Sir John Bruce

Administrative/Biographical History:

John Bruce (1905-1975) was born in Dalkeith. He graduated at Edinburgh University with Honours in 1928. After appointments at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, he worked for a time as assistant in general practice at Grimsby. When he returned to Edinburgh he ran with Ian Aird (later Professor Aird) a course for the final Fellowship examinations ‘of such excellence that few candidates felt they could appear for the exam without having attended it’. On the 17th May 1932 he became a Fellow of this College. In World War II, he served with distinction in the Royal Army Medical Corps, first in Orkney and then in Norway. Later, he was Brigadier and Consulting Surgeon with the XIVth Army in India and Burma.

In 1951, at the Western General Hospital, he and Wilfred Card set up what was probably the first gastro-intestinal unit in which a physician and a surgeon were in joint charge. In 1956 he was appointed Regius Professor of Surgery at Edinburgh University.

Sir John was a sound general surgeon with a particular interest in carcinoma of the breast and in gastro-intestinal disease. He was a consummate surgical pathologist, wrote notable papers and contributed many chapters in various textbooks. He was chiefly responsible for the foundation of the Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1955 being its editor for twenty years.

Many honours came his way. He was knighted in 1963 and was Honorary Surgeon to Queen Elizabeth from 1966 to 1975. He was President of the College from 1957-1962. He was President of the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland, the James IV Association of Surgeons, the British Cancer Council, the Eastern Surgical Society of America and the International Federation of Surgical Colleges and Associations.

John Bruce was a great ambassador for the College, travelling extensively and meeting Fellows in all parts of the world.


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