

Stanley Roberts

Born: 1932
President: 1994-1997
Died: 2023

Stanley Roberts was born in 1932 in Belfast. He attended school in the Royal Belfast Academical Institution where he achieved a foundation scholarship. He then studied medicine at Queen's University Belfast graduating with an honours degree. His early clinical training was at the Royal Victoria and Musgrave Park Hospitals, Belfast. He was a clinical research fellow and achieved an MD by thesis on Autoimmune Disease. Roberts then undertook research into rheumatic conditions as a fellow in the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital, Taplow, England. He was appointed consultant physician, and rheumatologist, at the Royal Victoria and Musgrave Park Hospitals in 1967. This was a time of major development in rheumatology with the sub-classification of rheumatic disorders, and the development of specific investigations and treatments. He was largely responsible for driving the delivery of these advances throughout Northern Ireland. He was particularly proud that he established a small research laboratory in the Musgrave Park Hospital from which still emerge significant numbers of publications appearing in international medical journals, and of the appointment of several of the graduates from the department to consultant posts throughout Northern Ireland and beyond.

Stanley Roberts was an active member of the Corrigan Club, founded in 1969, to provide the opportunity for collaboration and to foster friendships across the border in Ireland. As secretary/treasurer for five years from 1988 to 1993, Roberts worked hard to achieve these aims. This included assisting in clinical medicine to provide rheumatological expertise where this was available in one jurisdiction but not in the other. Cross border collaboration also strengthened several areas of research and fostered friendships. While by no means mandatory it was encouraged that members offered at-home hospitality to visiting members on the occasion of the annual meetings at which papers on clinical medicine and laboratory research were presented. All of this successfully encouraged good professional relationships which were unlikely to have occurred otherwise and have been proven to be long-lasting and strong. The high point of the success of the Club occurred under Stanley Roberts' time as secretary and was almost entirely due to his input in every aspect of the club.



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Stanley Roberts was a Fellow of the three Royal Colleges of Physicians, chronologically London, Dublin and Edinburgh. It was to the Dublin College that he contributed most substantially. Roberts served as a Council member for over 20 years. He was Director of Examinations for six years, during which time the examinations flourished becoming standardised and in-line with the emerging science of assessment. The examination was delivered in more countries particularly in the Middle East and attracted more examinees than before. Roberts was elected President of RCPI in 1994 for a three-year term. During this period, he was involved very positively in all aspects of the College's activities. He was particularly interested in improving relationships between the Royal Colleges. He initiated the process of changing from a relationship that was based on competition to one generally of cooperation and mutual respect. This was in no small way due to Stanley's skills in negotiation, never losing his lively sense of humour and the adept use of his most potent weapon, self-deprecation, resulting in under-estimation by the unwary and unwise.

Following his term as RCPI President, Dr Roberts was appointed Chairman of the Committee of Higher Medical Training embracing all medical specialties. Again, he was successful in delivering a robust training programme attracting more candidates, many from abroad. This programme subsequently blended with the Higher Medical Training Programme of the EU, so that graduates who were achieving high levels of proficiency were then automatically eligible by right to recognition throughout the EU. Stanley Roberts' contribution to the College was considerable. In recognition of this, the College presented him with the Stearne Medal in 2007, only the fifth recipient of the award in 28 years and the first Fellow to receive it.

Stanley Roberts was a member of, and played a significant role in, an exceptional number of medical and lay organisations. These included the Association of Physicians of Great Britain and Ireland (Council member), the British Society for Rheumatology (Committee member and Heberden Roundsman), Irish Association for Rheumatology and Rehabilitation (President), Hibernian Society, Ulster Medical Association, Antrim Club (President) and Lions International for over 20 years.

Stanley Roberts was widely recognised as noted above. Two other honours are worthy of mention. It is unusual that clinicians are remembered years after their retirement but Stanley Roberts was one. In 2018 the Rheumatology Department of the Musgrave Park Hospital was renamed the Roberts Rheumatology Unit and in 1997 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to medicine.



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Stanley was married to Florence Isabel Nelson, and had three children Belinda, Michael, and Paul. He died on 13 September 2023.

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