

LEWIS, IVOR (1895-1982), consultant surgeon

Name: Ivor Lewis
Date of birth: 1895
Date of death: 1982
Spouse: Nancy Lewis (née Faux)
Parent: Mary Lewis (née Davies)
Parent: Lewis Lewis
Gender: Male
Occupation: consultant surgeon
Area of activity: Medicine
Author: Alun Roberts

Ivor Lewis was born on 27 October 1895 at Llandeusan, Carmarthenshire, the only child of Lewis Lewis, a farmer steeped in Welsh culture, and his wife Mary (née Davies). Educated at Llandeilo Grammar School, though his devout mother cherished the hope that her son would one day enter the ministry, Ivor Lewis aspired to be a doctor. After spending the years between 1915 and 1918 pursuing preclinical studies at University College, Cardiff he undertook his clinical training at University College Hospital, London. There he was awarded the Lister Gold Medal in surgery before graduating MB BS in 1921, having obtained the MRCS LRCP in the previous year.

After graduation, fortunate to fall under the influence of such celebrated practitioners as Wilfred Trotter and Gwynne Williams, Lewis decided to pursue a surgical career. Working as a resident surgical officer at Lewisham Hospital during the 1920s he obtained the London MD in 1924 and the MS in 1930, at which point he moved to Plymouth where he became surgeon and medical director at the City Hospital. There he fostered the practice whereby patients could be visited by their relatives on a daily basis, by no means a common practice in those days. In 1933 Lewis returned to London, spending the next eighteen years at the North Middlesex Hospital, as surgeon and medical director.

It was during these years that Lewis acquired an enviable international reputation in the fields of abdominal and chest surgery, leading, in 1939, to his performing the first pulmonary embolectomy operation in Great Britain. His reputation as a pioneering surgeon resulted in invitations to visit many hospitals in the United States and Europe, and on 10 January 1946 he delivered a highly-acclaimed Hunterian Lecture on the surgical treatment of carcinoma of the oesophagus at the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Two years later Lewis was admitted as FRCS by election. During these years Lewis was greatly supported by his wife Nancy (née Faux, 1909-1990) whom he married in 1944. She was herself an experienced anaesthetist and together they would prove a formidable team at the North Middlesex Hospital and subsequently until his eventual retirement.

Ivor and Nancy were to have four children, the two girls eventually becoming teachers while the two boys were to become doctors. What was of paramount importance to Lewis, a proud Welshman, was that his children should be brought up in a totally Welsh environment. Therefore, at the height of his surgical career, in 1951, the family moved to north Wales on his appointment as consultant surgeon at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Rhyl, and at two nearby chest hospitals at Abergele and Llangwyfan. Though he retired from his post at Rhyl in 1960 he continued to work at Abergele and Llangwyfan for a further ten years. His working years in north Wales were most fulfilling when, among other things he enjoyed the opportunity to train young surgeons from other parts of the world, particularly from Australia and Canada. He was for many years a staunch supporter of the Welsh Surgical Society, serving as its President in 1959 and 1960. As a long-standing member of the Welsh Regional Hospital Board he was also able to contribute to the wider development of health services in his homeland.

Outside Medicine Ivor loved the traditions, the language and literature of Wales and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to be admitted, in 1970, as a member of the White Order of the Gorsedd of Bards with the bardic name Ifor o Wynfe, at the National Eisteddfod held that year in Ammanford, Carmarthenshire. In 1977 his many achievements were recognised by the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, when the University Chancellor, HRH the Prince of Wales, admitted him to the degree of DSc honoris causa in the presence of the immediate past Chancellor, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

Ivor Lewis died aged 86 on 11 September 1982 in St Asaph, Denbighshire. Though he never fulfilled his mother's hopes for him by entering the ministry he remained a devout Christian all his life, serving during his later years as an elder of the nearby Welsh Presbyterian chapel at Cefn Meiriadog, Capel Marli, where his funeral service took place. Afterwards he was laid to rest, according to his wishes, in the place of his birth, Llandeusan, Carmarthenshire in Twynllanan cemetery.

In the year after his death, following the launch of a fund by the doctors at Glan Clwyd Hospital, an annual lecture, the Ivor Lewis Memorial Lecture, was established and continues to be held at the Postgraduate Education Centre at Glan Clwyd Hospital. In 2011 a new outpatient department was opened at the hospital, with the name the Ivor Lewis Building. Thus are the achievements of a surgeon who pioneered the combined abdominal and thoracic approach to the excision of cancer of the oesophagus, and a man who made a notable contribution to Welsh public life still recognised.

Author

Dr Alun Roberts

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