

Obituary

Peter Banks



Peter Banks was one of the best known maxillofacial surgeons of his generation, as well as one of the most colourful and entertaining. Admired as an intelligent and innovative clinician, he was also a leader in the affairs of the specialty both nationally and internationally.

He was born in Leicester on 23rd July 1936 and spent his formative years in nearby Hinckley. Educated at Oakham School in Rutland he left with an impressive academic record sitting both arts and science subjects at “A-level”, passing in all six subjects. Despite an obvious interest in the arts Peter decided to study dentistry although he often confessed he was not quite sure why. His career might have taken a different path because he was offered an Oxbridge scholarship but

declined it in favour of an open scholarship to Guy’s Hospital Dental School.

Peter entered Guy’s in 1954 where his notable academic progress continued with the award of several undergraduate prizes. On qualifying he was appointed resident dental house surgeon and then started in general dental practice in Guildford. He soon realised that this was not for him and wrote to enquire about the possibility of a job to Mr – later Sir Terence – Ward, who was the head of the Maxillofacial Unit at the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead. Ward was a dominant force in the specialty at the time and later the inaugural President of BAOMS. An informal visit was arranged and a house surgeon position offered. Peter began his long association with East Grinstead in 1960.

Later that same year he returned to Guy’s to study for a medical degree, collecting further prizes as he did so. Following house appointments he spent a period as registrar in Professor Killey’s department at the Eastman Dental Hospital. He returned to East Grinstead as senior registrar in 1966 and toward the end of his training was seconded to the maxillofacial unit in Kaduna, Nigeria. This had been established with the help of the British government to treat ballistic injuries sustained in the civil war of 1967–1970. Management of maxillofacial trauma was an enduring interest to which Peter made several important contributions, particularly in the areas of fracture fixation and the treatment of orbital trauma, including the secondary correction of residual defects.

In 1969 he was appointed as a consultant in Peterborough but in 1971 he returned to East Grinstead following Terence Ward’s retirement where he continued to develop the unit’s scope of practice, including a special interest in the management of secondary cleft lip and palate deformities. For four years after starting at East Grinstead, in addition to a busy clinical workload, he undertook research at the Royal College of Surgeons primate unit at Downe where he carried out investigations into temporomandibular joint pathology and pulp changes after segmental osteotomies.

With his iconoclastic attitude to much received wisdom and his innovative approach to many surgical procedures Peter was a stimulating teacher in both informal and formal situations. He was much in demand as a lecturer and for over ten years held an appointment as Honorary Senior Lecturer and Consultant at the Eastman Dental Hospital where he undertook weekly teaching sessions on the postgraduate M.Sc. course.

Peter was enormously hard working, as was shown not only by his clinical workload but also by the large number of responsible positions he occupied, including Civil Consultant to the Royal Air Force. He was elected a member of the Board of Faculty of Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and served a period as Vice-Dean. He had wide experience as an examiner for the Royal College of Surgeons of England and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and chaired the Specialist Advisory Committee overseeing training standards in the specialty. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the specialist FRCS initiated by the Edinburgh College in 1985 but later superseded by the current intercollegiate exam, and was invited to serve as an inaugural examiner for both.

Peter was awarded the BAOMS Down Surgical Prize in 1988. He served as Honorary Treasurer of BAOMS and was elected President in 1996, after which he served as President of the International Association from 1997 to 1999. In addition to his wide involvement on the national and international stage he did not neglect involvement with local and regional health service committees, serving for three years as Medical Director of the Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Foundation Trust before retiring from clinical practice in 1999.

Life with Peter was never dull. He was what may sometimes be called a “character”. He was a highly intelligent, extrovert, gregarious person who was stimulating and enjoyable company, although he could sometimes become easily frustrated, openly demonstrating his vexation. The storm clouds passed very quickly however and those who worked with him soon learnt how to deal with these episodes knowing that normality would rapidly return with no hard feelings on either side. It was clear that his trainees, colleagues and staff not only held him in high regard for his undoubted ability but also regarded him with genuine affection as a generous, humorous, extremely clubbable (even if occasionally exasperating!) man.

As a young man Peter was an accomplished cricketer and skier. Following the fortunes of English cricket and rugby remained a lifelong, if sometimes discouraging, interest. Fly fishing was a passion for many years and he took up golf in retirement, a game he enjoyed regularly even though its vicissitudes tried his less than robust patience. He enjoyed the daily challenge of the Times crossword and was a voracious reader, able to recall plot details and authorship long after finishing a book.

Peter met his wife-to-be Diana, who was a nurse in the maxillofacial unit, in 1960 on the day he first visited the Queen Victoria Hospital. They were married for more than 56 years and together were wonderful and generous hosts, opening their home to generations of trainees, visitors to the unit, and friends and colleagues alike. Peter Banks, a man who was typically full of energy and life, died after a relatively short illness on 2nd March, 2019 in his 83rd year.

Andrew Brown