

Letter to Editor

In memory of Professor George Michael Sheldrick (1942-2025)

Dear Editor Seçen,

It is with deep respect that I write to honor the memory of Professor George Michael Sheldrick, FRS (1942–2025), one of the most influential chemists of our time, whose pioneering work has left an enduring mark on the field of structural chemistry. He passed away on 20 February 2025 in Bovenden, Germany, at the age of 82.

Born in Huddersfield, England, Sheldrick was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he also began his academic career, later becoming a Fellow of the college. In 1978, he joined the University of Göttingen, where he served as Professor of Inorganic and subsequently Structural Chemistry until his retirement in 2011. His profound impact is evidenced by more than 284,000 citations and an h-index of 113—figures that reflect both the depth and breadth of his scientific influence [1,2].

Sheldrick's name is most closely associated with the development of the SHELX suite of programs, which revolutionized the refinement and solution of crystal structures using X-ray diffraction. Initially created for small-molecule crystallography, the suite evolved to support the refinement of complex macromolecular structures, particularly those derived from high-resolution or twinned data. Tools such as SHELXL, SHELXD, and SHELXE became indispensable to crystallographers worldwide, forming the backbone of numerous high-throughput structural pipelines. Their robustness, speed, and accessibility made them a cornerstone of modern structure determination, both in academia and industry [3].

Throughout his distinguished career, Professor Sheldrick received numerous prestigious honors, including the Gotfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize, the Carl-Hermann Medal, the Max Perutz Prize, and the Gregori Aminoff Prize. In 2001, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, one of the highest recognitions in science. In a fitting tribute, the European Crystallographic Association established the George M. Sheldrick Prize in 2024 to honor outstanding contributions in crystallography [2].

Beyond his scientific achievements, Prof. Sheldrick was also a devoted family man. He married Katherine Elizabeth Herford in 1968, and together they raised four children. As beautifully expressed by Irmer and Usón, his colleagues, Professor Sheldrick was not only a pioneer in crystallography, but also a model scientist—curious, generous, unprejudiced, and profoundly human [4].

He will be deeply missed by the global scientific community.

Sincerely,
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Received March, 2025; Published online March 31, 2025.

Keywords: George Michael Sheldrick; SHELXL, SHELXD, and SHELXE 2025 ACG Publications. All rights is reserved.

[1] Wikipedia contributors. (n.d.). George M. Sheldrick. In Wikipedia. Retrieved March 15, 2025, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_M._Sheldrick

[2] Google Scholar. (n.d.). George Sheldrick – Dept. Structural Chemistry, Goettingen University. Retrieved March 15, 2025, from <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=uTwRJgAAAAJ&hl=tr&oi=ao>

[3] Sheldrick, G. M. (2013). A short history of SHELX. *Acta Crystallographica Section A: Foundations and Advances*, 64(1), 112–122. <https://doi.org/10.1107/S0108767307043930>

[4] Herbst-Irmer, R., & Usón, I. (2025, February 23). *George M. Sheldrick (1942–2025)*. European Crystallographic Association. <https://ecanews.org/blog/2025/02/23/george-m-sheldrick-1942-2025/>

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Yazar : Ertan Şahin Sayfa Sayısı : 2 Kelime Sayısı : 519 Karakter Sayısı : 3402

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