

Ian Kemp Marr Morton

16th October 1937-14th October 2023

Our friend and colleague Ian Morton died peacefully at home on Saturday 14th October. Ian was a true academic, a talented pharmacologist, a passionate believer in equality and inclusion, who had an inquisitive mind and encyclopaedic knowledge on a wide and varied range of topics.

Ian was born in Cardiff on 16th October 1937 and spent his childhood with his father, an engineer, his mother and elder sister Ann in Wales. Growing up in the Welsh countryside gave him immense pleasure; he acquired a deep love for nature and an interest in wildlife and photography which remained with him throughout life. Ian was particularly proud of his Scottish heritage. His family on both sides was from Scotland and he loved in particular the Scottish islands, which he visited often - including in his specially converted Land Rover, which also, on one occasion, took the family to Russia.

Ian's academic career began at Southampton University, where he enrolled as a chemistry undergraduate. He soon discovered that chemistry was not for him and he left the course after one year. His time spent at Southampton was not, however, in vain. It was there that he met his future wife Mary. After Southampton and looking for a more applied science to study, Ian enrolled on a new course and achieved a Diploma in Applied Technology in Pharmacology at the Chelsea College of Science and Technology (later Chelsea College, University of London and then King's College London). In pharmacology he found his vocation, and his final year thesis, 'A review of the animal screening tests in the evaluation of analgesic substances' sparked a life-long interest in analgesic drug development, initially with an interest in opioid receptors. Mary joined Ian in London, they married and built their life together in Barnes village, bringing up their family and integrating into the community.

Ian's PhD at University College London (UCL), with HO Schild and supervised by Don Jenkinson, was on mechanisms of catecholamine activity in the gut. As Don recalls: "Ian was my first PhD student and we worked very well together for three years. He had a first-rate knowledge of pharmacology, gained from

his course at Chelsea, and was excellent in the laboratory. The outcome of our efforts was a pair of papers in the *Journal of Physiology*, and a letter to *Nature*. His external examiner was Edith Bülbring, and I recall how positive she was about his thesis, even though some of its conclusions, on how adrenaline relaxed the longitudinal smooth muscle of the gut, were not in accord with the views then current in the Department of Pharmacology at Oxford. Later she and Tadao Tomita confirmed and extended what we had done". Ian completed his PhD and took on a role as a Demonstrator at UCL. Shortly after, he was offered a lectureship at King's College London. He moved to King's in the late 1960s where he remained for the rest of his academic life.

Ian's in-depth knowledge of drug-receptor interactions acquired at UCL was to be the focus of his research for the rest of his career. As is clear from his work on catecholamine receptors, Ian was not afraid of confrontation in the quest for truth. He continued throughout his career to question conclusions drawn from research findings which he believed to be open to interpretation. Jude Hall, a long-term collaborator, was Ian's BSc project student at the time. She was given the task of re-evaluating a proposed mechanism of substance P induced contraction in the guinea-pig ileum which Ian considered to be mis-interpreted. He was correct and their findings were duly published in *Journal of Physiology*, with thanks from the original authors. Ian believed strongly in knowledge sharing in the pursuit of science, both with other academics and with industry. Collaborating with Sue Brain in the 1980s brought an *in vivo* context to the lab's tachykinin research, with Humphrey Rang at Sandoz a new focus to the lab on bradykinin receptors, and with Chris Jordan at Glaxo, 5HT₃ receptors. Ian recognised early on that international collaborating was important to furthering scientific knowledge, and co-founding the European Neuropeptide Club (ENC) in the 1980s was something Ian was very proud of. Organising and attending ENC meetings resulted not only in establishing important scientific collaborations, but also brought him and Mary new friends, including Peter and Ulrike Holzer from Graz, Austria which gave him great pleasure.

A committed teacher, old Chelsea-ites and Strand-ites will remember, he contributed to medical undergraduate teaching, including running a state-of-the art biometrics and medical statistics course in addition to cellular and molecular pharmacology modules. He was an admissions tutor for both

medicine and pharmacology for many years: he had a remarkable memory of the students he had admitted, and a life-long interest in their achievements. He was a great advocate of equality, promoting women in science and inclusivity. Ian came to believe he was dyslexic only later in life, and became interested in issues relating to neurodiversity, which he latterly very much enjoyed discussing with Sara Rankin, a BSc student he admitted to King's and now neurodiversity advocate at Imperial College London. He was immensely proud of many of his other BSc students, and especially his PhD students Jude Hall, Aly Fox, Julie Field, Paul Fosbraey and Roland Featherstone.

Ian always cared deeply about pharmacology, though in later life he worried that pharmacology as a subject and name was becoming somewhat hidden amongst catch-all degree titles. He was an active member of BPS and encouraged all his students and international collaborators to join and contribute to the Society by communicating at meetings and publishing in *BJP*. The annual meeting was a highlight he rarely missed. He continued to have a keen interest in the Society's activities throughout his retirement, as exemplified by his last contribution to Society activities in 2020 when he acted as an expert referee of the Society's Experimental Design e-learning tool on Blinding.

Ian retired from university life in the early 1990s, moving to the Ebbles Valley in Wiltshire where he and Mary made many friends, and where he enjoyed his hobbies of fine dining and wine, photography, and, including as a skilled woodturner, woodwork. He and Mary continued to travel, spending much time in France (though not on a Lambretta, which is how they had travelled to France together in the 1950s), and also as far afield as Machu Picchu. In his retirement, Ian continued working, contributing to pharmacology in other ways, both academically and in promoting the public understanding of pharmacology. He was a Specialist Consultant, involved in fact checking and editing the sixth edition of the *Dictionary of Pharmacological Agents*, fully referenced descriptions of over 170 000 biologically active compounds (Chapman and Hall). Ian's attention to detail meant he was one of very few with the skill and patience to take on and accomplish this daunting task. With Jude Hall he published many books for the public both in the UK and USA including the Royal Society of Medicines, *Medicines: The Comprehensive Guide* (Bloomsbury) which went to six editions and sold over 2 million copies in many

different formats, once available in all good bookshops and even in motorway services (much to Ian's astonishment).

Ian passed away on Saturday 14 October. He had been suffering from prostate cancer. Ian sadly never got over the early death of his beloved wife Mary. He is survived by his 3 children Lucy, James and Helen and 6 grandchildren.

Donations to [Alzheimer's Support Wiltshire](#).

Written by: Dr Judith Hall and Prof Susan Brain.