



OBITUARIES

John Lloyd Burton

Cameron Kennedy



Although he spent his consultant career as a dermatologist, John Lloyd Burton had a very thorough training as a physician. He became increasingly widely known from the 1970s onwards through his writing—firstly for those studying for the membership examination of the Royal College of Physicians with *Aids to Postgraduate Medicine*, soon followed by *Aids to Undergraduate Medicine*, *Aids to Medicine for Nurses*, *Aids to Medicine for Dental Students*, and *Essentials of Dermatology*. In these slim texts John combined the essentials for understanding the subjects with an iconoclastic humour, such that the readers found that they could after all remember those lists that were needed to pass exams.

John was born in Buxton, Derbyshire, and was the first in his family to go to a grammar school and then on to a university. He had a highly successful undergraduate career, obtaining many prizes and a BSc in physiology before moving through a series of prestigious junior posts in medicine—the professorial unit in Manchester, the Hammersmith, the Brompton, then Edinburgh—where he undertook cardiovascular research before becoming a dermatologist.

John was attracted to the stimulating research oriented environment of Sam Shuster's dermatology department at Newcastle, where he joined a group that would later have a major influence on British dermatology—including Bill Cunliffe, Malcom Greaves, Martin Black, and Rod Dawber. His own work was on sebaceous gland physiology, biochemistry, and pathology. He was appointed to the first academic post in dermatology in Bristol as senior lecturer and consultant dermatologist in 1973. Although facilities for research initially promised did not materialise, John nonetheless continued to produce research and supervise postgraduate students, mainly on the biochemistry and endocrinology of sebaceous glands and epidermal lipids. He established teaching in dermatology for undergraduates, GPs, nurses, dentists, and many other groups. He was made reader in 1982 and then professor in 1993.

He was a busy and talented clinician in the dermatology department at the Bristol Royal Infirmary. He retained his general physician's approach and brought the rigour of his scientific training to clinical work. In addition to his scientific

research papers, John made many important contributions to the literature, particularly in therapeutics, including some that were a first, such as the benefit of metronidazole for rosacea (a double blind controlled trial published in the *Lancet* in 1976).

As a physician, he was a writer of questions and examiner for the MRCP during the 1980s and 1990s, a chairman of the dermatology committee of the RCP, and an examiner in the Bristol University finals MB until he retired.

In British dermatology John had many influential roles. He was chair of the therapy committee of the British Association of Dermatologists, served six years on the BAD executive committee, and was president in 1995-6. In this key role, his wit and diplomacy helped him steer the association through several difficult circumstances. An important behind the scenes role that he undertook for several years was being advisor in dermatology to the chief medical officer. His clinical abilities were recognised when he was chosen to be president of the dermatology section of the Royal Society of Medicine in 1994-5.

His writing and editorial skills came to the fore when he was a coeditor and author of nine chapters for the "Rook Book," the major British textbook of dermatology, during three editions from 1986 till 1999. Before this enormous commitment, he was for four years the editor of the *British Journal of Dermatology*, during which time its prestige rose, and the profits went up more than 30-fold. He wrote numerous review articles and editorials, many of which came out anonymously.

The humorous side to John was sometimes seen in formal publications such as "Prolonged haemorrhage following nail clipping" (regarding his botched attempt to trim the claws of a budgie), published in the *Lancet* in 1983, then reprinted in *The Best of Medical Humour* (1991), and particularly in his many after dinner speeches and guest lectures.

His erudition, inquiring mind, encyclopaedic knowledge, and memorable style of presentation—almost always using his inimitable sense of fun—made him a much sought-after lecturer. He gave the prestigious Parkes Weber lecture at the Royal College of Physicians ("Diet and Dermatology," 1988), the Dowling Oration ("The Logic of Dermatological Diagnosis," 1980) and the Pierre Deville lecture at the RSM ("Cutaneous and Sexual Stereotyping, 1996).

John retired from his clinical and university positions in Bristol in 1996 and moved, first to Dorset, then Somerset. He continued to work for a further two years as a consultant dermatologist at Dorchester Hospital.

From an early age he had enjoyed painting, and for more than 30 years John was a highly regarded designer-bookbinder. In retirement he took up stone carving, jewellery making, and furthered his gardening skills, particularly with bonsai trees.

Despite having had ill health for many years, John maintained his curiosity in life, wrote a blog with his thoughts, and continued as many of his interests as possible. For 54 years he was happily married to Pat, a consultant histopathologist at Southmead Hospital, Bristol. It was a devastating loss when Pat died in February 2018 (read obituary: <https://www.bmj.com/content/361/bmj.k1490.full>). John leaves two daughters, a son (a professor of ophthalmology), and nine grandchildren.

Biography

Professor of dermatology Bristol (b 1938; q Manchester 1964; BSC, MD, FRCP), died from heart failure on 10 November 2018

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