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Obituaries

Robert Shields

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Ian Gilmore, Caroline Richmond

Brought worldwide fame to a surgery department for treating liver disease

A good administrator can run a department smoothly and apparently effortlessly; as great an administrator and charismatic leader as Bob Shields can turn a demoralised department into a world famous one. He did this for the department of surgery at Liverpool University during 27 years as its head. This included three years as dean of the medical school, building its strength by establishing new chairs in general practice and public health and forming close links with local hospitals.

Bob, an engineer's son, was educated at the John Neilson Institution in Paisley. He was inspired to choose medicine when his family doctor treated his mother for an ankle fracture, with the bone protruding. A high flying student at Glasgow, by the time he qualified he had won a distinction, two prizes, and a medal, for surgery, pathology, and diseases of the nose and throat. He was a houseman at ...

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Sir Robert Shields: distinguished surgeon and administrator

Wednesday October 15 2008, 6.30pm BSTThe Times

Robert Shields was a doyen of British surgery in the second half of the last century. As president of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1994-97 he was responsible for raising its management and administration systems to match the increasing role it was playing in maintaining standards and surgical education in the UK and elsewhere.

He was especially involved in raising the training standards for surgeons overseas, and he was able to achieve complete equivalence in higher surgical training between the UK, Hong Kong and Singapore. In recognition of this the Hong Kong College of Surgeons established a Shields Medal to be awarded to the most successful candidate in the Joint Fellowship Examination.

As president of the Edinburgh college he was called on to play a key role in many medical political issues. Most notably he led a working party which led to the creation of the Clinical Standards Board for Scotland, a statutory body which was the Scottish equivalent of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence in England.

In his university career Shields had taken over the headship of the small and demoralised department of surgery in the University of Liverpool in 1969. Under his guidance it became one of the most successful in the UK. In the first UK Research Assessment Exercise of the Higher Funding Council in 1982, his was one of only two departments of surgery to achieve star rating as being of international status. It became a virtual incubator for chairs of surgery, training 12 professors, including the first woman to occupy the post of chairman of a university department of surgery.

His policy was to give intense encouragement and initial financial support to members of his department so that they could form teams to develop research interests within the overall departmental programme which encompassed breast and gastrointestinal cancer and liver disease.

As a result of this approach the department's research profile rose, funds were attracted from the chief UK sources, and research fellows from many parts of the world were attracted to work with him. In addition Shields was always keen to develop research and service links with other university departments, especially gastroenterology and physiology, and as a result the department achieved national recognition for the emergency treatment of bleeding oesophageal varices.

In 1983 he was persuaded to become the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Liverpool, and the management principles which he had established in the department were translated to a broader canvas. This was an exciting time to be part of the medical-academic community in Liverpool. Shields attracted funding from the Department of Health to establish new chairs in general practice and in public health, and excellent candidates were appointed to both posts. A new collaborative spirit developed between clinical and science departments. He improved the cool relations between the university and the local NHS by incorporating undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in district hospitals and establishing academic clinical posts within them. This has since become normal practice, but Shields deserves huge credit for breaking down barriers which sometimes seemed insurmountable.

Robert Shields was born and raised in the West of Scotland. He attended the John Neilson Institution, Paisley. After a distinguished undergraduate medical career, his initial surgical training in Glasgow — and National Service in the RAMC, including a posting to Berlin — was followed by a research fellowship at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, which had great influence on his research career.

His MD thesis was awarded the Bellahouston Gold Medal, and he gained fellowships of both the Edinburgh and London Colleges of Surgeons. He was appointed to a senior lectureship in the University of Wales where he was promoted to reader in 1968, before moving to Liverpool in 1969.

He received many honours. He was knighted in 1990, and was president of the British Society of Gastroenterology, the Surgical Research Society and the James IV Association of Surgeons. He served as a member of the Medical Research Council and the General Medical Council and within the NHS, became vice-chairman of the Mersey Regional Health Authority.

He was awarded honorary fellowships, visiting professorships and honorary degrees in many countries.

Bob Shields was an excellent colleague whose judgment was invariably sound. Industrious to a fault, he had a most engaging personality. He was highly respected and liked by his peers and juniors in the many fields where his influence was felt.

Shields is survived by his wife, Marianne, and their three children.

Sir Robert Shields, Professor of Surgery, University of Liverpool, 1969-96, was born on November 6, 1930. He died of cancer on October 3, 2008, aged 77

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OBITUARY

Professor Sir Robert Shields

Kt. 1990; *DL County of Merseyside* 1991; MB ChB Glasgow 1953; MD Glasgow 1965; FRCS Ed.1959; FRCS Eng. 1966 FRCPS 1993; FRCPE 1996; Hon. DSc. (Wales)

8 November 1930 – 3 October 2008

Professor Robert Shields (Bobby to his friends) was elected to the Travelling Surgical Society (when it was still 'The Surgical Club') in 1972. Despite a busy medical career, Robert and his wife Marianne supported The Club whenever they could, and the Travelling Surgical Society was delighted when he agreed to become its President (2001-2003) following James Thomson's retirement. His high profile in the surgical world at home and abroad brought many connections, and he gave papers and contributed much to the scientific discussion at our meetings as well as being an authority on surgical training.

Robert Shields was Professor of Surgery and Chairman of the Department of Surgery and Honorary Consultant Surgeon to the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals from 1969 to 1996. He was Dean of the Faculty of Medicine to the University of Liverpool from 1982-85 and at the outset he invited the Club to Liverpool. The Report for 1982 recorded that "On Thursday, September 30th a coach took us from the Atlantic Tower Hotel near the Mersey and the famous 'Liver Building' now up for sale, to the delightful opening ceremony that Bobby and Marianne had arranged in their home in the Wirral - a truly joyous occasion where many friends swapped news. Present also was Professor Alan Clarke, an accomplished New Zealander of great charm." On the following day "Friday 1st October - at a commendably early hour on near enough its fourth birthday and Bobby Shields' first day as Dean of the Medical School, we assembled in the new Liverpool Royal Infirmary for the weekly Grand Round." A very full, varied and interesting programme followed. Some two years later at the Diamond Jubilee meeting held in Norwich (1984) he delivered his paper 'Musings of a Dean' - a model of clarity and commonsense. Bobby had what Dean Swift called the capacity to use 'Proper words in proper places', to 'make the true definition of style', as befits one who became editor of the *Scottish Medical Journal* and vice-chairman of the *British Journal of Surgery*. Certainly his short papers at 'in-house' meetings were instructive and always welcomed.

Born on 8 November 1930 in Paisley, Robert was educated there at John Neilson Grammar School. At Glasgow University he won the Asher-Asher Medal and MacLeod Medal, qualifying in medicine in 1953. Following house appointments at the Western General Hospital in Glasgow, he entered National Service with the rank of Captain as a Regimental Medical Officer to the first Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (1954 – 1956), and retained a Territorial Army connection as Major with the 7th Battalion of the Regiment until 1961, later becoming Honorary Colonel, University of Liverpool Officer Training Corps from 1994 -2001. He was on the Executive Committee

and Council of Military Educations Committees of the Universities of the UK from 1990-1994.

In 1957 he married (Grace) Marianne Swinburn and resumed his civilian medical career as Hall Fellow in the University of Glasgow, followed by a year as Foundation Research Fellow at the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota. Returning to the UK he became Lecturer in Surgery at the University of Glasgow (1960-1963) and worked at the Western Infirmary under Sir Charles Illingworth before moving to the Welsh National School of Medicine in Cardiff as Reader with Honorary Consultant status on Sir Patrick Forrest's unit until 1969.

His career was illustrious, with Presidencies of the Surgical Research Society (1986-87, following many years as secretary), the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland (in 1987), the British Society of Gastroenterology (1990-91) and finally President of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh from 1988-89. He received numerous accolades from Colleges of surgery worldwide, and lectured at many of them. He had been on the Council of the Association of Surgeons from 1966-69, and had won its prestigious Moynihan Medal in 1966. He was also a member of various national bodies including the General Medical Council and its Education and Professional Conduct Committees (1982-94), and the Medical Research Council and its Strategy Committee (1987-1991).

He was active within the NHS at national level, advising amongst others the Secretary of State for Health (England) and the Acute Services Review, and he was Chairman of a range of advisory and training committees, as well as working for his own local health authorities. In addition to all these commitments he was in demand as an Examiner in Surgery to many Universities, including those of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Leicester, Sheffield, Cambridge, Lagos, Amman, Riyadh and Malta.

His travels as a Visiting Professor and Lecturer took him far and wide both within the UK and abroad: to Bristol, Sheffield University, London, and Hong Kong, as well as back to his native Glasgow. He was Wellcome Visiting Lecturer in South Africa at the College of Medicine and at Witwatersrand, and Alpha Omega Alpha Distinguished Lecturer to the Uniformed Services University Medical School, Washington DC, USA. He had also been visiting lecturer at Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, Yale, New York, San Diego, Chicago, Toronto, Malta, Sudan, Nigeria, Jordan and Zambia.

A great many academic distinctions came his way. The award of Doctor of Science by the University of Wales in 1990 gave him much pleasure, and he also had Honorary Fellowships of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the College of Surgeons of Hong Kong, the American College of Surgeons, and the College of Surgeons of South Africa. He was given Honorary Fellowships of the American Surgical Association, the Association of Surgeons of India and of the Academy of Medicine of Singapore.

His publications have also been numerous. He contributed to at least five books (including 'Surgical Emergencies' in 1979, 'Textbook of Surgery' by MacFarlane and Thomas in 1983 and 'Gastrointestinal Emergencies' in 1992). Nearly 200 original articles and reviews bear his name in the field of gastroenterology, particularly liver problems and oesophageal varices. Little wonder that he was a member of numerous editorial boards: Gut (1969-76), British Journal of Surgery (1970-1985 and 1989-95) and the International Editorial Board of 'Current Practice in Surgery'. Sir Robert became Chairman of the Merseyside, Lancashire and Cheshire Council on 'Alcoholism' (1992-94) and was Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the British Liver Trust (formerly British Liver Foundation) from 1991-94.

He was knighted in 1990 and appointed Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Merseyside in 1991.

His main home was in Liverpool, although 'North of the Border' the Shields relaxed around Lochgilphead in the Highlands of the West of Scotland. He enjoyed sailing and family activities there, and also took pleasure from walking his dog in the Wirral. His wife Marianne, a former almoner, is a gracious lady (indeed her first name *is* Grace) who loved those around her dearly, and was rightly proud of her husband and her family. A supportive wife who never sought the limelight, she and indeed the man himself were humble about Robert's many achievements which kept them so very busy, and they were a pleasure to be with on our visits, especially in Rome in 2001 when James Thomson passed the Presidency to Bobby Shields in "a small domestic ceremony". This took place during the TSS dinner at the Lord Byron Hotel in the company of 15 guests, mainly Italian but including the British Ambassador to the Holy See, His Excellency Mark Pellew. Bobby Shields was thus our President for the meeting in Tunbridge Wells that September until the visit to Washington, USA, in 2003, after which the TSS Presidency passed to Geoffrey Glazer.

The Shields had three children, two of whom work in healthcare: Gillian Camm – who has two children and an entry in Who's Who – has been NHS Regional Appointments Commissioner for the South West since 2001. Jennifer, the younger daughter who also has two children, is Commissioning Manager for Health and Social Services in the Wirral. Their brother Andrew is a Director of Avis Europe based in London and Paris. All the family have our condolences and our very warm thoughts over the loss of a remarkable man with so many distinctions and honours in surgery, and we are proud that he shared so much with us in the Travelling Surgical Society.

Alan Green / Tim Williams

Obituaries for Professor Robert Shields, Gastroenterologist, dated 2008:

The Times:

“His policy was to give intense encouragement and initial financial support to members of his department so that they could form teams to develop research interests within the overall departmental programme which encompassed breast and gastrointestinal cancer and liver disease

[...] in addition Shields was always keen to develop research and service links with other university departments, especially gastroenterology and physiology, and as a result the department achieved national recognition for the emergency treatment of bleeding oesophageal varices.”

The Travelling Surgical Society:

“His publications have also been numerous. He contributed to at least five books (including ‘Surgical Emergencies’ in 1979, ‘Textbook of Surgery’[...] in 1983 and ‘Gastrointestinal Emergencies’ in 1992). Nearly 200 original articles and reviews bear his name in the field of gastroenterology, particularly liver problems and oesophageal varices. Little wonder that he was a member of numerous editorial boards: Gut (1969-76), British Journal of Surgery (1970-1985 and 1989-95) and the International Editorial Board of ‘Current Practice in Surgery’. Sir Robert became Chairman of the Merseyside, Lancashire and Cheshire Council on ‘Alcoholism’ (1992-94) and was Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the British Liver Trust (formerly British Liver Foundation) from 1991-94.”

Obituary for Professor Robert Shields, Gastroenterologist, in The Telegraph, dated 2008:

“Among other things he promoted the development of transplant surgery with a new senior lectureship, and in 1973 a new purpose-built transplant unit was opened at the Liverpool Royal Infirmary by Sir Peter Medawar. Together with his great friend the physician Richard McConnell, Shields also established the country's first dedicated joint medical-surgical gastrointestinal unit.”