Robert Shields

Brought worldwide fame to a surgery department for treating liver disease

He spent a year as a research fellow at Glasgow under Charles Illingworth, and a year at the Mayo Clinic with Charles Code and Jesse Bollman, where he studied intestinal absorption. This was the basis of his 1965 doctor of medicine degree, which won him Glasgow University’s Bellahouston gold medal.

He moved to Cardiff in 1963 as senior lecturer at the Welsh National School of Medicine and consultant surgeon. In 1969 he was made reader, but he accepted the chair of surgery at Liverpool, where he remained until he retired in 1996. He nurtured the staff’s academic potential. He built up the department into a regional centre for breast and intestinal cancer and for liver disease, and he developed extensive clinical and research links.

The department was famed for its treatment of portal hypertension, especially bleeding oesophageal varices, a common emergency in Liverpool, where liver disease is common. The department was one of only two in the country to be awarded a star rating of international status by the higher education funding councils in the first ever research assessment exercise. He promoted transplantation, establishing a senior lectureship, and a purpose built transplant unit was opened in Liverpool in 1973 by Peter Medawar.

Bob was knighted in 1990; three members of his department were also knighted, and 12 became professors of surgery elsewhere. For many years Bob ran a clinic with his physician colleague and great friend Richard McConnell, an early example of joint outpatient clinics in gastroenterology. In 1999 he was invited by the then health secretary, Alan Milburn, to assess clinical services in Southport, Formby, and West Lancashire. On his advice, the trusts were successfully merged.

He served on many committees; he was a good listener and had a talent for integrating people’s ideas. A strong supporter of the National Health Service, he was vice chairman of Mersey Regional Health Authority (1982-5) and vice chairman of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital Trust (1992-5). He was a member of the Medical Research Council (1982-94) and served on its cell board and strategy committee.

In 1993 he was the first graduate from Glasgow to be elected president of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in its 500 year history, underlining the respect and confidence that he commanded from his peers. He was proud to be president of the British Society for Gastroenterology and the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland. He was an examiner in surgery for a dozen universities in the United Kingdom and abroad and was on the editorial boards of several medical journals, including the British Journal of Surgery.

Bob was a fair minded, quiet, and private man of integrity. He was supportive of his staff and students. And he managed to combine being extraordinarily productive with dedication to his family.

In his spare time he walked the Highlands and sailed the Western Isles and south coast. He took his children dinghy sailing, and his holiday sandcastles were legendary. After retirement he continued as a government adviser, mainly on restructuring the health service for the Scottish Office, and he enrolled as an undergraduate, studying German and 20th century history.

He died of cancer peacefully at home. He is survived by Marianne, a son, and two daughters, one of whom is a lay member of the General Medical Council.

Cite this as: BMJ 2008;337:a2470
Isabel Mary Cant (née Martineau)

Former casualty officer Birmingham Children’s Hospital (b 1910; q Birmingham 1936), d 17 January 2008.
Isabel Mary Cant (née Martineau) qualified with gold medals for medicine and surgery and was vice president of the students’ union. She married William Cant, clinical pathologist at Birmingham Children’s Hospital, in 1939, and accompanied him in delivering the first supplies of blood to Coventry after it was bombed in 1940. Isabel was casualty officer at the hospital from 1939 to 1971 and medical officer to King Edward VI Girls’ School from 1953 to 1985. She also did voluntary work for Edgbaston High School for Girls and was a guide at Birmingham Art Gallery. Predeceased by William in 1981, she leaves two children and five grandchildren.

Jillian R Mann
Richard H R White

Cite this as: BMJ 2008;337:a2356

Norah Helen Colquhoun Clarke

Former general practitioner Derby (b 1914; q Royal Free, London, 1937; DCH, DTM&H, FRCS(Ed)), d 6 August 2008.
Intent on pursuing a career in surgery, Norah Helen Colquhoun Clarke gained her FRCS in 1947, but in 1948 she achieved a lifelong ambition to become a missionary doctor in Baringa Hospital in the Belgian Congo. Seven years later she reluctantly returned home, having contracted infective hepatitis. She took up resident surgical posts at the City and Women’s Hospitals in Derby, but she had to abandon a hospital career to care for her parents. After various locum posts in general practice she settled in Derby, becoming a partner in 1960 and retiring in 1980. She continued with on call work for some years afterwards. She leaves a niece and her family.

James Clarke

Cite this as: BMJ 2008;337:a2647

Richard John Frankel

Former consultant general physician and endocrinologist Frimley Park Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (b 1940; q Witwatersrand, South Africa, 1961; FRCP), died with his granddaughter in a road traffic crash on 11 August 2008.
Richard John Frankel qualified in South Africa at the age of 21 and, moving to London after house jobs, eventually became registrar at the London Hospital and senior registrar at St George’s, with a year’s research in San Francisco. Appointed consultant physician to the new Frimley Park Hospital in 1977, he established diabetic and endocrine services in the hospital and district, including obstetric services. He also undertook several senior management positions, notably, raising funds for and designing the postgraduate centre and a junior doctors’ mess with study bedrooms and a squash court. He leaves a wife, Merula, and four children.

Robert Bown

Cite this as: BMJ 2008;337:a2649

Ian Mc Gibbon

Former general practitioner Sudbury, Derbyshire (b 1939; q Glasgow 1964; MRCP), died of cancer of the stomach and oesophagus on 19 August 2008.
Ian Mc Gibbon joined the Royal Air Force as a student and on qualifying completed a five year commission. In 1970 he joined a rural practice on the Derbyshire-Staffordshire border, where he was responsible for the training programme and computerisation. Taking up marathon running aged 42, he completed 35 marathons (best time 3 hours 1 minute) and was a founder member of the East Midlands branch of the British Association of Sport and Medicine and doctor to Scottish Athletics and British Rowing. On retirement in 1988, he worked as a locum and in sports medicine as well as exhibiting his paintings. He leaves a wife, Evelyn, and three children.

J A Harvey

Cite this as: BMJ 2008;337:a2650

Alexander Logan Speirs

Former consultant paediatrician Stirling Royal Infirmary and Falkirk District Royal Infirmary (b 1921; q Aberdeen 1943; OBE, MD, FRCP), d 30 August 2008.
After qualifying, Alexander Speirs (“Sandy”) served as surgeon lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in Aberdeen, and was one of the first doctors in Scotland to administer penicillin. He gained his MD, on acute bowel infections in children, with commendation. A pioneer in the care of sick children in central Scotland, he was in 1962 the first doctor to report the link between thalidomide and increased congenital malformations, and he successfully pressed for its withdrawal from the UK market. An excellent communicator, he was passionate about teaching medical students, junior doctors, and nurses. Predeceased by his wife, Inez, in 1999 and by a daughter, he leaves a daughter and two grandsons.

Mary T Higgins

Cite this as: BMJ 2008;337:a2653

David Christopher White

Former consultant anaesthetist Northwick Park Hospital and scientist Clinical Research Centre, Medical Research Council (b 1926; q Westminster Hospital, London, 1949; FRCA), d 23 August 2008.
After house jobs in trauma and a resident anaesthetist post, David Christopher White did national service in the Royal Air Force, attaining the rank of acting squadron leader. Resuming postgraduate training in 1955, he became consultant and honorary research associate in Hull (1960) and clinical lecturer and consultant in Aberdeen (1964). His 1970 paper in Nature was the first to describe reversible enzyme inhibition by inhalational anaesthetics. From 1970 he worked in the NHS and the MRC Division of Anaesthesia, dividing his time between clinical anaesthesia, teaching, and research, mainly into methods of delivery of anaesthetics, publishing 41 peer reviewed papers over 36 years. He leaves a wife, Gillian, and two children.

John Nunn

Cite this as: BMJ 2008;337:a2652

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