

# Appreciation: Professor Joseph Gustave Hall

Georgina Hall reflects on the life and achievement of Professor Joseph Gustave Hall, MB BS, LRCP MRCS, FRCPath, PhD, DSc

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Born in Hull on 22 November 1933, Professor Joe Hall was educated at Berkhamsted School and Hymer's College. His love of explosives, weaponry and aviation likely heralded from his war years, scrambling over the rubble of bomb sites with his older brother Jim.

Joe decided to study medicine, rather than the classics preferred by his school masters. He duly arrived in London in 1951 to undertake his first MB at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine. He qualified in 1957 with numerous distinctions (mainly academic) along the way, out of only 9 men in his year.

He recounted many eyebrow-raising tales of life as a student and house officer with Fanny Gardener, Radley Smith, Nigel Compston, George Qvist and others. He experienced the outbreak of myalgic encephalomyelitis (Royal Free Disease) and the use of arsenic to treat acute myeloid leukemia as a house-officer (half a century later, arsenic is back in fashion). These experiences ignited his desire to understand the role of the immune response in the pathophysiology of such diseases.

Despite excelling in clinical medicine, his fascination with pathological processes led him inevitably towards a life of scientific investigation. Having completed his house jobs and being required to undertake National Service, he decided that joining the Royal New Zealand Air Force would not only indulge his passion for flying but give him free passage across the world to pursue the woman of his dreams, Diana Truscoe, the sculptress sister of his med school chum Barbara.

It was there in Wellington that he started his scientific career under the inspiring tutelage of his soon to be father-in-law Professor Richard Truscoe, working on urate oxidase. He discovered that the polyglot, SOE war veteran Dick, like his father, had studied chemistry at UCL in the years

leading up to the First World War.

In 1961, Joe enrolled at the John Curtin School of Medicine at the Australian National University in Canberra, Australia, working with a forefather of immunology, the gregarious, larger-than-life Australian veterinarian Professor Bede Morris, who also became a lifelong mentor and friend. He completed his PhD entitled *The Function of the Lymphatic System in Immunity* and returned to the UK in 1964 with his growing family.

Following a post-doc post at Babraham's Institute of Animal Physiology in Cambridge, he moved to the Chester Betty, Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) at the Royal Marsden Hospital (RMH) in Sutton, where he remained until his retirement in 1991, except for a brief period (1969–1971) as Reader in Immunology in the Department of Pathology, at the University of Birmingham. He worked mainly with sheep and being adept surgically, he performed various intricate procedures, including cannulation of the ovine and murine thoracic duct and inter-uterine thymectomies.

The antics of life in X Block (marked X in the original plans and never properly renamed) at the institute are fondly remembered by so many of his lab staff, research fellows, PhD students and clinical colleagues alike, inspired for life by Joe's tuition and approach to practicing good science. They remembered him as 'a unique, brilliant mentor with a bow tie-wearing elegance', who played a pivotal and memorable role in their lives and careers.

Also fondly recalled were his eccentricities, such as disappearing off to do his guitar practice in his operating theatre at lunchtimes, growing home-made fireworks in the centrifuge and encouraging the discussion of science on a Friday afternoon after the week's efforts (usually with a beverage or three). His one-time animal technician, former London Mayor Ken Livingstone, can attest to that.

Joe published extensively in immunology and cancer journals, *Nature*, *NEJM*, *ANAS* and wrote numerous book chapters over a 30-year period covering lymphocyte recirculation, cellular immune response, tumour immunology, IgA transport and the gut. He wrote more existentially in the *Lancet* on emotion and immunity, *Fallacious fallacies* on oedema and *Depression, stress and immunity*.

He was made professor of tumour immunology, awarded his DSc in 1986 and was both chairman and member of various academic boards and committees at the ICR, RMH and the University of London.

Retiring early from active research he worked for the Home Office Animal Inspectorate for a couple of years before retiring fully. He could then pursue his passions of aviation and military history, skiing, building and flying model aircraft, while religiously playing the classical guitar daily for the rest of his life. He enjoyed an erudite existence, enlarging his already enormous library, indulged in epicurean delights, obtained his private pilot's licence and published a poem in the *Spectator*, but never managed to write his book on the Spanish Civil War.

Joe was an exceptional wordsmith and orator, excelling in repartee. A thoughtful, fair and sensitive man, he was painfully polite and self-effacing. He was devastated by the death of his eldest son in 2011. Like many of his generation, he was frugal, disciplined and wouldn't complain or make a fuss, refusing to relinquish his independence or, frustratingly, ask for help. His fiercely inquiring scientific mind remained sharp, right up until the last few weeks of his life. He died peacefully at home on 23 December 2022 aged 89, survived by his wife, two of his children and three grandchildren.

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