

## **The History of Liver Surgery in Basingstoke**

In 1986 Merv Rees was appointed as Consultant Surgeon to join the Surgical Department at North Hampshire Hospital.

The expertise of Professor Bill Heald in dealing with colorectal primary cancer was already well established. How, therefore, could a small department accommodate the ambitions and drive of another enthusiast?

The obvious answer was for the new boy to look at ways of tackling the patients who developed secondary cancer from their bowel tumours.

Following a lecture on liver surgery for secondary cancer given by Professor Johannes Scheele at a meeting in Dallas, USA, Bill Heald packed off his young colleague to study Scheele's work at the University of Erlangen in Bavaria, Germany.

Barely able to communicate with each other, Professor Scheele and Merv Rees formed a mutual bond and terrier-like determination to deal with patients with secondary tumours in the liver. Professor Scheele, at his own expense, even came to Basingstoke to give the team his time and expertise to get the liver resection programme started. Subsequently, the operative techniques have been evolved under the leadership of Merv Rees.

To place our early efforts in context, it should be explained that the surgical challenges posed by the liver were regarded by many, even in 1986, as insurmountable. Post surgery mortality rates in established units were still well into double figures and the bleeding during surgery earned liver surgery the reputation of a "blood bath".

By evolving the technique of Johannes Scheele, Basingstoke set a benchmark for "bloodless liver surgery". Some surgical colleagues were disbelieving initially but gradually, over the years, our work became a benchmark for others to emulate. It is particularly pleasing that there are now more than fifteen units well established throughout this country that are equally committed to promoting a liver surgery service to patients with secondary bowel cancer tumours in the liver.

Colorectal surgeons and oncologists throughout southern England and Wales supported and continue to support their efforts and so far over 2000 patients have undergone resection of their liver tumours in North Hampshire. The team has grown and welcome additions include Tim John in 1997, and Fenella Welsh in 2005, as equal partners in the hepatobiliary surgical team.

On the radiology front, the interventional skills of Graham Plant have received a welcome boost from Delia Peppercorn who is revolutionising the use of MRI as a diagnostic tool.

The commitment of the whole team to the patients is legendary and our underlying philosophy includes two guarantees: (i) We will do our best. (ii) We will be honest with our patients.

Finally, our motto of "You are only as good as your next case" serves to emphasise that we must never be allowed the luxury of self-congratulatory thoughts – our latest patient needs us to perform at the peak of our ability.