

## Dr David Zuck FRCA, DHMSA

### Obituary

David Zuck combined a prodigious intellect spanning both the sciences and the arts with an encyclopaedic and apparently infallible memory, a gentle unassuming manner and great modesty. He was born in Birmingham into an orthodox Jewish family, his paternal grandparents having emigrated in about 1910 from Suwalki, which was then in Russia but is now in Poland. The family name of Zhukovsky was later shortened to Zuck. His mother's family came from Poland. He received a traditional Jewish education in addition to his secular schooling. His intellectual curiosity was manifest at an early age when he began asking awkward questions of his traditionally religious grandparents. He had two younger brothers, one of whom became a general practitioner and the other a dentist. Both emigrated to Canada.

David was educated at the King Edward VI Grammar School in Birmingham and qualified from the University of Birmingham Medical School in 1945. He undertook anaesthetic training in the RAMC and then as a civilian, obtaining the DA in 1948 and the FFARCS in 1953. He worked in Birmingham, Winchester and London before his appointment as a consultant anaesthetist to the Enfield District Hospitals from 1954 until his retirement in 1988. In addition to his clinical duties he took on a wide range of administrative work, often as chairman or as an elected representative. One can easily imagine how his calm and measured approach would pre-empt any potential discord and how valuable in committee would have been his ability to sift through the most enormous muddles, separating the wheat from the chaff with remarkable speed and clarity.

He published *Principles of Anaesthesia for Nurses* in 1969<sup>1</sup> and was a regular contributor to the correspondence columns of the *BMJ* and the *Lancet*. Like many Victorian pioneers of anaesthesia, David invented several items of anaesthetic equipment including a cuffed oesophageal tube as an additional safeguard against inhalation during induction, a non-return

valve for use during IPPV, a ripple mattress to prevent stasis on the operating table, a transistorised time marker designed to work with a continuous flow spirometer and a drip indicator which alerted staff when the infusion bottle was nearly empty.

He was quick to appreciate the benefits of personal computers, including their potential for research and also for self-directed tutorials without the intervention of a didactic pedagogue. In 1982 his self-taught programming skills enabled him to produce such a tutorial on a Sinclair ZX81 only one year after the introduction of that basic computer.

Members of this Society will treasure the memory of David as one of our best loved and most admired members. His gentle and unassuming manner, his immense capacity for friendship, his interest in the work of other members and the help which he was always prepared to offer would have made him a most valuable member of any community; but David brought two other wonderful gifts to our Society: his wisdom and his scholarship. David's scholarship was of a very high order and he was an exemplar for those who aspired to emulate him. He was, it need hardly be said, among the most learned of men, his learning being the rich harvest of his extensive reading in so many different fields and of his exceptionally retentive memory; and his scholarship was the product of this knowledge, his wisdom and his meticulous nature.

To say that David was a bibliophile would be an understatement. In the Christmas *BMJ* of 1984 he speculated that there might be such things as bibliomones, analogous to pheromones, which drew him involuntarily and inexorably to the nearest bookshop. Clothes were displaced from wardrobes as the latter were pressed into service for storage of books but, even so, his books metastasised over every available surface. It has been said that it is easier to buy books than to read them and easier to read them than to understand them. David achieved all three in equal and ample measure.

David's forte was the history of ideas and concepts; and of course none more so than those of his hero John Snow. This was brought home to me most forcibly when we were studying a newly recognised prototype of Snow's ether vaporizer and it gradually dawned on us that this vaporizer

was, in common parlance, a ‘missing link’ between the two previously known examples of Snow’s ether vaporizers. What David saw, and what I had failed to grasp until he talked me through it, was how one could now reconstruct Snow’s exact thought processes as he developed his original prototype (which we now named the ‘Mark I’) to produce his ‘Mark II’ vaporizer (the newly recognised vaporizer) and then finally the other previously known model, now the ‘Mark III’. It was a *tour de force* on David’s part. Several times I had to ask him to repeat parts of his line of thought before the scales fell fully from my eyes. I don’t believe there was anyone else in the world who had the knowledge and the ability to reconstruct Snow’s thought processes in the way that David did it that morning.

As a historian David was a prolific author. By my count, and excluding letters, book reviews and obituaries, he published 26 papers in our *Proceedings*, 13 papers in *Anaesthesia*, 5 in the *British Journal of Anaesthesia* (not including his ‘As we were’ column) and one major paper in *Medical History*, all of them meticulously researched and beautifully constructed and written. He was a major contributor to *Cholera, Chloroform, and the Science of Medicine – A Life of John Snow* (2003).<sup>2</sup> David was President of our Society in 1994-6, elected an Honorary Member in 1999 and appointed as the Blessed Chloroform Lecturer in 2008. His historical interests were not confined to anaesthesia, having been awarded the Diploma in the History of Medicine of the Society of Apothecaries; nor indeed were his interests restricted only to the history of medicine as, among other topics, he had researched the history of the English letterbox.

Above all, David was a family man. In 1950 he married Bella Paul, an actress who had trained at RADA and with whom he had two children, Michael and Linda. David was left desolate after Bella died in 2003 but found new happiness and companionship with Mala Tribich MBE, a family friend of long-standing. David is survived by Mala, his children, and by his five grandchildren and three great grandchildren, all of whom adored him. At David’s Shiva his granddaughter Anna described how, at the age of 91, David had proof-read her entire PhD thesis:

“It was a mammoth task – it was 130,000 words long but he was so utterly committed to it, and engaged in the task with the most

remarkable dedication. This was how he had always been with us so I suppose, in a way, I wasn't surprised. Perhaps it was more the case that his devotion never failed to amaze me."

*Henry Connor*

## **References**

1. Zuck D. *Principles of anaesthesia for nurses*. London: Pitman Medical Publishing Co. Ltd, 1969
2. Vinten-Johansen P. *Cholera, chloroform, and the science of medicine; a life of John Snow*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003

## **Sources**

1. Lives of the Fellows of the Royal College of Anaesthetists.  
<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/lives-of-the-fellows/dr-david-zuck>
2. Information from family, from journals and from personal knowledge.