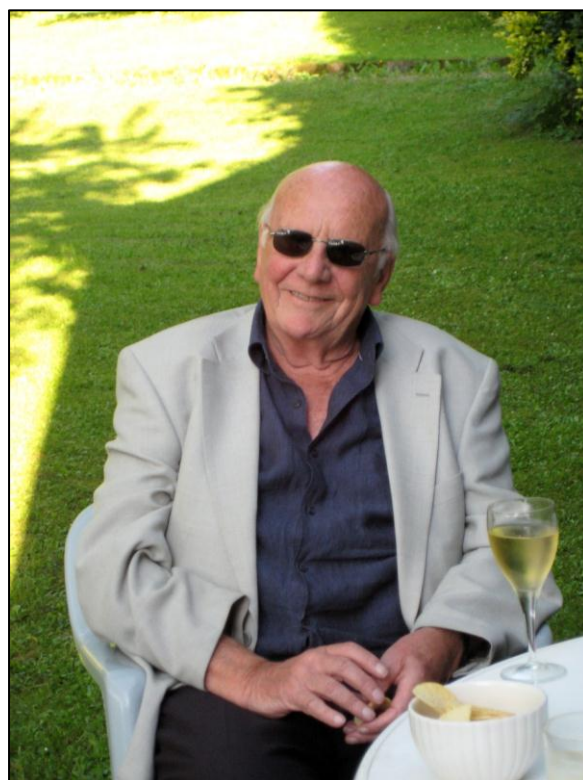


Bill Bowman (1930-2013)

The British Pharmacological Society lost one of its luminaries on Thursday, 18 July, with the death of Bill Bowman. Bill's health had deteriorated since a stroke in London a couple of years ago. After a very lengthy stay in hospitals in London and Dumfries, he managed to get home to Rockcliffe on the Solway Firth which held so many happy memories for him. His daughter Alison and son Ewen told us that over the past few months, and particularly the last few weeks, he became bedbound and life became incredibly tough. He died very peacefully; it was the most glorious evening in Rockcliffe, still and hot with the sun setting over Rough Island, just as he would have wished.



Bill started his academic career through obtaining a first class honours degree in pharmacy from the London School of Pharmacy ("The Square"), now of course part of University College London. During this time, he was inspired by Eleanor Zaimis who invited him to join her group to work for a PhD, in which he studied the effects of sympathomimetic amines on the contractility of skeletal muscle. He demonstrated, for the first time, that adrenaline, while enhancing the contractility of fast contracting muscle, actually reduced twitch tension in slow contracting muscle, this ultimately being identified as the possible basis of the tremorigenic action of β_2 -receptor agonists. The time between submitting his PhD thesis and actually being examined was interrupted by the Ministry of Defence, who suddenly required his assistance in defending the realm through two years of National Service. He found himself in the RAF which provided the basis of numerous, some unrepeatable, anecdotes with which he used to regale us many years later over the odd pint or two in the pub. He told us that because of his background, the RAF decided he should become an Education Officer and packed him off on a teacher training course, following which he was required to teach aerodynamics! During his National Service he was allowed to attend his PhD examination in Oxford, which he attended in full RAF uniform with Edith Bülbring as external examiner. When Her Majesty's forces felt sufficiently safe to dispense with his services, he joined the Square as a lecturer under the mentorship of Gladwyn Buttle. His time at the School of Pharmacy was very productive; the pharmacology department at the Square was a pharmacological powerhouse including staff members such as Geoff West, Alan Cuthbert, Brian Callingham, Tom Bolton, Colin Raper and Mike Rand. Among Bill's other scientific contributions during that period was the development of the concept of pre-junctional nicotinic autoreceptors (Blaber and Bowman 1963), which was pursued later at Strathclyde in collaboration with Ian Marshall (Bowman 1989). While at the Square, Bill, Mike Rand and Geoff West decided to fill a gap by writing a textbook aimed primarily at pharmacy students. This progressed to a second edition in 1980 with only Mike as co-author and became the standard textbook of pharmacology worldwide, translated into many languages. It was generally referred to as "Bowman and Rand" except in Portugal where, to Bill's mischievous delight, its author(s) was (were) described as "Rand Y Bowman"! Sadly, although well-advanced in preparation, the third edition never materialised, due to a fire in 1990 that destroyed

Mike Rand's house along with extensive drafts of the book, and then Mike's death in 2002, after which Bill lost the will to work further on this enormous task, which he and Mike had been determined to complete without farming out chapters to numerous colleagues.

Buttle's retirement in 1965 resulted in a Square pharmacological diaspora and Bill's move to establish the Department of Pharmacology at the new University of Strathclyde in 1966, an event that was to place Strathclyde firmly on the world's pharmacological map. Bill's presence at Strathclyde attracted people to join the department as staff members, notably Jim Parratt, whom he invited to take up an appointment in 1967, following which the department grew rapidly. At Strathclyde, Bill revisited his earlier work on the effects of sympathomimetics on skeletal muscle with Mike Nott and Ian Rodger (e.g. Bowman and Nott 1970), as well as developing a lasting interest in neuromuscular blocking drugs, this being stimulated by the close proximity of Organon laboratories, which at the time of Bill's arrival was developing pancuronium. The fruitful collaboration with Ian Marshall in the department and Organon led to the identification, development and subsequent marketing of vecuronium and rocuronium, two of the most extensively used muscle relaxants in anaesthetic practice. This resulted in Bill's wide recognition among anaesthetists and his being made an honorary fellow of the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal College of Surgeons, of which he was especially proud, and his appointment as visiting professor of anaesthesiology in various universities in Canada and the US. His other interests at the neuromuscular junction in collaboration with Ian Marshall and Alan Harvey focused on the aminopyridines as reversal agents for neuromuscular blockade and their potential application in conditions of impaired neuroeffector transmission (Bowman and Savage 1981).

Bill's long friendship and collaboration with Mike Rand and Mike's return to Australia in 1965, resulted in so many Australian visitors and PhD students in the department, that Bill's research laboratory became known as 'Kangaroo Valley' and was formally labelled as such! This was in the days before 'health and safety at work' and the department was then on the roof of Strathclyde's Royal College building. My recent attempt at a sentimental revisit to the old laboratories (abandoned many years ago) to see if the label remained was thwarted by the fact that access to the roof laboratories had been well and truly sealed off, presumably to stop pharmacologists jumping from the roof after a failed grant application. One frequent Australian visitor to the department, and one cause of Bill's trips to Melbourne (the excuse being the textbook!) was the delightful Anne Stafford, a distinguished pharmacologist, whom he married in the early 1970s; sadly Anne died in 2007 after a long illness.

As happens frequently with senior academics, Bill moved into senior positions in the University, becoming successively Deputy Principal (Pro-Vice Chancellor in English parlance!) and Vice-Principal, thus progressively removing him from active involvement in pharmacology research. I was never certain how much Bill enjoyed the trappings of high office, but his friend and colleague Dr Peter West, who was University Secretary at that time, tells me that Bill described his role as "drinking gin and tonic on behalf of the University"! Despite this laid back approach, he went on to be an outstanding Vice Principal, playing a key role in steering the University through difficult times. Throughout his time away from the department, he retained close contact with the world of pharmacology through his extensive involvement with the British Pharmacological Society, in which he held a number of executive posts, and IUPHAR, which he served as Secretary General from 1994-1998, becoming the first Editor-in-Chief of Pharmacology International. The British Pharmacological Society recognized his contribution to the Society and to the discipline of pharmacology through electing him as an Honorary Fellow and through establishing the Bill Bowman Travelling Lectureship, awarded annually to support the development of a young pharmacologist, a matter that was always close to Bill's heart. On his retirement, the University perpetuated his name by establishing the WC Bowman Chair of Pharmacology.

We have lost an inspirational teacher, a brilliant lecturer, a walking encyclopaedia of pharmacology and a mentor to numerous pharmacologists around the globe. Our thoughts are with his children Alison and Ewen and grandchildren Cammie, Ewan, Emma and Keith.

Professor Brian Furman (On behalf of Bill's numerous friends and colleagues at the University of Strathclyde).

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