

Professor Robert Owen, OBE

Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon. Born 1921. Qualified MB BS London 1946, FRCS, M.Ch.(Orth), DL. Died 7th March 2018, aged 96.

Bob Owen was a farmer's son, born in Chwillog in the Lleyn peninsula, North Wales and a monoglot Welsh speaker until the age of eight. From local Primary and Grammar schools he studied Medicine at Guy's Hospital in London, followed by three years in the Royal Air Force, where he met Meg, his wife. They had two children and five grandchildren.

Following orthopaedic training, latterly in Liverpool, in which he was outstanding and included an ABC Fellowship, he was appointed Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry and North Wales Hospitals at Rhyl and Abergele. He gave sterling service to these institutions, including the introduction of the Charnley arthroplasty, complete with 'greenhouse enclosure' to the first centre (Abergele) outside Wroughtington. This came about through his friendship with Charnley in the late 1960s. He taught him the operation and recognised that Bob had the skills and commitment to develop hip arthroplasty in North Wales.

He much enjoyed his time in Rhyl and Abergele and it was with some reluctance that in mid-career he moved to Liverpool as Professor at The Royal Liverpool Hospital and Alder Hey Children's Hospital. He served these hospitals with distinction, concentrating his clinical practice in children's work at the latter but maintaining a general practice, including hip and knee arthroplasty at RLH. He was also an enthusiastic supporter and contributor to the Liverpool MCh (Orth) course.

He was an outstanding orthopaedic surgeon. Aside from his clinical and operative skills, which included complex spinal surgery, he had the wellbeing of patients and colleagues at heart. An example of his concern for patients was as the driving force behind the establishment of houses for the relatives of those undergoing hospital treatment. At Broadgreen Hospital in Liverpool is the rightly-named Robert Owen House.

In relation to colleagues and friends, he was best described as 'inclusive'. Apart from training and mentoring many young orthopaedic surgeons from around the world, the value of the whole surgical team was recognised through activities such as an annual walk in Snowdonia, to which all members of the surgical team and their families were invited. Bob had open house invitations worldwide and over the years there were many reciprocal visits between him and his flock. As for his friends, they will always remember the golfing, hill-walking and dining occasions ('Bob's Lunches') which he organised.

He was the author or co-author of 140 scientific papers, co-editor of two notable text-books, an autobiography and author of chapters, editorials and reviews. He was a Board member of The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery and his eponymous lectures included the Robert Jones and Bradshaw lectureships.

He was an elected member of The Royal College of Surgeons and Founder-Chairman of its Welsh Board, Vice-President of the British Orthopaedic Association and President of the British Scoliosis Society and British Cervical Spine Society. He was particularly proud to be a founder-member and second President of The Welsh Orthopaedic Society.

Through World Orthopaedic Concern and personal relationships he gave outstanding service to many developing countries worldwide through 'hands-on', representational and teaching visits, including The Lipmann Kessel Travelling Professorship.

In Wales, he was Trustee or Adviser to several charitable organisations helping disabled or ill children, Deputy Lieutenant for Clwyd, Medical Ombudsman for Wales and Member of the Gorsedd of Bards and Honourable Society of The Cymmrodorion. He was a staunch supporter and Past-President of The History of Medicine Society of Wales.

In 1990 he was appointed OBE for services to medicine.

If one adds to all that his family and friends, travel, shooting, fishing, hill-walking and golf (after a fashion; his swing, to say the least, was optimistic), one can see how rich and fulfilling a life he had.

He was blessed with a long and active retirement, during which he was enthusiastic and indefatigable in plans for further adventures, convivial occasions and keeping actively in touch with the many organisations he served.

If one could summarise his life, the words 'Welsh', 'Orthopaedic' and 'Society' spring to mind. There was no stronger supporter of his Welsh heritage, he was an outstanding contributor to orthopaedic surgery and he espoused 'society' in its broadest sense, which included family, friends and colleagues.

Mr David Jones

