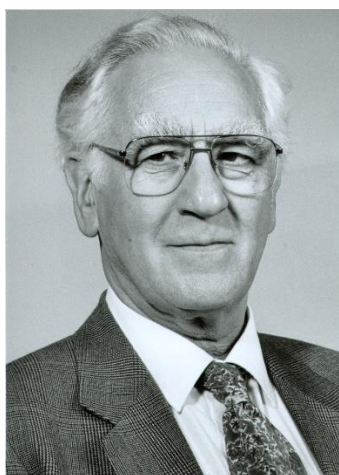


Professor Gerald Curzon



Gerald Curzon died in April 2019, only a few months after the death of his wife Stella.

Gerald was born in 1928 in Leeds and attended Cockburn High School in that city. He studied chemistry. He remembered that and at one stage neither he, nor his schoolfriend Sidney Cotson, were doing that well and his form-master suggested they both become apprentices at Yorkshire Copperworks. Happily, neither student followed this career advice since Cotson also had a distinguished academic career, becoming a member of the University Grants Committee.

Gerald obtained his first degree in Chemistry at the University of Leeds, following this with a PhD in biochemistry, also at Leeds. He then moved to London and after a brief period at the Institute of Orthopaedics moved in 1953 to the Dept. of Chemical Pathology at the National Hospital, Queen Square where he remained for the rest of his academic career. He became Reader in the Institute of Neurology in 1968 and joined the new Dept of Neurochemistry in 1971, becoming Professor of Neurochemistry in 1975. He was appointed Emeritus Professor on his retirement in 1993.

Although he had a strong attachment to neurochemistry, and would have probably called himself a neurochemist, his links with all the associated disciplines is evident from his society memberships. He was a member of the Biochemical Society and the International Society of Neurochemistry, becoming their archivist following his retirement from the Institute of Neurology. He was an honorary member of the International Society for Serotonin Research and was appointed a member of Council of the British Association for Psychopharmacology. He was also a long-time member of the British Pharmacological Society and it is striking that many of his PhD students and post-docs have been, and continue to be, active members of the BPS, so his influence on pharmacology are substantial.

The major thrust of Gerald's work was on the chemistry of the brain, particularly serotonin, and the effects of drugs on this neurotransmitter. This interest was initiated following discussions with Richard Pratt, a psychiatrist at Queen Square who, soon after the first reports of the psychoactive properties of LSD, showed him its structure and asked him how it might act. Gerald said it looked a bit like 5-HT. When asked whether 5-HT was in the brain Gerald said he did not know, but would find out, thereby discovering that its presence in this organ

had been reported only a few months earlier by Sir John Gaddum. His interest in 5-HT in the brain, its involvement in mood, and the mechanisms by which its concentration and function could be altered dominated his subsequent career. This is reflected in his publication list of 267 papers of which no less than 151 involve some aspect of serotonin neuropharmacology and function.

Early studies examined the effects of corticosteroids and plasma tryptophan levels on brain 5-HT concentrations (primarily with Richard Green, Michael Joseph and Peter Knott). This work was enhanced by his development with Richard Green of a fluorimetric method of measuring both 5-HT and its major metabolite in small areas of rat brain. This was published as a short paper in the Br J Pharmacol and cited more than 1000 times in the next 10 years. Interestingly, it was superseded by a hplc method developed by Charles Marsden, a later post-doc in Gerald's department. Charles also initiated studies which examined the association between 5-HT function and behaviour.

Gerald's later research had a much more psychopharmacological bent. With Mark Tricklebank he examined analgesia and with Guy Kennett he investigated the role of stress in altering rodent behaviour. The link between 5-HT and feeding behaviour in rodents was examined by Colin Dourish and this seamlessly evolved into investigations on the anorectic drug fenfluramine. Methods of examining neurotransmitters and drugs in vivo were spearheaded by Peter Hutson leading to the examination of clinically used drugs in vivo.

Gerald's great gift to all his colleagues was showing them how integration of scientific approaches used by neurochemists, biochemists, and pharmacologists resulted in information that was much more valuable than those pursuing only one specialist approach. In that regard one is reminded of the quote of Sir John Gaddum that pharmacologists are 'jacks of all trades'. Gerald was certainly that, and it was this multidisciplinary approach that attracted many of his young scientists. For example, Mark Tricklebank came to Gerald's lab via the Masters course he was doing in neurochemistry run by the Institute of Psychiatry, having done his first degree in psychology and biochemistry. He was disappointed that the Masters course made no attempt to integrate the two subjects. Gerald's enthusiasm for multidisciplinary approaches to the study of the brain resulted in him undertaking the degree project in his lab. This inspired Mark and made him truly indebted for all Gerald gave him and forever grateful to Gerald for having confidence in him at a time when he felt there was absolutely no basis for it.

Gerald's legacy to pharmacology is huge, even though he might not have thought himself to be primarily a pharmacologist. Our thoughts are not only with the many pharmacologists who he influenced in so many positive ways but also with his daughters Catherine and Jane at this sad time.

Richard Green
Tom Blackburn
Mark Tricklebank

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