



MAUREEN OWEN 1927-2011

It is very sad to report that Maureen Owen, a pioneering researcher and leader in the field of bone biology, died peacefully in Oxford aged 83 on 5th April 2011. Maureen was an Honorary Member of the Bone Research Society and was an extraordinary mentor to many. Throughout her life she showed great kindness and encouragement to all her colleagues. Many benefited from her tuition and expertise over the years and she instilled the joy of science to all those who were fortunate to work with her in Oxford as students, researchers or sabbatical visitors throughout her career.

Maureen was born in Northern Ireland and gained a first class B.Sc. Hons degree in Experimental Physics at Queen's University, Belfast in 1948. Following a year as a Scientific Officer at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell, she gained a DPhil Studentship in Nuclear Physics in the University of Oxford at the Clarendon Laboratory and obtained her DPhil degree in 1952. From 1952 to 1958, with a one-year sabbatical break at the Donner Laboratory for Biophysics at the University of California in Berkeley, she was a Graduate Assistant in the Nuffield Department of Medicine at the University of Oxford. In 1958 she joined the Bone Seeking Isotopes Research Unit as a Member of the Medical Research Council Staff, with Dame Janet Vaughan as Honorary Director. Under Dame Janet's mentorship Maureen's lifelong interest in bone tissue began. There was a one-year break in 1962 when she accompanied her husband (John, also a nuclear physicist) to Long Island, New York, where she was a Research Fellow at the Brookhaven National Laboratory. Following Dame Janet's retirement, Maureen became a member of the MRC External Scientific Staff and head of the bone research team at the Churchill Hospital Oxford. The MRC Bone Research Laboratory moved to the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre in 1974 and she retired in 1993. A Bone and Tooth Society meeting was organised at Keble College and the University Museum in Oxford in July 1993 to mark the occasion. Her many international friends and colleagues attended

to celebrate Maureen's career and made this a very memorable and enjoyable meeting.

Maureen's numerous publications clearly established her as an expert in the field of bone tissue research. Her scientific achievements were many and varied. These began with her work on bone uptake of radionuclides and radiation dosimetry that naturally followed from her Nuclear Physics degree background. She quickly learnt cell biology and developed highly novel techniques using quantitative autoradiography to investigate the formation and metabolism of bone matrix, osteoblasts and osteoclasts. Her remarkable insight led her to the premonition that the progenitor cells of musculoskeletal stromal tissues would be central to future investigations of bone diseases and their treatments and to normal musculoskeletal physiology. She performed the pioneering studies on this subject and made seminal contributions to understanding the key role of marrow stromal stem cells. Based on her knowledge of studies by the Russian scientist Alexander Friedenstein, working in Moscow, Maureen framed the concept of the marrow stromal cell system. She and Alexander became firm friends and active collaborators, and together they laid the foundations and principles of "marrow stromal stem cell biology" (their preferred terminology) that endure today through their publications.

Maureen was a major player in all the scientific societies relating to work in the bone field. She was secretary of the British Bone and Tooth Society (now the British Bone Research Society) from 1975-79 inclusive, and acted as the founding secretary of the European Calcified Tissue Society. She was also deeply involved in the Advisory Board of the triennial Parathyroid Hormone Conferences. With this group she helped to organise the highly successful "Parathyroid Conference 1974" at St Catherines's College, Oxford. She was involved in the evolution of this group to become the International Conference on Calcium-Regulating Hormones and eventually the International Bone and Mineral Society, from whom she received the Elsevier award in 1998.

She was also on the editorial boards of all major bone journals, including Bone, Bone and Mineral, Journal of Bone and Mineral Research and Calcified Tissue International. After her retirement she continued to regularly attend lectures and events at the University of Oxford, often arriving by bicycle, and also remained a prominent figure at national and international meetings. Her warmth and friendly nature will be greatly missed by all who knew her. We offer our deepest sympathy to her daughter, Stephanie, and son-in-law and her three grandchildren. Donations in Maureen's memory for "RP Fighting Blindness" can be made online at the website: www.justgiving.com/maureen-owen