

## Benno Paul Schoenborn (1936–2025)

Rob Knott MRSN

Email: robert.b.knott@gmail.com

The scientific community mourns the passing of Benno Schoenborn, a distinguished scientist with an outstanding career in structural biology. He died on 23 September 2025 in Phoenix, Arizona. Benno was born on 2 May 1936 in Basel, Switzerland, and grew up in Berne, but, as an indication of the man-before-his-time, rather than continuing a traditional Swiss education, he regarded the world as his classroom.

After receiving his BA in Physics from the University of California Los Angeles in 1958, a chance meeting inspired him to redirect his studies to biomolecular structure. Of all the opportunities available to him, he chose the Physics Department at the University of NSW to study for his PhD, awarded in 1962. During this time, Benno formed many scientific collaborations and friendships, and especially a lifetime friendship with Jak Kelly, a past President of the RSNSW. Benno was a member of the Society for many years.

After his PhD studies, Benno returned to the US to continue his career at the Brookhaven and Los Alamos National Laboratories. The list of achievements

during his career is extraordinary. Benno is rightly the “father” of neutron protein crystallography, a technique which leads to a greater understanding of biomolecular structure and function by locating hydrogen in exquisite detail. He received the Ernest Orlando Lawrence Award in 1980, a DSc (hon.) from the New Jersey Institute of Technology in 1982, and the American Crystallographic Association Bau Neutron Diffraction Award in 2016 for his pioneering work on neutron crystallography and its application to biology. There were also many achievements in other X-ray and neutron-scattering techniques, complex computation and sophisticated instrumentation. He was an adjunct professor at Columbia University and taught at numerous universities in the US, the UK, Europe, and Australia.

Benno returned to Australia many times for work (at UNSW, University of Sydney, and ANSTO), for family, and to enjoy our more relaxed lifestyle. Benno’s scientific insight was extraordinary and his remarkable sense of curiosity drove many innovations. He was an inspiration and mentor to many.

