The Bryan Priestman Memorial Lectures

A photograph of **Bryan Priestman** from the time period when he flew for the Royal Canadian Air Force (*from the Bryan Priestman fonds in the University of New Brunswick Archives*).

Bryan Priestman was born in England and attended Cambridge University before moving to Canada where he obtained an M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Physics at McGill University. He started as a one-man physics department at UNB in 1928. He was a close friend of Dr. Francis Toole (after whom the Chemistry Building is named) and socialized and talked philosophy with many of the other faculty members. He served as a member of the RCAF during WWII and it was shortly after his return from the war that he died on Remembrance Day, 1945, trying to save a young boy from drowning in the St John River.

The Bryan Priestman Memorial Lectures were initiated in 1951 in memory of his death. This lecture series commemorates Priestman's passion for science by providing opportunities for the discoveries and joys of pursuing science to be communicated to a broad audience. Over the years, over thirty lectures have been held and include eminent scientists from the fields of biology, chemistry, geology, mathematics and physics.

The 2012 Bryan Priestman Memorial Lecture

Dr. Christopher J. Wild

Professor, Department of Statistics, University of Auckland

It's a great story but Is it true?

MacLaggan Hall Auditorium (Room # 105)
UNB Fredericton

September 18th, 2012
7:30 pm

This event is supported by the Priestman Lecture Fund of the University of New Brunswick

UNB

Dr. Christopher J. Wild

New Zealand statistician Dr. Christopher Wild is internationally known for his work on methods for analysing data from complex biased sampling mechanisms and also on statistics education. He is often a keynote speaker for international conferences. He has done transformational work on more accessible ways for people to think about data, about the processes of investigation, and about learning from data. He is involved across the spectrum from blue-skies forward-thinking to the development of enabling software and pedagogy, research on students' understandings and paradigm shifts in statistics in school curricula building forward into university.

Dr. Wild did his first degrees at the University of Auckland (NZ) followed by a PhD in statistics at the University of Waterloo (Canada) before returning to Auckland in 1979. He has been elected a Fellow of the *American Statistical Association*, a Fellow of the *Royal Society of New Zealand*, and is an Editor of the *International Statistical Review*. He is a former President of the *International Association for Statistical Education*, a former Head of *Auckland's Department of Statistics* and winner of a New Zealand national Tertiary Teaching Excellence Award.

Tonight's Program

Welcome	Dr Anthony (Tony) Secco VP Academic,UNBF
Priestman Lecture	Dr. Christopher J. Wild

It's a great story but is it true?

Summary

We have moved from a world where there was a trickle of data towards a world where there is a deluge. Data is everywhere. It is forcing its way in through cracks under doors and around windows into places that have never seen it before. Soon, it seems, everyone will have to be a statistician whatever their day job. The world's greatest exponent of transforming data into compelling and important stories that are accessible to almost everyone is Hans Rosling[1]. Discovering stories from data is exhilarating, but we want our stories to be true.

In data on 650 children from Boston, those who smoked tended to have better lung function results than those who did not. "Smoking good for kids' lungs"? What is going on here? Have we gone to sleep and woken up in an alternate universe? Or is it just that Bostonians are weird? Statistical data provides us with windows we can use to look out upon our world and learn about it to inform our world views and decision making. These are not windows of plain glass, however, but of rippled glass – like many bathroom windows. What we see through them is never quite the way it really is. We get sometimes unfocussed and sometimes systematically distorted views of reality. We will experience the prime causes of distortion and what we can do about them.

[1] http://www.gapminder.org/videos/the-joy-of-stats/