

# Obituaries

Obituaries should be submitted by email to Jonathan Coe at [jonathan.coe@nature.com](mailto:jonathan.coe@nature.com).

All submitted obituaries should be 400 words maximum in length (apart from obituaries for past presidents of the BDA where the length should be 800 words).

Content of the obituary is down to the individual author, and the approval of the family should be given for the obituary prior to submission to the *BDJ*.



James George  
Steele CBE

1962–2017

Jimmy Steele was born on 28 June 1962 in Edinburgh. He was educated at the Royal High School in Edinburgh and studied dentistry at the University of Dundee, graduating with commendation in 1985. After house jobs in Perth and Dundee and a hospital job at Glasgow Dental Hospital, he was appointed to a lectureship in restorative dentistry at Newcastle University in 1989, where he worked for 28 years. He completed specialist training in restorative dentistry while studying for a PhD in adult dental health in Salisbury, Darlington and Richmondshire, building on the seminal work by Bulman and Slack, *Demand and need for dental care* (1962). This combination of excellence in restorative dentistry, coupled with his deep knowledge of changes in the pattern of oral health in adults gave him a unique insight into the need to transform the quality of dental health in Britain. He was promoted to Clinical Senior Lecturer in 1999 and then Professor of Oral Health Services in 2003.

He was one of the leaders of the consortium who carried out the Children's Dental Health Surveys in 2003 and 2013, as well as the 1998 and 2009 Adult Dental Health Surveys. He will be widely remembered for his work on the independent review of NHS dental services in England, universally known as the 'Steele Report'. He said that '*oral health is for the long term and I believe in getting simple things right.*' Fundamentally, he believed that '*contributing to preventing*

*disease is more satisfying than drilling and filling and being on the treadmill.*

Jimmy's outstanding research contributions were recognised by the Distinguished Scientist Award from the International Association of Dental Research in 2008. He was awarded a CBE for services to dentistry and oral health in 2012. He gave the *BDJ*/BDA Anniversary lecture 'Oral health, epidemiology and the British way of life' in 2015. He received the Tomes Medal for his scientific work and contribution to his profession by the BDA in 2016.

Jimmy was a gifted teacher and lecturer, with an exuberant personality, outspoken, decisive, clear thinking and quick witted. He was also: 'eloquent, charming, empathetic and possessed of the common touch. If you wanted someone to 'engage' with a bunch of disgruntled, disenchanted and disillusioned practitioners, then Jimmy's clearly your man.' (*The Times*, 30 November 2017).

While at Dundee, Jimmy met Kate Bushby, a medical student. They married in 1987. Katie's medical career also developed in Newcastle, where she is Professor of Neuromuscular Genetics and a leading researcher into Duchenne muscular dystrophy. They have two children, Tom and Jenny.

Jimmy's main hobby (obsession) was bird watching. He got even more excited when lecturing about birds than he did about dentistry. His patch was Newbiggin-by the sea, from where he surveyed the North Sea, and the world. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge about birds (he served on the British Rare Birds Committee for nine years), an interest first developed on the edges of the Pentland Hills when he was a young boy. He claimed that one of his proudest achievements was to find Britain's second Black-faced Bunting. Jimmy was also a proficient cook, especially fish. At dental student charity auctions he would hire himself out

to provide a fish extravaganza, but this was a day's teaching and skills acquisition for the students too! The successful students were taken to North Shields Fish Quay at 7 o'clock on Saturday morning, given instructions in what to look for when buying fish, before bringing their purchases back to the family home. Then he gave a demonstration on filleting and preparing fish and crustaceans, before the students cooked a meal and prepared dinner for friends in the evening. Jimmy was devoted to his students and was Staff President of the Dental Students' Society 2004–2005.

He was a very popular member of staff, and was Head of the School of Dental Sciences for seven years from 2009–2016. He was Public Orator for the University for three years (August 2013–July 2016). In December 2015, Jimmy first noticed symptoms, and emailed members of staff to inform them that he had been diagnosed with a glioblastoma, which in Jimmy's words 'was not good news'. After extensive treatment he enjoyed a period of remission and returned to academic work at the School of Dental Sciences. Unfortunately, the tumour recurred and Jimmy retired in 2016. The last few months were very precious to Katie, Tom and Jenny. He died at home, surrounded by his family, on 16 November 2017, aged 55 years.

Hundreds of mourners, including a great many past and current students, joined Katie, Tom and Jenny, together with Jimmy's mother and sister, Christelle and Alison, at Newcastle Crematorium on 24 November 2017. The celebration of a life well lived included a Geordie folk song, a Robert Burns poem and bird watching tales from Newbiggin, highlighting some of Jimmy's eclectic passions – his love of bird watching, Scotland, dentistry, fish cooking and his inspirational spirit.

J. Murray and J. M. Thomason