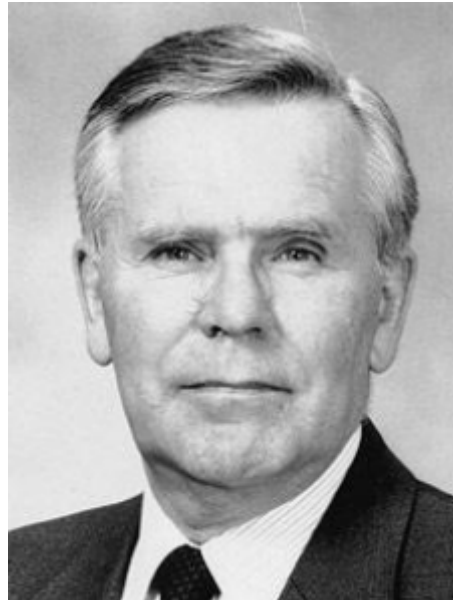


# Professor Sir Robert Shields

Surgeon who presided over a department admired for its research, teaching and clinical practice.

08 October 2008 • 7 :35pm



Shields: cast-iron integrity

Professor Sir Robert Shields, who died on October 3 aged 77, enjoyed a distinguished career in surgery and in academic and health service administration, particularly at the University of Liverpool, where he held the chair in Surgery from 1969 to 1996.

The son of an electrical engineer, Robert Shields was born in Paisley, on November 8 1930 and educated at the John Neilson Institution there and at Glasgow University. His promise became apparent during his clinical training, when he passed Pathology with distinction and was awarded the Captain HS Rankin VC Memorial Prize in 1952. The following year he won the MacLeod Medal and the Mary Margaret Isobel Ure Prize in Surgery, together with the Asher Asher Medal in diseases of the nose and throat.

House officer posts followed at Glasgow's Western Infirmary, and then

National Service as regimental medical officer with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. While serving in Berlin he met, and in 1957 married, Marianne Swinburne, a nursing sister at the British Military Hospital. He retained his association with the Army until 1962, serving as senior surgical specialist and medical officer with the 7th Battalion the Argylls (TA Reserve).

After demob in 1956, Shields returned to the Western Infirmary and moved steadily up the ranks under Professor Charles Illingworth, with a spell at the Mayo Foundation as senior research assistant to Charles Cooke and Jesse Bollman. Here he began research on intestinal absorption which would form the basis for his MD, awarded in 1965, and on the strength of which he won the Bellahouston Gold Medal.

In 1963 he moved to Cardiff as senior lecturer in surgery at the Welsh National School of Medicine and consultant surgeon to the United Cardiff Hospitals and the Welsh Hospital Board. He was appointed Reader in 1969, but the same year was offered a chair at Liverpool University (with a consultant post at the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen hospitals), where he was to remain until his retirement. Over the next 30 years Shields built up a department of surgery with an international reputation for the excellence of its research, teaching and clinical practice.

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 gastro-intestinal unit.

Shields was a good listener who was adept at evaluating different points of view and was known for his assiduous preparation and almost military attention to detail – what he called "staff work".

His administrative flair led, in 1982, to his appointment as Dean of the Liverpool faculty of Medicine, a three-year appointment which he used to champion the establishment of new chairs in general practice and public health. He also served on many university committees.

His reputation led to invitations to serve on numerous Health Service and professional bodies. Among other appointments he served as vice-chairman of the Mersey Regional Health Authority and of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital Trust. He was a member of the Department of Health gastroenterology liaison committee and of the NHS working party on undergraduate medical and dental education.

He also served, successively, as president of the Surgical Research Society; the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland and the British Society of Gastroenterology. He was chairman of the British Liver Foundation and a member of the Medical Research Council and the General Medical Council, serving on its education and professional conduct committees.

In addition he was on the editorial boards of various learned journals and vice-chairman of the *British Journal of Surgery*. In 1990 he was elected president of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, becoming the first Glasgow man to hold the office in nearly 500 years of the college's history.

After his retirement Shields served as an adviser to government on issues relating to health service restructuring.

In 1996 – in a report for the Scottish Office, *Commissioning Better Health* – he recommended that the onus for maintaining a high-quality environment for patients should in future fall more directly on hospitals, with health boards focusing on clinical outcomes and the monitoring of clinical practice using data from clinical audit.

A quiet man of cast-iron integrity, Shields's natural reserve belied his determination to get things done. Throughout his time as an administrator he maintained a close and supportive interest in research work and did much to ensure that clinical and laboratory research proceeded side by side. He made numerous contributions to medical and surgical journals relating to surgery and gastroenterology, and was joint editor of books on surgical and gastrointestinal emergencies and of a *Textbook of Surgery* (1983).

Robert Shields was awarded numerous honorary fellowships and degrees, including fellowship of the American College of Surgeons.

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

Between 1994 and 2001 he was Honorary Colonel of the Liverpool University OTC.

He is survived by his wife and by their son and two daughters.