

an area of south London. He was actively involved with the sexual dysfunction clinic, and began, tentatively, to take a more psychotherapeutic approach to his work. He pursued his interest in transsexuals, and transvestites, and talked to a number of respectable and not so respectable groups on these topics. He was undoubtedly an able physician and diagnostic psychiatrist, but his most memorable contribution arose from his humanity, and very real concern for people who found themselves on the margins of society.

He was born in Australia, lived in London, died in Mallorca, and at the end of his life, held an Irish passport. His ashes were scattered in his gardens in Mallorca and London. At his request, his name will be added to the family grave in Beaufort, Australia.

JUSTIN SCHLICHT



**Derek Richter**, formerly Director MRC Neuropsychiatric Unit, Carshalton, Surrey, and Secretary General of the International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO)

Derek Richter, one of the founding fathers of modern neurochemistry died on 15 December, 1995, at the age of 88. He had a full and active life, the most

important aspect of which for him was to strive, through research, to reach a better understanding of the working of the brain and to gain new knowledge that might help in the treatment of the mentally ill.

Derek's father was an artist designer of fine furniture, imprinting on him a keen life-long interest and appreciation of art. He was educated at Oundle School, where science teaching was known to be good, and won an open scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he read chemistry and was awarded a first class honours degree. He received a grant from his College and went to Munich, which was then one of the outstanding centres of research in organic chemistry. He worked in the laboratory of Wieland, one of the pioneers in the study of biological oxidations and was awarded his PhD (*magna cum laude*). After moving back to England he was invited to work in the laboratory of Sir

Frederick Gowland Hopkins in Cambridge on investigations into the fate of adrenaline in the body. He was later invited by Professor F. L. Golla to the Maudsley Hospital in London, where he continued working on adrenaline. Research here was interrupted by the war and the work was transferred to Mill Hill School. It was during this period that Derek decided, at the age of 35, to get a medical training. After qualifying, he worked in general practice in London and as a house physician in Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge. Nevertheless, he wanted to get back to research and in 1947 accepted the position of Director of Research in Whitchurch Hospital, Cardiff. The research reputation of Whitchurch was excellent, due to the outstanding work previously carried out by Juda Quastel. Unhappily, these research activities had come to an end at the outbreak of war and Derek had to build up everything from scratch in an environment that often interfered rather than promoted his efforts. I remember that, even in 1957, when I came to work there, one had to get to the main laboratory through the pharmacy, negotiating a narrow passage under the scornful gaze of the hospital pharmacist, who made it clear that she suspected us of the worst. In spite of bad accommodation, obsolete equipment and an unsympathetic medical superintendent, Richter developed exciting new research. He succeeded in obtaining financial support from the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Rockefeller Foundation and recruited an excellent crew, with whom he embarked on some pioneering neurochemical work. In 1957 the laboratory was formally taken over by the MRC and the decision made to move the Neuropsychiatry Research Unit to a new location, where clinical collaboration was possible. In 1960 the Unit moved to Carshalton, Surrey, and a Clinical Investigation Ward was established in a nearby mental hospital. In addition to the relatively small number of permanent staff, the Unit attracted a great number of visiting scientists and became a neuroscience centre of international repute. He retired from the MRC in 1971 but remained active in the field of neuroscience, in particular as the Secretary General of the International Brain Research Organisation (IBRO). Furthermore, during this period he edited six books and wrote a delightful autobiography, which was published when he was 82-years-old.

Derek's *oeuvre* contributed significantly to the development of neurochemistry as we know it. His pioneering contributions included the discovery, in collaboration with Hermann Blaschko, of monoamine oxidase (MAO), these studies initiating exciting worldwide research into the fate of monoamines in nervous tissues. Another lasting contribution of great impact was the demonstration with Rex Dawson and Jim Crossland that the brain is a metabolically active organ

and that biochemical changes are associated with brain function, detectable even under normal physiological conditions. Particularly exciting for him was the discovery together with Miki Gaitonde that these changes also affect brain proteins which, in contrast to widely held belief at the time, are not inert constituents serving only a structural role.

Although he firmly believed that the development of neurochemistry as a special branch of biochemistry is critical for furthering the understanding of brain function, he realised that a multidisciplinary approach is necessary for the promotion of neurobiological research. The disciplines represented in the Neuropsychiatry Research Unit, when I was working there, included in addition to psychiatry and neurology, neurochemistry, neuropharmacology, neurophysiology and neuropathology (Alec Coppen, Ted Reynolds, Miki Gaitonde, Jeff Watkins, Brian Meldrum, Jim Brierly to mention only a few). This approach reflected the great influence that Hopkins had had on him, as he (Hopkins) regarded the director's job to be to select able people working in different disciplines and at the same time to provide an environment in which they can do their own research.

In addition to his impact on research, he made lasting contributions in establishing instruments for the promotion of the development of neuroscience in general, and neurochemistry in particular, both at the international and the national level. He realised that scientists need international, independent organisations, as opposed to UNESCO or WHO, the effectiveness of which is limited by political factors, in so far as they depend on national governments for support. At that time, neurochemical research was carried out by a handful of people and Richter was instrumental in bringing these scientists together at the International Neurochemical Symposia, the first of which took place in Bristol in 1952. The next meeting was in 1954 in Oxford and the published proceedings established the groundwork of this very new branch of science, neurochemistry. These international symposia seeded further developments, one of the most notable of which was the foundation of the *Journal of Neurochemistry* in 1956. Since Derek was the catalyst in this venture he was asked to be the Editor in Chief of the journal, an honour that he declined in order to keep the structure democratic. Nevertheless, the bulk of the work fell on his shoulders. Papers from the American continent were edited by Heinrich Waelsch, but Derek dealt with those from Europe and the rest of the world. In addition, he dealt with all the other aspects of the journal, including sub-editing and liaising with the publisher. It was when I came to Cardiff that I first appreciated the enormous amount of work that he had invested in

order to make the journal excellent. Some of the papers were badly written and many of these had to be rewritten by him, particularly those from developing countries where the mother tongue was not English.

The other important development stemming from the experience gained from the Neurochemical Symposia was the foundation in 1967 of the International Society of Neurochemistry. Derek was its first Treasurer and later became Chairman of the Council.

In keeping with his philosophy that the better understanding of brain functions requires a multidisciplinary approach, he was very happy to be elected in 1960 to the first Central Council of the IBRO. When the UNESCO support was withdrawn, IBRO was in great difficulties. Derek was then asked, and agreed in 1972 to become its Secretary General, running the organisation for some time from his home in Surrey. He initiated the publication of *IBRO News*, which is now the most widely distributed neuroscience information sheet, and the basis of the multidisciplinary scientific journal of IBRO, *Neuroscience*.

Besides these international activities, Derek promoted the establishment of science organisations at the national level. I mention only a few to demonstrate his ability to detect general problems from the difficulties he encountered and to establish a social structure for counteracting them. His initial difficulties to build up research in Whitchurch Hospital made him realise the importance of having an organisation which could support good research in the mental health field. He initiated the foundation of the Mental Health Research Fund and became the first honorary secretary of the Fund in 1949. From very humble beginnings, this Fund is now a very important factor in supporting research in the area of mental health.

The difficulties he experienced as the editor of the *Journal of Neurochemistry* with its publisher Robert Maxwell, prompted him to initiate the foundation of the Science Publication Council, becoming its first Secretary. Research groups, like his laboratory in Whitchurch, can become easily isolated. In order to encourage the spread of information and cooperation among neuroscientists nationally he initiated the formation of the Brain Research Association, which has now branches throughout the UK. Other bodies, in the formation of which he had a significant influence, include the Group for Biological Psychiatry of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Association for Prevention of Addiction.

Derek firmly believed in the power of the written word. When he encountered a particular problem, he took his own counsel during long walks or as he worked strenuously in his garden. Derek was a master of scientific writing; while highlighting the essentials in any paper, he was able

at the same time to express the sophisticated nuances of the work and their implications.

Those who did not know him well found Derek sometimes rather remote, but in fact he was a compassionate and generous person with a very strong social conscience. The plight of young addicts prompted him to help to establish the Association for the Prevention of Addiction. With the assistance of his wife, Molly, he founded South Lodge, providing sheltered accommodation for mentally ill patients discharged from psychiatric hospitals in Epsom. Most of the research workers, with whom he pioneered putting neurochemistry on the scientific map, and the clinicians with whom he fostered the growth of biological psychiatry (respectively Jordi Folch-Pi, Seymour Kety, Heinrich Waelsch, Max Reiss and Linford Rees, Dennis Hill, Tim Crow to mention only some) were friends of long standing. These personal relations contributed to the creation of institutions promoting neurobiology. However, his circle of friends was much wider and together with Molly they made their home a stopover for neuroscientists in transit from all over the world.

Derek felt especially strongly that scientists in developing countries should have easier access to the practical and intellectual facilities we enjoy in the West. Among the visiting scientists to his laboratory there were always people from the developing world and from Eastern Europe, so much so that our Unit in Carshalton was called the United Nations. He appreciated and used the possibilities offered by IBRO for bringing scientists from developing countries and from the Soviet bloc in contact with their Western colleagues.

Derek was a demanding person, but he set even higher standards for himself. Success in his case

did not breed complacency, and he fought all his life to better himself, by freeing himself from conventions, by adhering to his principles and by listening to his social conscience. He strove and succeeded admirably in living a full and active life. Derek found recreation in art. He was a connoisseur of art and, although he did not seriously practise painting he enjoyed, especially at long meetings, drawing caricatures of the offending bores. He loved his garden and worked hard in it almost to the last minute.

The neuroscience community expressed its appreciation for Derek's activities. He was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, an Honorary Member of the Central Council of IBRO, and his 75th birthday was marked by a special issue of *Neurochemical Research* dedicated to him. This volume includes research papers and birthday greetings from over thirty colleagues who had worked with him.

Derek made a great impact in shaping the development of neurochemistry and biological psychiatry, but those who were fortunate to work with him also owe him a lot at a personal level. We have lost a friend, whose wisdom, strength and loyalty we could always rely on.

Derek was fortunate that he was physically active and mentally alert to the very end. He was taken to hospital with a fractured leg, and died there peacefully during the night.

He is survived by his wife Molly, who was a great support to him in every aspect of his life, and by his children from his first marriage, Sally, John and Polly and their seven children.

ROBERT BALAZS

**The deaths of the following have also been reported:**

FHIONA MARGARET AGNES McCracken, Edinburgh, Lothian.  
OSWALD HARRISON PROCTOR, Hollywell Hospital, Antrim.