

Dr Ian McLean Baird ; A pioneer in Obesity Research

Ian McLean Baird MD FRCP was an entrepreneurial physician with a special interest in the prevention and treatment of obesity.

Born in Glasgow and educated at St Andrews University he took up several posts in Salford, Manchester and the University of Sheffield where he was lecturer in Pharmacology and Therapeutics before becoming in 1965 consultant physician at the West Middlesex Hospital, Isleworth. He immediately set about creating an organization to further the prevention and treatment of Obesity

In those early days, obesity was beginning to be recognized as a very serious problem and on the increase. Mclean Baird joined forces with Philip LeBon a Harley Street doctor and Trevor Silverstone of St Bartholomew's Hospital and others to found the Obesity Association. As chairman he was instrumental in drawing together those people who like himself wanted to do something practical to prevent and treat the condition. Among those who especially helped was Professor John Butterfield then the head of the Department of Medicine, Guys Hospital London who became the president. This was some twenty years or so before John, later Lord Butterfield was appointed Regius Professor of Physics at The University of Cambridge and starting the clinical school at Addenbrookes Hospital.

A committee having been duly established, their first venture was to organize a one day meeting at the Royal Society of Medicine London on Recent Advances in the Treatment of Obesity. This was the first national meeting on the subject ever held in the UK. The proceedings were published as a monograph in 1968 and edited by Ian Mclean Baird.

The committee then went into self destruct mode. Since almost all the members of the committee are no longer with us the story can and should be told .Two committee members, medical practitioners, promoted the Simeons treatment which employed daily injections of human chorionic gonadotrophin (obtained from human urine during pregnancy) together with a 700 kcal diet. As pointed out at the Royal Society Medicine meeting a recent Lancet publication had shown

that HCG was no more effective than saline. Weight loss was due to the 700 kcal diet. As a result they temporarily withdrew from the committee, presumably as result of the shock of finding that their therapy which they hoped to expand in the UK was discredited. One year later they returned together with a University nutritionist who had just come back from a project in Ethiopia to take part in what must be one of the stormiest meetings ever held at the Royal Society of Medicine. The secretary anxious for the Association to disseminate healthy nutritional advice to the public had taken on the job of being consultant editor of Slimming Magazine, launched that year by Tom Eyton a former journalist at the Daily Telegraph and his wife Audrey formerly editor of Woman magazine. In addition he had become secretary of the Food Education Society and had used their address for receiving mail. Copies of the latest magazine were produced and ridiculed. John Butterfield kindly took the secretary up to the bar for a drink while the committee deliberated on whether to ask for the secretary's resignation. On his return he was asked to resign but requested to act until a new secretary could be appointed. He duly did so and a few months later gave up as consultant editor of Slimming magazine. What happened next was quite astonishing; the University nutritionist who most vocal and critical at the meeting became his replacement.

Mclean Baird was stunned by the events and resigned shortly thereafter and like John Butterfield decided to take no further interest in the Organisation. Most of the committee did likewise. Trevor Silverstone an articulate lecturer in pharmacology at St Bartholomew's, one of the few left took over as chairman. He made the only possible decision: to change the Association into an esoteric Society devoted to academic meetings called The Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO) .It then took off and became very successful, especially in organising the First Congress on Obesity held at the Royal College of Physicians in London in 197- . The ASO format was taken up world wide especially in Europe, USA and Asia and ended up even with The International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO).

The original idea behind the Obesity Association was to help the public combat obesity. In the debacle which followed its founding this object was abandoned. It ended up with doctors talking to doctors behind closed doors. In the intervening years the British public becomes fatter and fatter. What was required was public education in good nutrition.

The opportunity was lost and is only now being considered. To further this object IASO has now changed its name to World Obesity.

McLean Baird decided to employ his talents elsewhere.

He established a metabolic ward at the hospital and in 1970 invited Alan Howard PhD a nutritionist and biochemist at the Department of Investigative Medicine University Of Cambridge to join him in a new research project. They became interested in a product called Vivonex which was marketed by a US company in Mountain View California It was a complete formula diet, made up with amino acids instead of protein and was recommended to be consumed before intestinal operations.

What they did was to modify the composition for the treatment of obesity and especially to lower its calorie content.

After about 4 years work they had devised a Very Low Calorie Diet of 330 k Calories which was very effective and safe. It was then taken up and modified by a Dutch Company Organon who organized several successful clinical trials in Europe.

In 1980 it was eventually marketed in The USA by another company owned by a multi millionaire family in Monterrey California. They called it the Cambridge Diet as by that time an obesity clinic had been set up at Addenbrookes Hospital successfully using the diet.

Then in 1984 the Howard Foundation, a charity established by Alan Howard, founded Cambridge Nutrition which manufactured and sold the formulation in the UK and subsequently throughout the rest of the world.

The Cambridge Diet formulation has been used successfully by millions of people world wide and is still available in the US after 34 years and in the UK after 30 years. Its development and success

would have been impossible without the foresight and enthusiasm of Mclean Baird.

As a consultant at the West Middlesex Hospital it was impossible for him to be involved too much in the marketing of the Cambridge Diet. However he gave his support by speaking at international Conferences and by setting up an outpatient's clinic with the assistance of Joan Fowler the nurse who looked after the metabolic ward patients.

His major contribution to this subject was acknowledged and acclaimed in 2011 at an International meeting on Very low Calorie Diets at the Howard Theatre Downing College Cambridge, a building donated by his colleague Allan Howard.

However Dr Baird made other important contributions to Nutrition In 1970 he became Treasurer of the Food Education Society, an institution established in 1908. Several nutritional meetings were sponsored at the Royal College of Physicians including in 1992 the First International Symposium on Clinical Nutrition which continued for many years afterwards in various parts of the world.

He was active in teaching and became a senior lecturer in medicine at the Charing Cross/ Westminster medical school and an examiner for a diploma in dietetics at the University of London.

After his retirement in 1989 he continued to work with several medical charities one which the Nutrition Research Foundation he established himself. For many years he was also spokesperson for the British Heart Foundation. This was particularly fitting as he looked after the Cardiac Unit at the hospital.

He was a very charming man with an attractive Scottish accent and a wry sense of humor Very easy to get on with and in every way a gentleman. He married Ivy in 1947 while in Salford and had 2 children Neil (who died in 1997) and Fiona.

In their early years in Barnsley and Sheffield they enjoyed a lively social life and Dr Baird's champagne cocktails became legendary.

He settled in Cobham following his appointment at the West Middlesex Hospital and there enjoyed a quiet family life. Like any true Scotsman he enjoyed an occasional game of golf and country pursuits such as fishing. Only recently he and Fiona went sea fishing in Guernsey. However his favorite pastime was reading, including weekly visits to Foyles London bookshop.

Ivy had a dreadful car accident in the 1960's from which she never entirely recovered. In spite of this they travelled extensively and bought an apartment near Fort Lauderdale Florida which they used for winter holidays. Ivy died in 2008. It was a great loss to him.

Mclean Baird's contribution to medicine especially the treatment of obesity was immense. At his funeral in St Andrew's Church Cobham his colleague and friend of many years Alan Howard gave the address, and said "Ian Mclean Baird will be remembered by many for many years to come".

He is survived by his daughter Fiona.

Ian Mclean Baird was born on 23 November 1923 and died on April 20th 2014 aged 90 years.