

THE FIRST NATIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING OF BLOOD TRANSFUSION LABORATORY STAFF – 1959

A version of this document, written by Phil Learoyd, was originally provided as a hand-out at the British Blood Transfusion Society Annual Meeting of 2008

Robert Stapleton who worked at the Sheffield Blood Centre, let me have a symposium booklet and group photograph of delegates who attended a symposium called 'Recent Advances in Blood Group Technology' that was held on the 1st May 1959 at the 'Regional Transfusion Centre', Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge. Robert stated that he believed that this was the first national technical meeting held for blood transfusion staff in England and that the programme was given entirely by technical / scientific staff, even though it was attended by many prominent people in blood transfusion. Robert in fact presented his first paper at the meeting and states that he believes the second meeting was held in Bristol, with further national meetings taking place at other transfusion centres in the UK "until the annual meetings of the newly-formed British Blood Transfusion" [the first one of which was held in Cambridge in 1983 - PL].

The delegate photograph (Fig.1) identifies many distinguished people who were working in transfusion in the UK at that time, including (on the front row) Chris Bowley, Ivor Dunsford, Barbara Dodd, Laurie Marsh, Ruth Sanger, Arthur Mourant, Robert Race, Elizabeth Ikin and Robin Coombs, as well as many of the senior staff from the 'National Blood Transfusion Service' (as it was then known). Robert Stapleton is stood on the far left of the back row, with a colleague Ron Firth next to him.



Fig.1: The speakers and delegates of the 1959 symposium on the 'Recent Advances in Blood Group Technology' held on the 1st May 1959 at Cambridge.

Ron Firth also let me have another photograph (Fig.2) of a smaller number of the delegates that is potentially uniquely in that it includes Dr Robert Race (far left), Dr Ruth Sanger and Dr 'Robin' Coombs (far right) stood together.



Fig.2: Some of the delegates of the 1959 symposium on the 1st May 1959 at Cambridge that includes Dr Robert Race, Dr Ruth Sanger and Dr Robin Coombs.

The symposium booklet is typewritten and appears to have been produced 'in house'. It provides an interesting insight into the type of work that was being performed and debated in the late 1950's in England (together with some of the terminology that was in use at the time). As well as the eight papers presented at the symposium there were also five 'demonstrations' during the meeting. The titles and presenters of the papers were as follows:

1. Is it a quantitative or a qualitative difference which distinguishes an A1 from an A2 cell? – Angelyn A. Konugres
2. A 'weak B' antigen – W.L. March
3. The use of papain in D typing – R. Stapleton
4. Rh gene position studies – I. Dunsford
5. Coombs titres in pregnancy – W. Simpson
6. Abnormal survival of transfused cells – P.J. Dewar
7. Bacterial problems in blood transfusion – R. Firth
8. Safeguarding of sterility in plasma siphoning – W. Loeb

Further details are in the symposium booklet, a copy of which can be viewed [here](#)