



Professor John Knowles Stanley

John Knowles Stanley was born in Cardiff on 30th March 1944 but grew up in Oswestry in North Wales. From the Boys' High School, he moved in 1962 to Liverpool University Medical School, qualifying in 1968. His subsequent career in orthopaedic surgery was appropriate, as these places are linked indelibly with Sir Robert Jones, the founder of the modern specialty.

After a first house officer post in Ormskirk he entered surgical training in the Liverpool Region, becoming a Senior Registrar in orthopaedics in 1974. In 1979, he returned to Ormskirk & District General Hospital as a Consultant, with sessions at Wrightington Hospital. Shortly after appointment, at the age of 35 he had a myocardial infarction resulting in bypass surgery. This was a major factor in his decision in 1984 to move to full-time hand surgery at Wrightington. Under his leadership, the unit there grew exponentially, developing a particular focus on the treatment of patients suffering with rheumatoid arthritis as well as other complex problems of the wrist. From 1991, more consultant colleagues creating a renowned centre of innovation and excellence joined him. At his retirement in 2009, the Wrightington Upper Limb Unit had thirteen Consultants, both orthopaedic and plastic, dealing with all conditions of the upper limb, from shoulder to elbow and hand, with a high national and international reputation. This was a testament to John Stanley's professional and leadership skills as well as his personal qualities of commitment, passion and drive combined with pragmatism and perseverance.

Although much in demand, he forsook private practice early in his career. He developed in its place a large medicolegal practice, which did not interfere so much with family and social life, and his hobbies. Such was the quality and clarity of his opinions, that he was required in the witness box only rarely.

John Stanley's research activities, particularly in the introduction of hand and wrist prostheses, produced more than 100 peer-reviewed papers in learned journals as well as countless presentations to learned societies. He wrote two books, supplied chapters for 20 more and delivered many eponymous lectures. He travelled widely, not only in the UK and Europe, but worldwide, particularly in America, Australia, France and Switzerland, resulting in a long list of honorary fellowships and memberships. A crowning academic accolade was

the award in 1996 of a Chair in Hand Surgery by the University of Manchester, a considerable distinction. Finally in 2016 John was made “Pioneer of Hand Surgery “, by the International Society of Hand Surgery, a lasting tribute as his name now sits amongst the great’s of Hand Surgery.

He supervised many surgical trainees, a role in which he excelled. Many of these were at the end of their orthopaedic training, acquiring a sub-specialist polish in hand surgery before taking up their own consultant appointments. He continued to teach at Wrightington Hospital until shortly before his death. He also served for many years as an Examiner for the Intercollegiate Board in Orthopaedic Surgery.

Not surprisingly, John Stanley was an active member of the British Society of the Hand, presenting at many meetings, serving on Council and becoming President in 1999. In 2006, his professional standing and the affection in which the wider surgical community held him led to his election to the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons. His College career culminated in his election as Vice-President from 2010 to 2012, a role in which he served with distinction and good humour.

John Stanley’s first myocardial infarction happened when he was 35, his father having died of the same condition at 55. His subsequent course was complex in the extreme, with four open cardiac operations and numerous other less major procedures. It stretches the bounds of credibility that with such problems he completed a distinguished surgical career and a busy family and social life with his enthusiasm and sense of humour unaffected.

John met his wife Gail when they were both students in Liverpool and they married in August 1967, before he qualified. She at first supported John in his surgical practice, but later her own career blossomed as a magistrate, Deputy Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff of Lancashire. In turn he supported her unfailingly, a role well suited to his unassuming, friendly personality. Not surprisingly, both were active in support of the British Heart Foundation.

He had a life-long passion for aviation having learnt to fly as an air cadet at school. His heart problems prevented him pursuing this, but he worked as a volunteer in the aeronautical section of the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. He had a serious interest in military history, particularly but not exclusively of the Second World War, and made many visits to battlefield sites. He managed to take flights in a Spitfire, a Mustang and a Lancaster Bomber, fulfilling some of his dreams, particularly when he was allowed to take the controls of the Spitfire and found his piloting skills had not deserted him.

John was married to Gail for 54 years. His two children Sian and James both followed their father into medicine, Sian as a General Practitioner in Bishops Stortford and James, also a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, in York. He has three grandchildren.

Ian Trail and John Black