

Ivan Johnston

4 October 1929 - 29 December 2007



Professor Ivan Johnston, TSS President 1992-1995, was a distinguished academic surgeon who made major contributions in the fields of endocrine surgery and metabolism. He and his wife Annette were conscientious attenders at TSS meetings whilst his health permitted, and his presentations and speeches were concise and respected. The affection in which he was held by the TSS was reflected in the contact maintained with him subsequently, a postcard being sent to them both signed by all those on our foreign visits when he could not come. He died on 29 December 2007 having suffered progressive debilitating Parkinsonism and failing eyesight, which blighted his final years. Elected to the TSS in 1967, he hosted two visits to Newcastle-upon-Tyne: the first in 1971 with his first wife Beth (who died in 1987), and the second in 1989 at the time of his engagement to Annette.

Born in Belfast, Ivan was a pupil at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. He studied medicine at Queen's University where one of his first year teachers was Professor Flynn, father of the flamboyant film star Errol Flynn. Ivan qualified in 1953 and spent his pre-registration year at the Royal Victoria Hospital where he worked for the charismatic Sir Ian Fraser and then in the Musgrave Clinic with its 80 private beds. Passing his Primary FRCS in Dublin (in the days of reciprocal recognition between all the Royal Colleges) he joined the new Department of Surgery there under the watchful eye of Harold Rodgers, Professor of Surgery, with Dick Welbourn recently appointed to enhance its research and clinical activity. Sensitive to the geographical separation of Ireland from mainland Britain, Professor Rodgers sent many trainees to centres of excellence around Britain, including Manchester (where the Professor of Surgery was Michael Boyd, also a member of the TSS). One trainee in Belfast was Dennis Burkitt, later famous for his work in Africa on Burkitt's Lymphoma and for his analysis of the benefits of high fibre in the diet.

Ivan passed the FRCS in England in 1959 and married Elizabeth (Beth). He was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to attend the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota (whither they sailed on a heavy weather crossing on the Britannic, of the White Star Line) and here he spent a year working on gastro-intestinal function. Early morning ward rounds were the norm, and the depths of winter also posed problems! They returned the following year after touring the United States in a second-hand Dodge. Beth and Ivan had two sons, Stephen and Philip, who became a doctor and a vet.

Appointed to the Hammersmith Hospital, Ivan became a Senior Lecturer there in 1963 with Consultant status and continued his research. He joined a hospital team (led by another TSS member, Selwyn Taylor) which was invited by the Ministry of Overseas Development to present money for research equipment to a medical school in India, a country they toured extensively together with the Chief Medical Officer of the day, Sir George Godber. The development of research facilities at the medical school in Chandigarh in the Punjab was supported by many Hammersmith staff.

When Andrew Lowdon, Professor of Surgery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and yet another TSS member, died suddenly in 1965, Ivan succeeded him in the Chair of Surgery, working at the Royal Victoria Infirmary from 1966, for which he moved to Ponteland with Beth and their two sons. He was elected to the TSS the following year. During his tenure he nurtured the outward-looking approach to surgical training instilled in him in Belfast, and invited many overseas surgeons to visit his department, some delivering the Grey Turner or Rutherford Morrison lectures (named after former incumbent Professors). Overseas placements were encouraged for his junior staff, particularly in North America, and overseas graduates were likewise welcomed in Newcastle. He fostered specialisation in endocrine surgery during its infancy. A great supporter of the Surgical Research Society from its inception, he made numerous contributions to the scientific literature including *The Metabolic Basis of Surgical care* (1968), *Advances in Parenteral Nutrition* (1980) and *Modern Trends in Surgical Endocrinology* (1968).

With his wife Beth, Ivan hosted a memorable meeting in Newcastle for the TSS in May 1971 at short notice, the trip to Lisbon being postponed until the autumn because of the unexpected death of their intended host, Professor Limo Basta, Portugal's leading cancer surgeon. The variety and quality of the research conducted under Ivan's leadership left a lasting impression on the TSS. The buffet supper at his home, Darras Hall, was also memorable and the

social programme was joined by Andrew Lowdon's widow Glenys.

Ivan was an RCS examiner for six years and the first Chairman of the Specialist Advisory Committee in General Surgery; he travelled worldwide on behalf of the College. He first visited Cairo and Khartoum in 1972: two years later, four TSS members were present in the Sudan at the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Kitchener College of Medicine in Khartoum: Selwyn Taylor, Adrian Marston as a WHO representative working there, Ivan Johnston who joined him in a similar capacity and Alan Green who was leading the Primary FRCS (Eng.) examining team. During the opening ceremony the students staged a good natured demonstration against President Nimeiri, in reprisal for which he closed all Universities, making it difficult to gain facilities for the examinations. Lunches from local hotels also left a little to be desired, and gave some examiners abdominal problems!

Ivan was an Honorary Colonel in the RAMC, dropping in on its manoeuvres (literally! by helicopter) in June 1989 to witness the management of simulated casualties. That same year the TSS again visited Newcastle, for the third time (the first having been in 1933 when Professor Grey Turner was host, in his prime). Sadly Ivan's first wife Beth had died in 1987 of renal complications from diabetes, but during that Newcastle visit in 1989 members of the TSS were delighted to read in the national press of the engagement of Ivan and Mrs Annette Maiden (née Elphinstone), an event toasted by the TSS and culminating in the couple's marriage on 18 December 1989.

In 1991 at the TSS meeting at Newport Ivan was unanimously elected President, for which he was formally handed the Presidential Badge commissioned in Norwich by Doreen and Alan Green, the latter being briefly allowed to wear it before it was conferred on the President-elect! Ivan undertook the Presidency with distinction, with Annette beside him, both of them always supportive of members and their wives. His speeches and presentations were concise and informative, and he was well-known to our overseas hosts, particularly as during this time he became President of the International Association of Endocrine Surgeons (1993/4).

Annette lovingly guided Ivan through his final years when his eyesight was failing and Parkinsonism reduced his mobility, afflictions bravely borne but which compromised his hobbies of photography and gardening though the couple still attended home meetings of the TSS whilst Ivan was able to. Having delivered a lecture on Grey Turner he had been given honorary membership of that eponymous travelling club also, a true honour acknowledging the many

contributions Ivan Johnston had made to surgery throughout his distinguished career.

Tim Williams / Alan Green