

## How I Got Into Histology

By: Neil Hand



I well remember when I lived in London many years ago, being asked by my parents what I was going to do when I left school in the summer. Though this was not an unreasonable question as the prospect of me finishing school was after all less than six months away, I really had no idea. My exam results had been very disappointing, (I make no excuses for that) but it doesn't make decision-making easy when you realise that you're not very good in any particular subject. I had always liked human science and used to dissect lungs, gut and eyes that my mother was able to bring home from the butchers, although I very much doubt under Health and Safety nowadays whether such a practice would be allowed. Never-the-less, I had through dogged persistence managed to pass a few exams – mainly in sciences which I was hoping might become useful, but the original thought of going on to study medicine at Medical School had long been abandoned. I agreed with my father to reluctantly go with him to the local library to investigate what other careers there were in the health sector, and found numerous roles under the heading "Careers Supplementary to Medicine." I flicked through the list hoping something would interest me and though many of these roles were unfamiliar, I do remember also looking at the associated annual salary. Nursing, Medical Physics, Physiotherapy, Dietetics, all with disappointing pay – nothing appealed until I spotted "Medical Laboratory Technology" with a top end salary of £2032 p.a. Wow, in 1969 when I was thinking of a potential salary of maybe £1000 p.a. this certainly looked very attractive! To put this into perspective, the average cost of a house at that time in the UK was just over £4000. I read more detail not understanding what Bacteriology, Clinical Chemistry, Haematology and Histopathology were, and I was captured.

I enquired at my old local general hospital for more details and after a visit to the Pathology Department, Mr Pascoe offered me a paid job with day-release to study for an introductory course over two years at a London college. I declined his offer saying I fancied a full-time course away from home, not because of an unhappy childhood or that my sister had left home for a teaching qualification, but because that is what teenagers want to do. At the time there were very few full-time courses available, but after being told about one in Cardiff (Wales), I enquired, applied, was interviewed and accepted in April 1969 to start college in September. After gaining an Ordinary National Diploma two years later, I stayed in Cardiff and decided to study part-time my chosen speciality Histopathology, completing



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my Higher National Certificate (two years) and then a Fellowship of the Institute of Medical Laboratory Technology (two years), whilst earning a salary in the Histopathology Department at a local hospital for the National Health Service. At the then newly opened University Hospital for Wales I was fortunately promoted to a “Senior” post after gaining my Fellowship and left three years later for promotion at the Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham (England) to set up diagnostic services for Histopathology. Here I later completed a Master’s and PhD degree and a management qualification because I wanted to, and though I retired a few years ago, it has been a rewarding but sometimes very challenging career. Along the way, there have been tears, frustration, disappointment, and sometimes excitement but I have no regrets. I have performed diagnostic work and research relating to Histopathology – a fascinating and beautiful science, managed large laboratories in big teaching hospitals, seen many technological advances, worked with some very talented colleagues and encountered many wonderful people. I have also been very fortunate to have been invited to lecture throughout the UK and overseas, and published many articles/papers. At the end of the day, I now know laboratory work was for me and hopefully as a Biomedical Scientist I have assisted some of those who have required medical treatment. What more could I wish for – it has been just what I wanted 50 years ago!