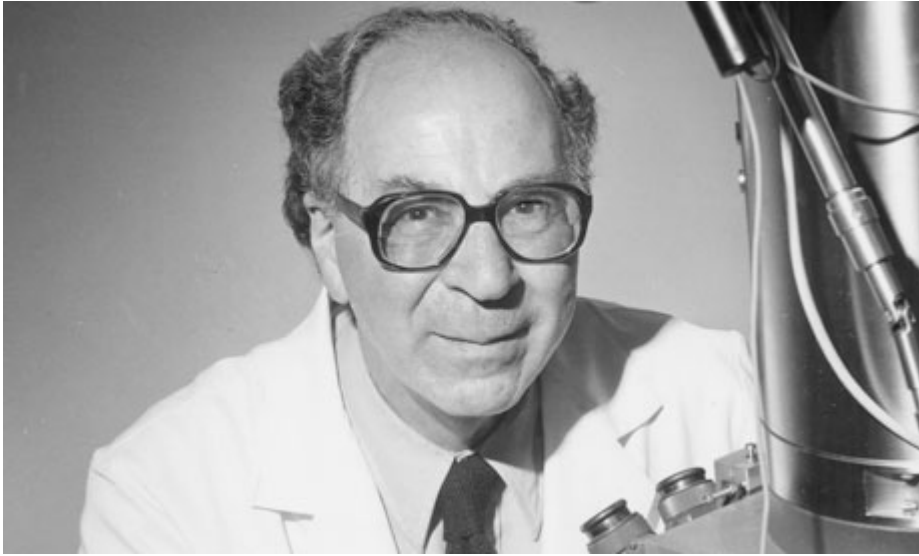


# Sammy Franks obituary



Sammy Franks had an impish sense of humour

Leonard Maurice Franks, fondly known as "Sammy", who has died aged 90, was regarded as the doyen of prostate pathologists. Particularly important was his research into the high frequency of prostate cancer in ageing men, which led to the appreciation that if a man lives long enough, he will develop prostate cancer. Sammy was also a pioneer in the application of cell culture and electron microscopy to cancer research. He was for decades a revered authority on tumour biology.

He was born in Newcastle upon Tyne and graduated in medicine from Durham University in 1942. After a short period in general practice in Newcastle, he was almost immediately caught up in the second world war, serving as regimental officer with the Rifle Brigade, rising to the rank of captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps. On his return he worked for some time as pathologist to the London hospital, then moved to the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF) as a research pathologist.

After periods spent at the Strangeways Laboratory, Cambridge, with Dame Honor Fell, and with George Gey (who established the first human cancer cell line, HeLa) at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, Maryland, he was appointed head of the department of cellular pathology at the ICRF in 1961. Starting in a single room in the Royal College of Surgeons in London, his remit was to develop a unit to explore the clinical and experimental development of cancer.

Sammy was very interested in the development of cancer in relationship to age, and made material contributions to our concept of "tumour latency", where tumours, early in their development, can linger for many years without progressing. His main model was the prostate, and his concepts of tumour latency are put into practice every day in those men whose tumours are treated with what we now call "watchful waiting". Sammy developed cell-culture systems for studying the development of cancer, and he was also one of the first to isolate clones of tumour cells with high and low capacities to spread, or metastasise, and to study their properties. He demonstrated that they showed genetic differences – the very beginning of the now burgeoning field of tumour heterogeneity.

Sammy continued to support and develop his research students throughout their careers. He liked to tease, and had a dry and impish sense of humour, with a great talent for self-deprecation. On occasions he found it difficult to restrain his sense of humour and some people of influence with greater perceptions of their own importance found him difficult. He used to give the appearance of falling asleep within five minutes of the start of any lecture, but always seemed to have heard every word. He was the master of the gently provocative statement: one of his favourite observations at the end of a lecture was that he "felt like a drowning man coming up for the third time", a remark with which many will empathise.

Sammy was a founder member of the Royal College of Pathologists, was elected to the American College of Pathologists, and served as secretary general of the International Federation for Cell Biology for many years. He was also a founder of the British Society of Cell Biology, and played his part in the formation of the European and international societies.

He played an important role in the development of the ICRF's clinical fellowship scheme, whereby young doctors in training were able to come to Lincoln's Inn Fields and work towards a PhD, a scheme which has produced many of the current leaders in cancer research in Britain and abroad. His work was much admired in the US, where he was visiting professor at a number of institutions. His book with Natalie Teich, *Introduction to the Cellular and Molecular Biology of Cancer*, was published in 1986, the year he retired, and went to many editions. In later life, he continued to work as a consulting scientist to the ICRF.

Sammy wrote evocatively of the events in his life: general practice taught him never to jump to conclusions; he regarded his experience with the Sixth Armoured Division in the Italian campaign as "much less stressful" than general practice.

From the time during the war when the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers workshop attached to his unit made him a fly rod from a tank aerial, Sammy was an enthusiastic fly fisherman. Few pastimes gave him greater pleasure than fishing in the Welsh streams close to his small cottage near the Brecon Beacons.

In 1945 he married Mary Laing, who died earlier this year. Their three sons survive him.

- Sammy (Leonard Maurice) Franks, pathologist, born 3 April 1921; died 11 November 2011