

U.S. National Reliability Award : Mr. R. Brewer

MR. RALPH BREWER, of the General Electric Company Research Laboratories, Wembley, has been awarded the 1958 National Reliability Award for his paper entitled "Life Tests of Electron Tubes and the Analysis of Failure Causes", which was read at the Fourth National Symposium on Reliability and Quality Control in Electronics, held at Washington in January 1958. The award is made to the author of the best technical paper presented at this annual Symposium. Mr. Brewer's paper was the only overseas contribution in the total of fifty papers read. The symposium is jointly sponsored by the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, the Institute of Radio Engineers, the American Society for Quality Control and the Electronic Industries Association. Mr. Brewer is a member of the principal scientific staff of the General Electric Company's Research Laboratories, which he joined in 1937 to work on illumination engineering. During the War he transferred to electronic valves and worked on early radar magnetrons. After the War, he took charge of valve reliability studies, which have played an important part in the development of improved valves. His work has now extended to cover the study of the survival characteristics of transistors and related semiconductor devices as well as the general reliability problems of electronic systems.

**National Institute for Research in Dairying :
Prof. R. G. Baskett**

PROF. RONALD GILBERT BASKETT has been appointed director of the National Institute for Research in Dairying, University of Reading, as from August 1, 1959. He succeeds Prof. H. D. Kay, who has recently retired (*Nature*, 181, 1506; 1958). Dr. A. T. R. Mattiek is at present acting director. Prof. Baskett is now professor of agricultural chemistry, the Queen's University of Belfast, and head of the Chemical and Animal Nutrition Division of the Ministry of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. He was born in 1901, and educated at King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford, and University College, Reading, where he received his early training in chemistry with Prof. H. Bassett and Prof. H. A. D. Neville. His interests have centred in animal nutrition, particularly mineral metabolism. He has been especially concerned with pig husbandry and is at present a member of the Technical Committee of the Agricultural Research Council on Pig Research. Prof. Baskett has had long administrative experience in Northern Ireland coupled with teaching in the University of Belfast and examining in other universities. He also served with distinction as agricultural attaché at the British Embassy in Washington. His world-wide contacts with workers in the same field will be of great value in his new post.

**Animal Husbandry at the Royal Veterinary College :
Prof. J. A. Laing**

THE late Prof. N. J. Scorgie (see *Nature* of January 24, p. 220) has been succeeded in the Courtauld chair of animal husbandry at the Royal Veterinary College, London, by Dr. J. A. Laing, reader in veterinary science in the University of Bristol. Prof. Laing, who graduated in Edinburgh in 1941, took an early interest in problems of bovine infertility, and as an Aleen Cust Memorial Scholar worked under John Hammond at Cambridge, under whose guidance he obtained his Ph.D. in 1944. He remained in Cam-

bridge studying particularly spermatozoa, as a research officer and then as veterinary investigation officer of the Ministry of Agriculture, until 1949, when he joined the staff of the newly formed Veterinary School of the University of Bristol. His main research interest did not waver from the general problems of animal breeding and genital infection and he attained a nation-wide and international reputation in this respect. In 1954 he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study in Copenhagen, and has acted as a consultant to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which sponsored an assignment for him to advise the Republic of Dominica on cattle infertility and allied problems during 1957-58. He was awarded the status of reader in 1957. His published works include the book "Fertility and Infertility in the Domestic Animals" (1955). Prof. Laing's breadth of experience in the field of animal reproduction will be of value in helping to develop the new field station of the Royal Veterinary College recently opened at Potters Bar.

Spert-III achieves Criticality

THE special power excursion reactor test No. 3 (Spert-III), a versatile research facility developed for studying nuclear reactor safety at the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's National Reactor Testing Station, Idaho Falls, achieved criticality on December 20. Spert-III is one of a series of reactors designed and developed by Phillips Petroleum Co. as part of the Atomic Energy Commission's programme to find basic explanations for the behaviour of reactors under runaway conditions. All operations are conducted by remote control, since some of the tests approach destruction of the reactor. This facility provides the widest practical range of control over three variables—temperature, pressure, and rate of flow of coolant. The plant is expected to contribute significantly to a better understanding of reactor self-limiting and occasional instability characteristics exhibited in an earlier experimental reactor, Spert-I.

Spert-I, which began operation in July 1955, was the first of a series established to investigate potential hazards associated with the broad class of heterogeneous, water-moderated, enriched-fuel reactors. Spert-II, which is still under construction, is intended to continue similar studies with special emphasis on how various moderators and reflectors, including heavy water, influence reactor behaviour. Tests in Spert-I, using a simple open-tank system, are generally characterized by sudden power rises (one reaching 2.8×10^9 watts) that are arrested by the inherent self-limiting tendency of the reactor itself. Without any manipulation of the control rods, reactor power reaches a peak in a fraction of a second and drops off to much lower but generally steady levels. In some cases, however, instabilities also are observed following the power peaks. Some of these are divergent oscillations that could probably destroy the reactor, despite its self-limiting characteristics, if allowed to continue. The precise causes of self-limitation and of these power instabilities are not known, but form the principal objective of the present project.

Atomic Energy Information

IN order to make atomic information more easily available, the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority has decided to make fuller use of microphotography. The effect of this will be to make all non-secret