

# Christopher Lewis Colton

9th September 1937 - 24th December 2025

Obituary by Paul Szypryt and Simon Lambert

**P**rofessor Christopher Lewis Colton was born on the 9th September 1937, in Nottingham. He later returned to the city, working as a Consultant in T&O surgery until his retirement in 1997, and was appointed Special Professor in Trauma Surgery at the University of Nottingham in 1993.

He qualified from St Thomas's Hospital Medical School, London, in 1960 before obtaining a position as orthopaedic registrar at Bristol and later the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in London. He spent a period working in the Dala Orthopaedic Hospital, Nigeria during the Biafran War (1967-1970) before he was appointed to his consultant position at Queens Medical Centre (QMC) in Nottingham in 1973.

At the new medical school in Nottingham, he set about creating a centre with an international reputation for the highest standards of care in T&O. Such was his enthusiasm and success that surgeons and patients from all over the world visited the unit for training and treatment. His work, alongside colleague John Webb, was instrumental in making Nottingham a world-renowned Orthopaedic Trauma Unit. Together they operated on HRH King Charles in 1990 and founded the Nottingham Fracture Forum, which continues today.

As well as a respected clinician and teacher he developed a leading role within British orthopaedics, he was elected to the ABC Travelling Fellowship and later served as a BOA Council member and then treasurer, eventually becoming the President between 1995-1996.

His passion for trauma and his link to the AO Foundation began at an early age when, encouraged by his mentor Keith Lucas, he spent six weeks in Chur, Switzerland, in 1967, with AO Founder Martin Allgöwer. He later stated: "This was a life-changing experience for me, working with the big man and his assistants at the time, such as Thomas Rüedi, Peter Matter, and Stephan Perren."

He devoted much of his professional career to spreading the message of AO Teaching of fracture care, giving many well delivered lectures and writing chapters for books. He held many roles within the AO Foundation culminating in him becoming President in 1996-1998. He was the first and only President from the UK.

He served as a Lifetime Honorary Member of the AO Board of Trustees and was a founding member of the AO Alliance Foundation, extending the AO's aim to transform surgery and change lives to underserved regions.

He published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and served as Executive Editor of *AO Surgery Reference*. His editorial influence extended to major journals, including *Injury*, *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, and *Journal of Orthopaedic Trauma*.

He was a founding member of the International Board for Research into Air Crash Events. His dedication to education was recognised with the A.B.I. Medical Community Award—Bronze Medal for Outstanding Service in Health Education and the BOTA Award for Outstanding Contributions to Orthopaedic Training.

We will remember him not only for his clinical excellence and leadership but also for his warmth, generosity, and commitment to advancing trauma care globally. When asked to reflect on what he was most proud of as a person and as a surgeon, he said "I am proud that I worked hard and honestly for my patients and was able to teach my experience to others".

He was a larger-than-life character who lived life to the fullest. He had a huge intellect, which he was happy to share. He was never



happier than giving a lecture to an appreciative audience of his peers and always entertained them with imaginative slides that he created himself and a humour that had everyone in stitches of laughter.

Away from clinical, academic, and managerial activities, Chris was a gifted artist, which was reflected in his preoperative planning diagrams and self-created slides, which remain legendary throughout the trauma world. He was an accomplished skier until late in life and then took up scuba diving, spending many hours in Bonaire.

Chris once wrote a letter to himself as a medical student—when he was in his eighties! Some of the following quotes highlight the quality of him as a doctor and as a man:

*"Dear Chris, you are nearing the end of your time as a medical student... never forget that you have a bounden duty of care to your patients, your colleagues, your profession, and to yourself... Surgery is fun, but the hallmark of a good surgeon is to know when not to operate... always remember that surgery is not a science, it is a scientific art: the art is two-fold. The first is the art of handling tissues with biological finesse and delicacy; the second is the art of handling your patients and their near ones with respect, humanity and humility."*

The many people he inspired will continue his vision and dreams. He often said "...we stand on the shoulders of giants, which enable us to see further and clearer than our predecessors...". He was indeed one of those giants.

Throughout his life he was a loving husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather and friend to so many. He was a charismatic surgeon, teacher and leader who was a huge inspiration to everyone who knew him and was touched by his energy.

He died peacefully in his home on 24th December 2025, after a chronic illness. He was lovingly cared for by his wife Jo, as his light slowly dimmed. ■

*Acknowledged contributions: The AO Foundation*

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