

# John L. Finney Biography

July 11, 2023. Patrick Charbonneau

John Leslie Finney (31 March 1943-) was born in Stockport, England, son of Leslie Finney, local government clerk, and Annie Finney (née Amer), housewife. He spent his youth in the area, notably attending the Manchester Grammar School (1954-1961).

Finney obtained a BA in Natural Sciences from the University of Cambridge (Jesus College, 1961-1964) and then a PhD in Crystallography from Birkbeck College (1968) for a thesis entitled “Random packings and the structure of the liquid state”, under the supervision of J. D. Bernal. He took up a faculty position in Crystallography at Birkbeck, where he climbed through the faculty ranks (Lecturer, 1968; Reader, 1977; Professor, 1986). In 1970-1971, he went on a postdoctoral sabbatical year with George A. Jeffrey at the University of Pittsburgh and spent shorter sabbatical periods at the University Aix-Marseille III (1976), the Technical University of Denmark (1980) and Fukuoka University (2006). From 1988 to 1993, he was Chief Scientist ISIS Facility, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Oxford, England, and in 1993 became Quain Professor of Physics University College London, where he is emeritus since 2009. From 1993 to 1996, he was Science Coordinator European Spallation Source.

Finney trained as a physicist and a crystallographer, initially tackling foundational issues in the structure of simple liquids and structural glasses using models of jammed hard spheres and computational geometry tools. He later developed those approaches, with input from neutron scattering, to studying the structure of water and of aqueous solutions, and the role of water in chemical and biological processes.

Finney is a Fellow of both the Institute of Physics and the Royal Society of Chemistry. In 2003, Finney was co-organizer of a Royal Society Discussion Meeting on “The Molecular Basis of Life: is life possible without water?”. In 2004, he gave The Bragg Lecture of the British Crystallography Association, “Beyond Bragg’s Law: crystallography without a lattice”, was Vice President of that Association from 2004 to 2007, and edited its quarterly ‘Crystallography News’ from 2020 to 2023. A founder-member and past Vice President of Euroscience, he was Founding Editor of *Euroscience News*.