

Obituary Dr Frank Bowser-Riley 1945-2020

By Dr Derek Ball and Professor Gordon McEwan

Dr Frank Bowser-Riley unexpectedly passed away in December 2020 at the age of 75. Frank was a long-time-member and supporter of The Physiological Society. Born in Manchester, Frank's family moved to Cheshire when he was eight. After earning a scholarship, Frank attended Sandbach School where he became an active member of the army Cadets. He later moved to Buxton to be with his mother following the death of his father. In Buxton, he took his first scientific job as a Laboratory Technician in the Devonshire Royal Hospital. He also joined the Manchester Regiment of the Territorial Army and this experience left a profound and lasting impact on him.

He later moved to London and worked at the Paediatric Research Unit at Guy's Hospital and attended night classes. This helped him to gain admission to the University of Southampton where he studied and achieved a BSc in Physiology and Biochemistry. To continue his studies, Frank moved to Edinburgh and completed a Master's degree in Neurophysiology at the Royal Dick Veterinary College in Edinburgh. He was awarded the James Tindall Scholarship and in 1978 he completed his PhD on neurotransmitters using the cockroach salivary gland as a model. Frank enjoyed his time at the College where he found great stimulation from those around him. While completing his doctorate, Frank took on the role of a demonstrator and assisted in the teaching of undergraduate students.

Frank took a post-doctoral post at University of Oxford and worked with Sir William Paton on high pressure neurological syndrome (HPNS) elucidating the role of glycine in HPNS. During this time, he also conducted work for the United States Navy, examining deep sea diving and the effects of anaesthetics. The link provided an opportunity for travel to the United States as well as visits to other parts of the world, even spending time aboard the USS Nimitz. He continued his interests into the effects of hyperbaric physiology when he moved to Aberdeen in 1986 as an MRC-sponsored lecturer. His arrival at Marischal College (Aberdeen), coincided with his first forays into the developing world of computing. Coming to work at the University of Aberdeen in the late 1980's was something of a culture shock with its one departmental computer on a trolley. However, within a few years Frank, along with others (Prof Andy Booth, Leeds and Dr Jim Aiton, St Andrews) had developed innovative teaching using new technology (The Bionet Project) for which they were awarded the IBM United Kingdom Prize for Information Technology.

Frank continued his work on deep sea diving, in conjunction with colleagues at the national hyperbaric centre (Aberdeen). The work involved travelling to conduct research with Russian colleagues and, on one occasion, he returned with a polished titanium vodka flask which had been fabricated on a Russian nuclear submarine!

As time progressed, Frank's work interests moved further into teaching and the development of IT infrastructure to support it. As an extraordinary visionary in a world where the internet, as we now know it, was still very young and when there were only a small handful of websites around the world, Frank set up the first one to showcase the Department of Biomedical Sciences. He also created an intranet in the Department at Marischal College and then repeated this exercise for the new Institute of Medical Sciences following the move to Foresterhill in 1996. Frank's skills and insight into the use of IT approaches for both teaching and research was, without question, highly significant, with the department becoming one of the leaders in Biomedical Sciences in the UK. Frank was always a proponent of fairness to do with everything from quality control of marking at the University to becoming the School Disability Officer and an advocate for the promotion of gender equality.

Many have commented that Frank was a terrific mentor to early career researchers and many will smile as they think of him, in his own manner, wisely and robustly defending evidence-based discussion and sound decision-making. Thousands of students, over the decades, will

remember him as an inspirational teacher. Those who witnessed it will never forget him eccentrically striding towards them over the benches of the Arts Lecture Theatre! Frank relaxed into his retirement but remained a polymath. He did o't slow down so much as use the time to further diversify his interests. Among them art, which had always been important to him. He was able to enjoy more time with his wider family. He will be sadly missed but not forgotten. Frank is survived by his wife Susan and son Alexander.