time Dr Highfield's appetite has come under scrutiny. One Oxford contemporary recalls that the young scientist was so fond of his mid-day meal that he often had two lunches.

Our source also confirmed that Dr Highfield did indeed have hair in his youth, although even at that stage he was forced to resort to a "combover".

In the end, however, the last word must go to one of Dr Highfield's colleagues, who wished to remain anonymous. "Roger was an unparalleled reporter whose heights of journalistic integrity will never be repeated," he said.

"Who else could on the one hand explain complex scientific experiments to his readership and on the other, still get the word 'twat' on the *Telegraph* website?"



Run, Roger, run: the 'New Scientist' editor-to-be shows off the desk design he plans to introduce. Above left: much mockery after Roger fails to get into the spirit of the fancy dress competition

## Boffin Log

● In a stunning/surprising/unusual/tediously repetitive announcement (*delete as appropriate*), it was revealed yesterday that broccoli/red wine/toast/blueberries/mobile phones can cause/cure/reduce the effects of/are strangely attracted to memory/cancer/leukaemia/Alzheimer's/house prices. Writing in the journal *Nature/Science*/a random self-serving press release my editor found on his desk, scientists/experts/PRs for the blueberry/broccoli/red wine/toast industry announced that a trial of 1,000/100/a couple of people had proved beyond doubt/vaguely suggested that the substance might help/harm/do nothing whatsoever. (NB Please recycle this template as necessary)

● The Science Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, Dr Roger Highfield, has won a prestigious award for receiving the shortest book review ever written for his Christmas-themed anthology of popular science, *Can Reindeer Fly?* Ignoring Dr Highfield's discursion into the parasitic vermin that might have caused Rudolph's nose to bleed itself raw, the critic from the prestigious magazine *Loaded* answered the question posed by the title with the following verdict: "No."

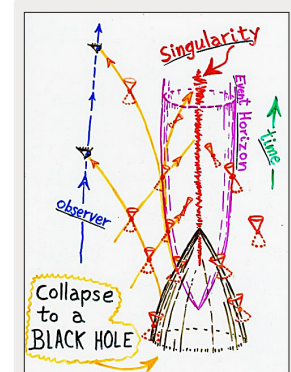
● Meanwhile, tributes continued to flood in to the man they called "The People's Science Editor". Charles Moore, former Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, recalled: "Roger was the perfect science editor - he was unbelievably hard-working, could see the science in any story. He also had an unquenchable belief in his subject - he'd always be fighting for space, and have more stories up his sleeve if anything became available. The only time I ever saw him flummoxed was when he suddenly found out he was going to be a father - he was rather poleaxed by the news. He was a real champion for science, and for scientists - the only problem was that he ran his stories by them, which I didn't know about and would have put a stop to. But they all loved him for it."

FREE DVD



Doctor Roger's Decidedly Deadly Experiments

PAGE 29  
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At home with the Highfields  
How Roger sets his children's homework  
PAGE 24

When science met media  
The frocks, the shocks - special report  
PAGE 22

Zirconia catalysts  
What can't they do?  
PAGE 25

## Fighting fallout the Highfield way

By Plenty O'Booze

THE announcement this week that an antioxidant found in red wine increases protection from radioactivity has been hailed as a long-overdue vindication by Dr Roger Highfield of *The Daily Telegraph*.

Dr Highfield made his name as a journalist in 1986, in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster. He was touring a nuclear installation in Scandinavia, when the alarms went off. The visitors were swiftly evacuated, only for the engineers to reveal that the fallout was coming from outside, rather than inside, the plant, so it was safe for everyone to continue.

Over the following weeks, the jobbing hack was able to parlay his status as the only man in the country who could actually explain radioactivity in terms that laymen could understand into a job with *The Daily Telegraph*. Unfortunately, by then his exposure to the wind from



Bottoms up: the anti-radiation plan

Chernobyl had already cost him his most prized asset: his luxuriant head of hair.

Determined that this would be the last of the damage, he followed in the footsteps of the Russian workers who held that drinking a bottle of vodka would

fend off Chernobyl's effects, and ensured that once he reached Fleet Street he was seldom seen without a bottle in hand. While many of the reporters and editors working in the national press in those days spent much of the day in the pub, it was only Dr Highfield who could justify his behaviour on medical grounds. At least, this was the explanation gleaned by his colleagues from his mumbled repetition "Chernobyl fallout" - although it theorised that this might also be the punchline to a favoured joke.

Dr Highfield was also able on several occasions to kill two birds with one stone, concocting "experiments" in which he demonstrated the progressive impact of alcohol consumption on reasoning, speech and physical co-ordination. So devoted was he to experimental accuracy that he would repeat the procedure again and again, in order to iron out any rogue results.

## 'Lipstick on a pig? That's chicken feed'

By Harry Trotter

ROGER Highfield's reputation as a serious journalist received a terrible blow yesterday when the manuscript of his unpublished novel, co-authored with Fay Weldon, was made public.

The story told the tale of a young scientist, who falls in love with one of his research subjects - a pig.

According to Weldon, the pair got more than a third of the way into the work before abandoning it. Although she enjoyed working with Dr Highfield, she found his relentlessly scatological ideas and passion for porcine pornography clashed with her intention to include

some serious science.

"His inventiveness knew no bounds," she told *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday. "There was no stopping us, other than the agents, and the lawyers - and the boundaries of common decency."

It seems that - as with so much avant-garde work - the public was simply not ready for Dr Highfield's vision of trans-species romance. The project was quietly shelved.

Questions are now being raised, however, over Dr Highfield's motives for writing an entire book about Dolly the Sheep. "There's a pattern emerging here," mused one acquaintance.

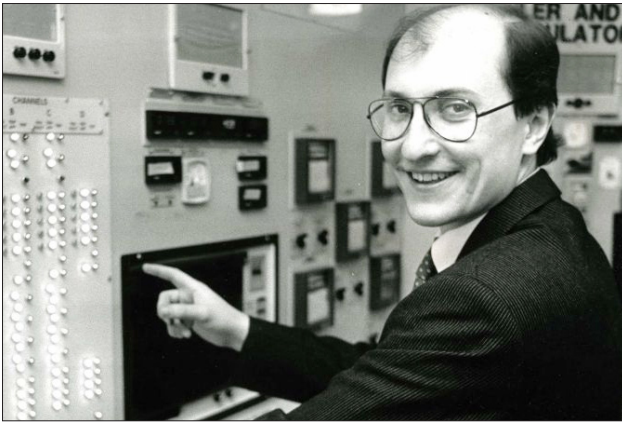
## Latest winner of Young Science Writer prize accepts his award

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

THE winner of this year's *Daily Telegraph* Young Science Writer award, in association with the Royal Society and Bayer, the firm that invented aspirin, and had nothing to do with the Holocaust, honest, has been announced.

The judges for Britain's longest-running quest to find the nation's best young science writers were unanimous in their choice of Dr Roger Highfield, formerly of Oxford University, drawing attention to his eye for an introduction.

The winning essay invoked a far-flung future, in which every household would have a portable telephone the size of a simple dictionary, and townsfolk would gather in



Switched on: 'One day every town will have one,' says Highfield

their hundreds at the municipal computer centre to watch three-minute online videos of DIY science experiments car-

ried out by Dr Highfield.

His reward is the chance to write hundreds of articles for *The Daily Telegraph*.

## Brain-bending boffins have the power to mess with your head

By Flowers Foralgeron Medical Correspondent

SCIENTISTS yesterday unveiled a new device that interferes with the human mind.

When exposed to the technology, the brain loses its ability to form complex sentences and express itself in coherent thoughts.

"We call it a 'newsdesk'," said Prof David D'Arbyshire, one of the team whose work was published in the journal *Nasty Neuroscience*.

"Its impact on the cognitive functions is quite severe, causing loss of focus, severe fatigue and a dramatic shortening of temper."

As part of the experiments, Dr Roger Highfield, the



It's a wind-up: Roger Highfield tries out the brain device

Science Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, was exposed to the newsdesk under carefully

controlled conditions.

He soon reported a decline in elementary reasoning, basic argument and respect for expertise. "It felt as though most of my brain cells had gone missing," he said.

"I went into the experiment willingly, but it wasn't a very pleasant experience. Quite frankly, I'm glad it's over."

To recuperate during the ordeal, Dr Highfield took to reciting nursery rhymes, but even that occasionally proved beyond him.

Fortunately, it is hoped that this reduction in brain power will be reduced by the prescription of a course of

magazines.

See Roger lose his mind: [www.telegraph.co.uk/science](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science)

## Roger Remembered

Missing Roger already? Soothe the pain with this exclusive new partwork, available free with *The Daily Telegraph* over the coming weeks. In each issue, a friend or colleague of the great man explains just what made him quite so special.

### PART I - THE FELLOW HACK

"Highfield-watchers all have their favourite moment - I will never forget, for example, the time he left Tony Blair speechless. But I treasure also the way that Kenneth Baker, Mrs Thatcher's unctuous science minister, would always refer to Roger as 'the accountant'. This wasn't just because of his preference, unchanged through the decades, for suits that would look solemn on an undertaker but looked quite exotic on a science journalist (a class of hack normally even more shabbily dressed than the economics staff). But the label was actually inspired by the great Highfield's awkward way with embarrassing questions. It was Baker's wont to announce that under Thatcher, more money was being spent on science than ever before. Roger imperterbly asked why it was, then, that the president of the Royal Society, the head of the British Association and the founders of Save British Science all claimed that there was *less* money? He wasn't the only hack to ask such questions, but most of us gave up after the unhappy experience of a Kenneth Baker response. Roger, however, kept on. And on. And eventually he got near the truth enough to square the circle: Baker was forced to concede that a very large sum of money had been set aside that year to pay off hundreds of scholars and researchers, close laboratories, and decommission research ships. The experience of being forced to disgorge something approximating a straight answer so embittered the minister that he had, in his quiet way, an enduring revenge. Of course, the *Telegraph* didn't bother to print the story..."

### PART II - THE SUB-EDITOR

"Roger and I have worked on so many pages together, I have lost count, and every one of them has been a classic. They haven't all been easy, though. I remember when one of us had to chop huge amounts from copy supplied by a top scientist. We really didn't know what he was going on about and couldn't contact him. Weirdly, he phoned the next day to thank us for running his story in full. Like everyone in production, I'll miss the genius of a man who can explain complicated science to anyone, even a sub-editor - except, of course, for what quantum mechanics is all about, and how it relates to time travel. We won't, however, miss the 'DLR effect' - when based in Canary Wharf, we used to get crackly telephone calls after the Science page had gone to bed. 'Urgh', the voice would say, 'Can we kill the page? There's a literal!' It was usually a simple word, such as "Buckminsterfullerene". But why, oh why did Roger only ever spot literals on a DLR train on the way home?"

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