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OBITUARY

Professor J. Hankinson



John Hankinson, Emeritus Professor of Neurosurgery at Newcastle General Hospital, died on 10 March 2007.

John was born on 10 March 1919 in Ramsbottom in Lancashire and was proud of his half-Irish parentage. After schooling in Thornleigh College, Bolton, he graduated from St Mary's Hospital Medical School in 1946.

While still a student, he volunteered for a place in the medical team that was sent to Belsen following its liberation in 1945. Helping with the medical needs of 67,000 survivors, many of whom had typhus, TB, gastroenteritis or other serious diseases in addition to starvation, had a marked effect on him, although he was rarely able to mention it in conversation.

During one of his house jobs, in St Mary's Hospital, London, John worked with Dickson Wright, who sparked his early interest in neurosurgery. After general surgical training, he worked as

house surgeon and subsequently surgical registrar to Wylie McKissock and Valentine Logue at Atkinson Morley's Hospital in 1951/52. He was much influenced by Jeffery Jefferson, whom he met frequently at Queen Square researching on Victor Horsely for a lecture given in 1957.

In 1953 he did a fellowship in Neurosurgery in Chicago with Dr Luis Amador and, subsequently, with Dr Ralph Gerrard in Illinois. Here, he developed his interest in stereotaxy and functional neurosurgery. After returning to Atkinson Morley's Hospital in 1955 and subsequently Queen Square as senior registrar, he went to Sweden to work with Lars Leksell in 1956.

'Hank', as he subsequently became known to one and all, became Consultant Neurosurgeon in 1957 in Newcastle, having followed Frederick Rowbotham there from Queen Square. He continued his academic interest, becoming Professor of Neurosurgery in 1972 at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Hank's principal medical interest throughout a long and varied career was in functional neurosurgery. He had many publications in the field, and lectured widely both nationally and internationally. He was also an authority on syringomyelia.

While sometimes irascible in theatre, Hank was otherwise entirely charming. A mark of his popularity with his colleagues was his election as President of the Society of British Neurological Surgeons in 1980 having previously been Secretary from 1972 to 1977.

He had many interests outside neurosurgery, and managed the delicate art of balancing an extremely successful and productive career with activities as diverse as sailing and playing the organ in his local church. It became an annual event for him to sail from Blyth on the Northumberland coast up to the Western Isles.

Hank retired in 1984, but remained a frequent visitor to the Newcastle unit for over 20 years both medically and socially. He was twice married: Ruth Barnes, a Theatre Sister whom he met in St Mary's Hospital and with whom he had two daughters, died in 1982. He subsequently married Nicole Andrews, a radiotherapist.

Hank was a loyal and entertaining colleague and his sudden death came as a great shock to the department. He is sadly missed.

ALISTAIR JENKINS