

Anne Warner

1940–2012

Picture credit: Giorgio Gabella



Professor Anne Warner

Anne Warner, who has died aged 71, combined careers as cell physiologist, a science policy maker and, latterly, an initiator and Director of CoMPLEX, a centre for systems biology at University College London (UCL). Born Anne Brooks, she took a degree in physiology at UCL and then worked for her PhD with Otto Hutter at the National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill. There she was appointed at the age of 23 to a staff position and carried out some of the classic studies on the pH dependence of the chloride conductance in skeletal muscle.

Her main research was devoted to understanding the role of gap junctions for intercellular communication during vertebrate embryonic development. Her collaborators included some of the major developmental biologists of the '70s and '80s. With her students and colleagues Christine Slack, Susanna Blackshaw, Luca Turin and Sarah Guthrie, her laboratory published a series of papers in *The Journal of Physiology*, *Nature* and *Cell* which mapped out the early electrical events occurring during normal embryo development. She also co-authored with Peter Baker, Roger Tsien and Tim Rink papers on many of the earliest projects which made the critical link between calcium and cell organisation.

Following appointments at the Middlesex Hospital, in Lewis Wolpert's biology department, and then at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine when it was still in Hunter Street in Bloomsbury, Anne took up an appointment at UCL in 1976 in Geoff Burnstock's Department of Anatomy and Developmental Biology where, in 1986, she became Professor of Developmental Biology. That same year she was awarded the Royal Society Foulerton Professorship.

Although she maintained her interest in development, there can be little doubt that much of her subsequent energy went into committee work and scientific policy. Sitting on councils including NERC, the Lister Institute and the Roslin Institute, she was clearly much in demand; many can remember the speed with which she could deal with any application. As a Vice President of the Council of the Marine Biology Association at Plymouth she undoubtedly steered the MBA through particularly difficult financial times in the 1990s. She had a major influence in the creation of the Cell Physiology workshop in 1984 (originally known as the Microelectrode Techniques workshop), a course that has created many cohorts of cell physiologists in the UK and abroad.

Anne had a penchant for academic gossip, whisky and cigarettes, probably in that order. She very much saw herself as part of a UCL family and was extremely loyal to it and to her friends. She had the uncanny ability to home in on conversations, preferably in proximity to a bottle of wine. She could usually be spotted in the UCL quad pacing up and down deep in thought with a cigarette held jauntily in one hand. She was formidable in her determination and, once her gaze fixed on you through her carriage-lamp spectacles, it was quite hard to refuse to do what she asked. Mobility became difficult for her during her last years, but this did not stop her firing off emails of advice and requests for information, often on an hourly basis. Her husband, Michael, a marine engineer whom she met as a student, when both were in the UCL Dramatic Society, predeceased her by just a few months.

Jonathan Ashmore