

# ROY WHITLOCK, SURGEON

The following obit appeared in The Daily Telegraph Sep.7,2004.

Roy Whitlock, who has died aged 88, was the first consultant in maxillo facial surgery to be appointed in Northern Ireland; previously, he had been among the first senior registrars trained by Sir Terence Ward, one of the founders of maxillo facial surgery, at the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead.

Whitlock, who held his post at the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital in Belfast from 1953 to 1981, played an important part in helping Norman Hughes, also from East Grinstead, to establish the Regional Plastic and Maxillo Facial Unit for Northern Ireland. The unit was in the vanguard of new techniques, and quickly gained a high international reputation.

In the early 1950s, repair of broken jaws and reconstructive surgery was undertaken by the general surgeons, from whom Whitlock initially experienced some opposition. By stages, however, he was able to demonstrate that such procedures required the expertise of someone trained in the subject. He won over his critics by obtaining superlative results.

Visiting hospitals and clinics all over Northern Ireland, he was gradually able to develop the speciality throughout the province, training a new consultant to help him in Belfast and another in Londonderry. He was also instrumental in establishing the speciality in the Republic, and was a founder member of the International Oral Surgical Club.

When the civil disturbances began in Northern Ireland in 1968, Whitlock was at the forefront in treating bomb-blast and gunshot wounds to the face. He established himself as a fine operator who could achieve excellent cosmetic results for victims whose faces had been blown away.

He also worked with the Army Forensic Laboratory in Belfast to establish the cavitation effects of high velocity bullets to the face, and later went on to investigate the effects of the newer plastic and rubber bullets. Based on this work, he wrote several important papers in medical literature.

Beyond Northern Ireland, Whitlock was one of the first people in the United Kingdom to develop the osteotomy technique (for removing a piece of bone from the jaw) to help patients with protruding jaws. He made a film of his technique and gained a bronze award in the British Medical Film competition in 1974.

He also developed several surgical instruments that are still used by maxillo facial surgeons today. Among them is the Horseshoe Head Rest, widely used in operating theatres to keep the patient's head still during surgery and adjustable to the size of the patient's head.

Roy Ivor Handing Whitlock was born in London on April 21 1916 and educated as a classical scholar at St Paul's. There he excelled at sports, representing the school at boxing, athletics and cricket. Although his family background was in banking, after St Paul's young Whitlock enrolled at King's College Medical School.

In 1939, with war looming, Whitlock completed his degree in Dentistry, and then, on the outbreak of war, joined the RAF. During the Battle of Britain in 1940 he was stationed at Hawkinge, Kent; later, he was sent out to India, where he was to run dental services for southern India.

It was after leaving the RAF in 1947, in the rank of squadron leader, that Whitlock worked under Sir Terence Ward at East Grinstead Hospital, thus becoming one of the first consultants to have undergone a formal training scheme.

He went on to win numerous honours. He was awarded an international Diplome d'honneur in Paris in 1976, and in 1979 he gave the Charles Tomes Lecture at the Royal College of Surgeons. He sat on the board of examiners for the college in both London and Dublin, and, until Keith Joseph changed the structure in 1974, on the Regional Hospital Board for Northern Ireland. He was an Honorary Surgeon Commander for the Royal Navy.

He was appointed OBE in 1981, when he retired from Belfast. Thereafter, he continued to work, undertaking locum appointments at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Exeter, eventually buying a house in the neighbourhood. He was always loyal to his junior staff, and was gratified to see many of his registrars go on to become eminent consultants.

Away from work, Roy Whitlock's great passion was tennis, at which he was highly proficient. He seldom let a week go by without playing, right up to the end of his life. He died, on July 24, following a collapse, from which he never regained consciousness, just after he had finished a game.

He married, in 1941, Lilian Weston, who survives him with a daughter and a son, a consultant in emergency medicine.

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We have nothing the Whitlock Family Association files that identifies which family Roy Whitlock belongs to. If anyone has additional information I would be pleased to add it to our files.

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