

NEWS and VIEWS

Electrical Engineering at Edinburgh :

Prof. W. E. J. Farvis

MR. FARVIS, senior lecturer in applied electricity and head of the postgraduate school of electronics and radio in the University of Edinburgh, has been appointed to the newly established chair of electrical engineering. He graduated B.Sc. from the University of Bristol in 1936, with first-class honours in electrical engineering. After junior teaching appointments at Dundee Technical College and University College, Swansea, he joined the Telecommunications Research Establishment in 1940, working first on new decimetric radar. The following year he transferred to counter-measures work for the radio defence of London, and for the remainder of the War led a group developing and using new ground and air interception devices. Immediately before the end of hostilities he was one of a team sent to Europe to investigate German radio and radar war-time research. In 1945 he returned to Swansea as lecturer, and in 1947 took the external B.Sc. degree of the University of London in physics. He was appointed lecturer at the University of Edinburgh in 1948, and afterwards senior lecturer. During his twelve years in the Engineering Department there Mr. Farvis has evolved a new electrical engineering degree curriculum, founded the postgraduate diploma course in electronics and radio (now in its eleventh year) and built up a research school on various types of gas discharge. His personal research has been in high-current arcs and fundamental problems associated with power-circuit interruption, interests which began during his student training at the switchgear works of the British Thomson-Houston Co. He took part in the official British programme for the International Geophysical Year, setting up stations in Shetland and Edinburgh for recording the absorption of galactic radio noise. This work, sponsored by the Royal Society, is still continuing in Edinburgh.

The British Industrial Biological Research Association

IN a written answer in the House of Commons on November 28, Sir David Eccles, as representing the Minister for Science, said that the British Industrial Biological Research Association was not designed to supplement the work of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. It had been formed by industry as a co-operative industrial research association, and its new laboratories were to be sited at Leatherhead on land adjacent to existing laboratories of the British Food Manufacturing Industries Research Association to facilitate the sharing of facilities. In answer to further questions on December 1, Sir David said that the laboratories would cost £56,000, and the main purpose of the facilities was to investigate the effect on health of substances used in food, or which may find their way into food from such things as pesticides, packaging materials or utensils. The site had the additional advantage of proximity to the Medical Research Council's Toxicological Research Unit at Carshalton. Questioned about the Minister's proposal to close the Research Station at Greyhope

Road, Aberdeen, the Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Mr. W. M. F. Vane, stated that the work proposed at Leatherhead was entirely different from that done at Aberdeen. During the past twelve months the latter had included: the installation and operation of the Mark I commercial prototype accelerated freeze-drying cabinet loaned from Chicago; production of field-trial samples of various foods processed by the accelerated freeze-drying method, and of experimental rations for large-scale trials by the three Armed Services; work on the quality and storage life of dehydrated foods; research into problems of flavour in vegetable products; investigation of enzyme activity in dehydrated raw meats with low-moisture content, and of the reasons for the deterioration of dehydrated raw meat; investigation of the mechanism of oxidative rancidity and of the application of free-radical acceptors to the inhibition of oxidative rancidity induced by radiation. Three other projects had been undertaken with grants provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, including the investigation of new antioxidants, of the freezing and drying of muscle tissues, and of the significance of carotenoid breakdown in the deterioration of fruits and vegetables.

Tax Assessment for Scientific Societies in Britain

CLAUSE 9 of the Rating and Valuation Bill, which received its second reading in the House of Commons on November 30, gives effect to the recommendation of the Pritchard Committee that the total exemption from rates given by the Scientific Societies Act of 1843 to societies established for the purposes of science, literature or the fine arts, exclusively, should be terminated. In moving the second reading of the Bill, the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Mr. H. Brooke, after a tribute to the work of the Pritchard Committee, said that the Government proposed to follow the report in this difficult matter. The definition in the 1843 Act had proved so difficult to apply that he doubted if anyone would advocate its retention unaltered, and under Clause 8 of the Bill, practically every organization which now obtains benefit from the 1843 Act would in future qualify automatically for 50 per cent derating, and the local authority would have discretion to give up to complete exemption if it thought fit. As regards research associations, Mr. Brooke added, in reply to a question, that derating would turn entirely on whether an association could establish that it was a charity.

Mr. Brooke also said that the Pritchard Committee was clearly in some doubt about the position of the universities. While, as stated in the first schedule to the Bill, they were undoubtedly charities, they were also substantially financed by Exchequer grants, and, unlike other charities, many of them held a considerable if not a dominating position in the towns and cities in which they are established. Accordingly, it did not seem to the Government that a sufficient case existed for giving the universities a statutory 50 per cent exemption from local rates, although the Chancellor of the Exchequer was ready to give an