

# Obituary

**John Kay Williams**



John Williams had nearly completed his term as President of the British Orthodontic Society at the time of his sudden death in September 2004. The Presidency is the highest honour the Society can bestow on a member. It is an honour that John richly deserved and characteristically he performed this office with all the zeal he brought to everything he ever did.

John first held office in the service of national orthodontics as the Treasurer of the Consultant Orthodontists Group (COG) from 1975 to 1977, subsequently becoming Treasurer of the British Society for the Study of Orthodontics (BSSO). He held this post from 1985 to 1990 during the six very important years when the orthodontic societies were preparing for Unification. Throughout, John maintained the members' subscription at just £25, whilst all the time the activities and expenditure of the BSSO greatly increased. John achieved this remarkable feat by very astute management of the Society's reserves.

John was the first and third Treasurer to the British Orthodontic Conference. He refused to let the Conference Committee keep the conference profit in

their coffers as a hedge against future conference losses and insisted they be given back to the societies. He thus set the financial protocol for running the BOC, which quickly became an extremely important element in the financing of the Society.

At BSSO Council meetings John would often say 'My job as Treasurer is to facilitate, my job is to find the money'. How well he succeeded: John gave the Society a secure financial base on which his successors have built, giving us a wonderful institution able to give excellent service to its members.

The financial base of the Society was just one of John's legacies to the Society. He followed David Di Biase as the Chairman of Council of the BSSO and was, in fact, the last Chairman of the BSSO Council. He was a member of the Unification Working Party throughout its eighteen meetings, at first as BSSO Treasurer and, finally, as Chairman of BSSO Council. He made a major contribution to the financial merger of the founding societies. His acquiescence, at an early stage in negotiations, to the assimilation of the large BSSO reserves into the new society was crucial.

Even more important was his achievement in securing the final agreement out of apparently intransigent positions. John Williams and Ken Lumsden, were the joint second Chairmen of the Working Party. By July 1993, after twelve meetings, negotiations were stalling. At the thirteenth meeting, John was adamant that the last obstacles be cleared that day or the negotiations would be terminated completely. The force of his authority was enough to achieve the final breakthrough into agreement and to the founding of the BOS.

Although another name for the new body had been agreed long before, John demanded at the last moment that 'Society' be used in the name of the new organisation. He thus ensured continuity with the oldest national orthodontic institution, the BSSO.

John was one of the first people to fully embrace the use of computers and even wrote the databases for the British Orthodontic Conference, the BSSO and later for the BOS. He updated these programs whenever needed. Yet, whilst still fully involved in the work of the BSSO, John broadened his horizons and increased his workload to serve on the Board of the Faculty of Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Elected to the Board in 1989, he served for two terms in office, a total of fourteen years—the maximum period allowed. He was the Vice-Dean of the Faculty in 1995–1996. He was Chairman of the Audit Committee. He brought all his usual energies to the benefit of the Faculty. He hardly ever missed a Board meeting and was an examiner for the MOrth for many years.

John was born and brought up in Leicester. His father was a dentist in the School Dental Service and his mother was a primary school teacher. John attended Wyggeston Grammar School in Leicester, and from there entered the Royal Dental Hospital of London School of Dental Surgery. He qualified in 1962 and two years later started the orthodontic postgraduate course at the Royal. Remarkably, he obtained his DOrth and FDS in the same year. John's higher specialty training was in London at the Royal Dental Hospital and St George's. He was appointed Consultant Orthodontist to Pinderfields Hospital in Wakefield and Leeds Dental Hospital in 1972, and remained in these two posts for the rest of his life. Recently, although still very enthusiastic about his work, he had reconciled himself to his approaching retirement and had begun to make exciting plans for future projects.

Beyond his work in national affairs, John was very active in his local community. He was involved in teaching and training dental nurses, dental students, and Specialist and Senior Registrars; he provided CPD training to GDPs and training for Clinical Assistants in the use of fixed appliances. He joined all the local orthodontic groups including the Yorkshire Orthodontic Regional Audit Group and gave lectures on Section 63 courses throughout the country.

John was an expert and very productive clinician. As a postgraduate student at the Royal Dental Hospital, he was naturally attracted to the Begg appliance and he became an acknowledged master of the technique. Later he became just as expert with Tip-Edge, but he was never limited to one appliance and was very versatile in all the appliances he used and taught—his students greatly admired his very practical approach to clinical problems.

He co-authored two popular orthodontic text books and lectured extensively in the Far East along with Allan Thom and Keith Isaacson. At one time he was a visiting lecturer in Libya. He was also a visiting examiner to Sri Lanka.

John made very many friends and was greatly loved by all who knew him.

John's Memorial Service in Leeds University Great Hall on 6th November 2004 was very well attended by his friends and colleagues from all over the country. All the speakers had a common theme in appreciation of John: John's amazing enquiring mind and how he delighted in posing conundrums to his friends. He loved machines and anything mechanical, best of all when they were broken. He was a master at mending things and was much in demand whenever something broke. He was amazingly generous of his time to help others and very insistent in his hospitality.

We will remember that he had a motor bicycle that was much bigger than he was. We will remember that we sometimes wondered if he cared about his clothes at all.

John had a very wry sense of humour and would have enjoyed the great amusement we shared when some of his wonderfully funny spoof letters from the past were read out at his Memorial Service. We miss him greatly.

John was born on 7th May 1940 and died on 3rd September 2004.

Chris Kettler