

Nicholas Barton

28th May 1935 - 11th October 2023

Obituary by Tim Davis, Neil Barton and Joseph Dias



Nicholas Barton, retired consultant orthopaedic and hand surgeon at the Queens Medical Centre and Harlow Wood Hospital, Nottingham passed away on 11th October 2023. He was a gifted, questioning surgeon and teacher who served as Chair of the Education Committee of the British Orthopaedic Association and Speciality Advisory Committee (SAC) for Trauma and Orthopaedics (1994-1995). He was Honorary Secretary (1983-1985) and President (1989) of the British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH) and Editor of the Journal of Hand Surgery, British Volume (1987-1991). In 2007, he was made a Pioneer in Hand Surgery by the International Society for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH).

Nicholas studied medicine at Cambridge and the Middlesex Hospital, qualifying in 1959. His orthopaedic training was completed at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital in Oswestry, and the Rancho Los Amigos Hospital in Los Angeles.

Nicholas developed his main medical interest, hand surgery, after his appointment as consultant in Nottingham in 1971. Throughout his career, he researched the treatment of scaphoid fractures, and delivered his Hunterian Lecture to the BOA annual meeting in Birmingham in 2001.

One of Nicholas' great assets was his curiosity. The first sentence of his article "Twenty Questions about Scaphoid Fractures" (1992) demonstrates his enquiring mind: "When I was appointed a consultant in 1971, I had no doubt about fractures of the scaphoid: I had been taught all I needed to know during my training - or so I thought". This article became, and remains, essential reading for any young surgeon planning to research injuries to this bone.

Nicholas was an active teacher of medical students and trainee orthopaedic surgeons. He was an excellent mentor of junior colleagues, and guided their management of patients by asking questions, rather than telling them what to do. He was the single-handed editor of the Journal of Hand Surgery for five years.

Nicholas' curiosity was not confined to surgery conundrums. When a student, he worked on a barge on the River Thames in London, and became interested in its tributaries. This led him to write the book 'The Lost Rivers of London'.

When a young doctor in London he met Margaret when she was looking for a speaker for a Christian Union meeting. She described him later as "a walking encyclopaedia, with boundless curiosity, who reads constantly". They were married in 1960. Nicholas leaves Margaret, their five children, 13 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He will have left his mark on those who worked with, or trained under him. ■

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