

LATEST NEWS

November 2023

Sad news about former Chair and President of the League of Friends, Professor Vincent Marks.



Pictured here with his daughter Jenny last year.

Professor Vincent Marks Born 6th June 1930 – Died 6th November 2023 Committee member of Haslemere & District Hospital League of Friends (2009 – 2018)

The League of Friends was saddened to hear about the death of Professor Vincent Marks on the 6th November 2023. Vincent was a Committee Member, Chairman and latterly, President of the Haslemere Hospital League of Friends.

Vincent was a renowned international Bio Chemist, and an authority on Insulin and Hypoglycaemia. He became an expert witness in resolving a number of high profile murders involving Insulin. We knew him as a retired NHS Physician, local resident and family man who wanted to continue to improve the delivery of health care locally. Hence, his volunteering role on the League of Friends Committee.

He was a very strong character and never averse to voicing his opinion. One sometimes got the impression that he enjoyed throwing a curved ball at the establishment. He loved writing long missives to Health Commissioners, Health Care Providers and Members of Parliament about topics he thought were very important to patients and doctors. This usually alluded to their decision-making or lack of!



Vincent had a great sense of humour and spoke often of his family. He often made us smile when he uttered that he had to “clean up his mess” or Averil his wife would be on his tail!

When he stepped down as our President in 2018, one of the last interventions he instigated was the setting up of a local Health Group. Vincent felt that the town council should be more engaged in the hospital and health matters in general. He invited people to join the group who had an interest in the hospital and other health matters. Ian Doolittle, a local resident, took up the challenge of chairing the newly formed Haslemere Health Group.

It was Vincent’s vision and the lobbying powers of the Haslemere Health Group who ensured that Stroke aftercare services, following treatment of an acute event, would return to the Royal Surrey County Hospital Foundation Trust in Guildford rather than be sent further afield.

Vincent continued to take an active interest in the League of Friends and communicated with us regularly even after he and Averil made their final move to London, in October last year, after 25 years as Haslemere residents.

A larger than life character, he will be missed. Our thoughts are with Averil and his family at this time.

The Trustees of the League of Friends of Haslemere and District Hospital.

His obituary as published in The Times on Saturday 18th November.
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OBITUARY

Professor Vincent Marks obituary

World expert on insulin in the Claus von Bülow and Beverly Allitt cases

Saturday November 18 2023, 12.02am, The Times



A portrait of Marks at the University of Surrey, where he was a professor

ART UK

In 1984 Vincent Marks, professor of clinical biochemistry, University of Surrey, had a call from an American, a Tom Puccio. Marks recalled: “He told me he was the lawyer representing Claus von Bülow, expecting me to know who he was. I had no idea.”

A Danish-born British lawyer and man-about-town, von Bülow was convicted in 1982 of trying to kill his wife, Martha ‘(Sunny’) von Bülow. Reportedly an unhappy \$75 million heiress who abused drugs and alcohol, she spent the last 27 years of her life in a coma after von Bülow allegedly injected her with insulin.

Puccio asked Marks to review the case with an eye to appeal. An international authority on insulin and hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar), Marks agreed without really knowing what he was getting into — weighing seven kilograms, the case notes ran to hundreds of pages.

The first major trial to be televised in the US, the original von Bülow hearing was ‘the case with everything’ — from money, sex and drugs to nobility, maids and butlers — plus a comatose sleeping beauty. The story inspired the best-selling book, *Reversal of Fortune*, and the 1990 eponymous movie, with Jeremy Irons in an Oscar-winning role as von Bülow.

One of nine expert-witnesses in the seven week appeal in 1985, Marks helped to quash von Bülow’s conviction and 30 year jail sentence, maintaining that Sunny’s coma was probably



linked to her bingeing. Demolishing the claim that she had been injected with insulin, he pointed out that the insulin-covered needle found in von Bulow's sponge bag had been tampered with — planted by someone who did not know that the insulin is wiped off the needle by an injection.

Even more devastating to the prosecution was that the jury in the original trial had not know about Sunny's incriminating binges. The evidence had been withheld. Marks told the BBC: "The case highlights how a prosecution case that is totally without merit and that should never have been initiated can lead to an innocent person being convicted of a non-existent crime".

Many insulin murders, Marks pointed out, are not so clear cut. He was determined to consign to history the popular idea that insulin was the perfect murder weapon — the poisoner's friend and the policeman's nightmare. Evidence, however, can be elusive, risking wrongful conviction or wrongly acquittal. Genuinely dedicated to the pursuit of justice and good science, Marks was meticulously cautious in framing observations about the mysteries of insulin and hypoglycaemia with the word 'probably'.

But in what was probably his most high profile UK case, he was convinced by the damning evidence against Lincolnshire nurse and convicted child murderer Beverly Allitt. Other medical experts, he recalled, at a specially convened pre-trial meeting were not so sure.

He said: "It appeared that almost no one except me was prepared at the beginning of the conference to stick their neck out and say foul play had definitely been committed". Allitt was found guilty of four murders, attempting to murder three other children and causing grievous bodily harm to a further six. Insulin was implicated in two of the murders.

In contrast, Marks was perplexed by the case of nurse Deborah Winzar. She was found guilty at Birmingham Crown of injecting her paraplegic husband Dominic with insulin. One night she stayed overnight with a friend. A kindergarten teacher found his body the next morning. His wife allegedly returned home overnight to deliver the fatal jab.



Initially Marks thought that she was guilty, but changed his mind. Recalling the case in *Insulin Murders*, co-authored with medical journalist Caroline Richmond, he said: “I could not be certain – you so rarely can in the practice of clinical medicine.”

Published to critical acclaim in 2007 and the first book about insulin as a murder weapon, *Insulin Murders* documents 50 years of legal cases. The *British Medical Journal* reviewer suggested that Marks would make ‘the ideal dinner guest’. She envisaged him spinning ‘startling stories of bigamous murders, serial killers and bungled miscarriages of justice until well after the last wafer thin mint had been eaten and the port bottle emptied’.

But, although the book reads like a creepy crime thriller, it is not just for amateur armchair detectives. It highlights the deep complexity and elusiveness of the science that gripped and excited Marks for more than 60 years. His star status as an expert witness was rooted in pioneering research.

For example, people with diabetes are at the greatest risk from hypoglycaemia, but Marks discovered that many other people were also vulnerable after developing a new way to measure glucose at low concentrations in blood. He identified hypoglycaemia ‘masquerading’ as neurological disorders — including brain tumours, dementia and panic attacks.

Marks exploration of hypoglycaemia began in an era of unprecedented progress in the late 1950s and 1960s. US researchers had developed a technique to measure the quantity of insulin in the blood. Marks collaborated with the brilliant South African researcher, Dr Ellis Samols, who introduced the US technique into Europe. They published original research on using insulin measurements to diagnose hypoglycaemia.

His medical career began with a scholarship to Brasenose College, Oxford. Graduating from Oxford in 1952, he completed clinical training at St Thomas’ Hospital, London, qualifying as a doctor in 1954 — shortly before meeting his future wife, Averil.



Married five months later, they remained together for 66 years. A renowned sculptor trained at St Martin's College of Art, she survives him, along with their two children, Lewis and Alexandra, both lawyers, six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Marks spent several years working in laboratory and metabolic medicine as a trainee or research fellow at London hospitals. He developed his interest in hypoglycaemia at the Hospital for Nervous Diseases. In 1962 he became the first consultant in chemical pathology at Epsom district hospital. In 1970 he became foundation professor of clinical biochemistry at the newly established University of Surrey in Guildford.

Renowned for his loud booming voice, commanding presence and his relentless enthusiasm, Marks became an outstanding teacher. Dr John Wright, one of his students in the 1980s and later a colleague and close friend, said: "He was an outstanding teacher, both entertaining and provocative. He had a passion for clinical biochemistry as a scientific discipline and for the importance of rigorous measurement and interpretation of clinical tests.

"He was also very kind and followed his students' careers with great interest."

Marks may have owed his medical career to his mother — not because, as in so many Jewish families, generation after generation go into medicine — but because she always insisted the house had to be tidy for 'the doctor's visit'. Doctors, young Vincent decided, must be really important people.

His older brother John, another important influence, also became a distinguished doctor, as a GP and council chair of the British Medical Association. Outspoken and a fierce critic of the Tories, he led the profession against the reforms introduced by Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke into the NHS



Vincent was born in the Grand Junction Arms pub in Harlesden, north London, the son of publican Lewis Marks, formerly Lewis Myer Kinishinski, and his wife Rose (née Goldbaum), a photographer's assistant. Lewis's father had been a kosher poulterer.

Wearing metal braces to straighten his legs, Vincent had a challenging but happy childhood. He was evacuated at the outbreak of World War Two to a farm in Bishop's Minton, Devon, where he delighted in hay-making and milking time – great novelties for a city boy. But his early rural days were testing. He refused to eat non-kosher food. Big brother John travelled the 185 miles to Devon to re-assure him that the rabbi had issued him with a dispensation to eat non-kosher food with a free conscience.

Devon, the family believe, had a profound effect on him. He returned to London in 1942 to take up a scholarship at Tottenham Grammar School — declaring himself to be an atheist. Later labelling himself as a humanist, he remained vehemently opposed to religion. His nephew, Richard Marks, also a doctor, said: “Speak to him about religion for five minutes and you'd wonder how anyone could believe in God. He was so convincing.”

Marks spoke with a slight Cockney accent and saw his childhood, to the family's amusement, as 'working class'. The nanny and the driver who took him to school defied the working class stereotype.

Like his brother John, Vincent was never afraid to court controversy. Fellow Oxford students accused him of being a communist when he proposed that the junior common room daily newspapers should include *The Daily Worker*, forerunner to *The Morning Star*, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

Speaking on his 90th birthday, he recalled thinking: “If they're going to call me a communist, I might as well join the party”. Disillusioned by the Soviet Union's brutal crushing of the Hungarian uprising, he left the CPGB in 1956, later joining the Social Democrats.



Marks was as passionate about writing as he was about politics and humanism. Contributing to more than 300 research publications, he published around 50 original papers and was the author, co-author or editor of nearly 20 textbooks, monographs and popular science books.

His first book, “*Hypoglycaemia*”, co-authored with neurologist Frank Clifford Rose, was published in 1965; and his last, “*The Forensic Aspects of Hypoglycaemia*”, in 2019, nearly 25 years after his ‘retirement.’ He was talking about a forthcoming paper with his son Lewis the day before he died. Lewis said: “He just loved writing — he was so enthusiastic about it — as with anything he was doing. He really was one of the world’s great enthusiasts. He was also a wonderful father.”

Vincent Marks, doctor, was born on June 6, 1930. He died on November 6, 2023, aged 93