

Obituary

Mr John Stanley Weston Whitehead

John Whitehead died peacefully at his home in Burton on 1 April, aged 85 years. He had worked as a consultant general surgeon in Lancaster, Morecambe and Kendal for 23 years.

John was born in Southsea on 15 February 1925, and his first school was St John's College, Southsea. Subsequently, he was educated at Downside College, Somerset, before gaining entrance to Trinity College, Cambridge, and finally to Middlesex Hospital Medical School. He qualified in 1947, passed the primary FRCS a year later, proceeded to the final FRCS in 1951 and became a Master of Surgery in 1954.

After surgical posts in London, National Service spells in thoracic and plastic surgery and A & E, he became senior registrar at Dudley Road Hospital, Birmingham, where he met and then married Marga. Before his consultant appointment here (Lancaster and Kendal) in 1965, he enjoyed working as senior surgical registrar and lecturer at the Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford.

John and Marga moved to Burton and they remained in the same home after his retirement in 1988. He loved walking and knew exactly how many times he had climbed individual peaks with Marga and their dogs. In fact, he was passionately fond of all animals and was almost as concerned with their welfare as he was for his patients. He had a wide range of interests outside medicine, including swimming, travel, languages, crosswords and particularly music. He could be relied on to entertain family and friends with his favourite pieces from composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann and Schubert.

He was a witty conversationalist who made a wonderfully entertaining companion at a social event or on a walk. His fund of anecdotes included many tales involving famous medical names, some of which were quite scurrilous, and they were always accompanied by his infectious chuckle. He was well read, classically educated, interested in a wide range of subjects and had a delicious sense of humour. He would have made a good competitor on Mastermind.

During his consultant years here he performed 12,600 operations and kept records of them all. He was particularly proud of his excellent series of thyroidectomies but, in typical humble fashion, he would invariably mention a particular patient with a poor scar. He was the sort of colleague you could truly rely on whatever the time of day or night, and he thoroughly deserved the respect which he drew from his staff and patients.



After his retirement, he pursued his interest in languages; not surprisingly he attended German classes, and perhaps it is less well known that he took, and passed, 'A' levels in Classical Greek, as well as in German. He also served for 11 years as a driver with Cancer Care, taking numerous patients to and from the Christie Hospital. In addition, he was on the Cancer Care funding committee, and was secretary and then president of the Lancaster Medical Book Club.

He found it hard to accept his increasing breathlessness and unsteadiness in recent years, and it was obvious how much he longed to be out on the hills – particularly as he looked out of the window of his home, Ridgeway, seeing the peaks he had walked so many happy times. However, he was delighted when daughter Alison and husband Alex presented him with two grandchildren, Harry and Georgina, and enjoyed his role as proud grandfather.

John Whitehead will be remembered as a caring, compassionate family man who gave a lot to the area as a surgeon and in many other ways. He enriched the lives of everyone who knew him.

Allen Brown