

James (Jim) Edward Pascoe

1924–2011

Jim Pascoe was a Reader in Physiology at University College London. He was born in Falmouth and at the age of 12 moved to Penzance. Thence at age 16 he worked at his mother's behest in an apprenticeship at Boots, transferring to Plymouth College to start his studies for the Diploma in Pharmacy which he completed at the School of Pharmacy, London where he then became a Junior Lecturer and where he met Margaret, a pharmaceutical chemist who became his wife. He studied Physiology whilst working nights in Boots, Piccadilly and so came to UCL at the invitation of G.L. Brown, the head of department, and then on to the staff where he was known for his absolute integrity and devotion to the subject. In 1954 he was elected a Member of The Physiological Society.

In the '60s and '70s the Annual General Meeting of The Physiological Society was always at UCL. There would be Jim Pascoe listening to the Communications in the lecture theatre, often alongside G.L. Brown, and clearly a close friend. Sometimes I thought they appeared very similar except that Jim was thinner. He had that intent questioning look that did not allow you to get away with any nonsense. At the same time he was wonderfully jolly and positive if he judged you to be serious about advancing the subject. At that time I did not know him at all well – he was to me a figure in The Society. Always something of a stirrer, he enjoyed tweaking the tail of The Physiological Society Committee. After joining the Committee in 1979, he remained the blunt-speaking champion of many causes.

He quite naturally, perhaps inevitably, had something of a falling out with *The Journal of Physiology* where the editors rejected a paper on the grounds, so he was told, that there was too much pharmacology in it. He was of course in good company since the great Nobel Prize winner Eccles had a paper rejected. Jim's reaction in the demotic argot was



Photo with kind permission of Alice Pascoe.

'sod them', and he never really got round to publishing much after that rejection. Such is the untoward power of editors.

He was a sailor, and Ann Silver describes one of his trips:

"He sailed his boat along the south coast and round to East Anglia, then up the River Deben to Woodbridge. This involved his successful negotiation of the tricky Horse shoal at the mouth of the river. I was very impressed by this but what impressed me even more was that when I drove over from Cambridge to show him some of north Suffolk, he made sandwiches for us without benefit of breadboard, slicing the loaf held vertically between his knees". Furthermore she describes on this trip how "We visited Orford Castle and several splendid churches. Jim couldn't resist the urge, left over from his choirboy years, to test the acoustics by bursting forth into hymns and psalms – occasionally startling some poor lady engrossed in arranging the flowers."

I came to know him well after I went to work at UCL. He was a marvellous ally who would drift in to see me from time to time to discuss the department and check out how I was getting along running it. We would talk about all manner of problems and he was always absolutely frank with me, telling me if he thought I was wrong about some problem and also if I was correct. Such straightforward advice from someone of absolute integrity was invaluable to me.

We also did some experiments together and he wrote the software for an early laboratory computer, the Z80. He would stand in the lab dictating the machine code while Michael Duchen and I would listen in awe and write it down. And the program worked, enabling us to measure changes in sensitivity of primary afferent nerve terminals in the spinal cord in real time.

He had a great fund of stories about the previous heads of department he had known including G.L. Brown, Andrew Huxley and Doug Wilkie – stories always told with great good humour and affection. He had the greatest respect for the College and its secular traditions, and for the Department of Physiology with a long history going back to the foundation of the College in the 1820s.

We worked most closely during the 1980s when there was considerable activity in the Palace of Westminster over the issue of animal experiments. The anti-vivisectionists were very active at this time and increasingly violent, for example, attempting to set fire to the house of a Nobel Laureate and attaching a bomb which fell off and detonated under the car of a Bristol physiologist. The Act of Parliament under which we all did experiments supervised by the Home Office Inspectorate had been passed in 1876. It was clear that with the changes in biological science there was a need to update the Act. Thus we became involved with the political process in The Lords and the House of Commons. There was a Private Member's Bill in the Lords and in the Commons, more seriously, there was a Private Member's Bill and a Government Bill succeeding it. There were a number of MPs who were positive supporters – Sir Nigel Fisher, Mr Ray Mawby and some others, but the most outstanding one was Tam Dalyell. As ever he was brave, articulate and hugely supportive of the scientific endeavour.

During discussion of the Private Member's Bill in the Committee Stage there was an accusation that experiments were being done involving cutting off the feet of rabbits, and this procedure should

be stopped. It turned out that there were no such experiments in the UK and if there were such things done in any country they were on anaesthetised mice. Tam Dalyell suggested that Jim and I bring to the House a rabbit and a mouse which he could then produce during the debate to show to our opponents the difference between these species. This we did and were, all four of us, smuggled into the Palace of Westminster through a back door by Tam Dalyell and so to the Committee room. Naturally the display of these animals caused embarrassment to the other side and even some mirth. The Chairman of the Committee, Mr Ted Leadbitter, did not demur. Not long after this the Bill was withdrawn. There followed the long period of argument and debate over the Government Bill in which Tam Dalyell was steadfast and Jim was continually involved along with a small group of other physiologists including Ann Silver, Cecil Kidd, Tony Angel and David Whitteridge. Robert Comline the Treasurer of The Society insured that whatever funds were needed were available.

Through this long period, perhaps 4 or 5 years, Jim retained his sense of humour and moral support and



A cartoon of Jim, drawn by Ralph Sallon (with kind permission of Alice Pascoe).

without him we would all have been much less effective.

He retired from UCL Physiology and then, as he said, was a bag or case carrier for his beloved wife Margaret who had become an authority on

'blackwork embroidery'. He took the photographs of embroideries and materials that she needed for her book, a technology that he had learned as a physiologist and in which he was expert. They travelled abroad with Jim as the significant other, a reversal of earlier roles which he greatly enjoyed. Such was his expertise that he then went on to photograph the work of others in the Embroiderers Guild as well as the historical collection of the Guild housed at Hampton Court Palace.

After Margaret died in 1995 he stayed on in Molesey and eventually in 2004/5 went to live in Chacewater in Cornwall and latterly in Truro. He was cremated at the Penmount Crematorium a place where my father used to take services and was also cremated, a touch of continuity that Jim would have greeted with a merry laugh. He also laughed heartily when long ago I told him that my father had made an insurance claim for his cassock which caught fire while he was waiting to take a service at the same crematorium.

He was a great colleague and a dear friend to many of us; he lived life and was much loved.

Tim Biscoe

An aside from Ann Silver

The oldest Members of The Society will have started their animal experiments under legislation enacted in 1876. Since this was long out-of-date by the middle of the 20th Century, it is understandable that from about 1965 onwards several moves were afoot to modernise the legislation. The Physiological Society and the Research Defence Society (now 'Understanding Animal Research') were at the forefront of those keen to weed out any new, ill-conceived regulations that could hinder research with no proportionate benefit to animals. Tim Biscoe indicates above that Jim was particularly active in these efforts. As well as priming Tam Dalyell at Parliamentary Subcommittees, he spent many a Saturday in Leeds with Cecil Kidd, Bernard Ginsborg and me, discussing the latest government proposals and formulating The Society's response. In addition, he once came to Cambridge for a memorable meeting in St Catharine's College at the invitation of Robert Comline, then the Society's Treasurer. Although productive, it was memorable for the wrong reasons. A cold, overcast day, Robert took us into Hall for a self-service lunch before we began our discussion. The lighting was rather poor and the most recognisable offerings were the salads but Robert insisted that we needed something hot. He hustled us along the counter to a rather tempting steak and kidney pudding with a thick suet crust; to this Cecil and I added a good helping of cabbage. Jim, invoking his choirboy days, smugly said that as it was Friday he would have the fish. As soon as Cecil and I started to eat we realised our mistake – our pudding was not full of steak and kidney but sweet, stewed, plums that went none too well with the cabbage. To add to the problem, I had a stone – plum not kidney – and not wanting to disturb Robert, I stored it, hamster like, in my cheek. Had he been aware of our dilemma, the ever-hospitable Robert would have insisted Cecil and I started again. When Jim and I went to fetch the coffee he said 'What the hell is the matter with you two?' Inevitably there was much scarcely suppressed mirth whenever we caught each other's eyes during our afternoon deliberations. A year or so later, The Committee met (I think in Leeds) ready for the Scientific Meeting beginning the following afternoon. When it came to the question of the pre-Meeting lunch, Robert said, indicating Jim, Cecil and me, 'You can't trust this lot not to disgrace us.' Apparently our failure to identify puddings had been revealed to Robert, during a convivial gathering the previous evening, after I had gone off to bed.