

The British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH)

HISTORY

In the UK in 1952, the “Hand Club” was formed by members of both Orthopaedic & Plastic surgical specialties. This occurred at a meeting in London at the Atheneum, at the instigation of Patrick Clarkson. Members would meet for dinner on a Friday evening, followed by a clinical meeting on the Saturday morning where Hand Surgery cases were discussed. In 1956, due to the exclusivity of the Hand Club which would not admit new younger members, the Second Hand Club was formed at a meeting in Derby as a result of “the enthusiasm of Mr Graham Stack” (quoted from Council minutes, 14.12.68).

The Second Hand Club contained mostly younger enthusiastic surgeons from both Orthopaedic & Plastic surgical disciplines and they held regular informal meetings to present difficult hand surgery cases. In the late 1960s, they expanded their title to “British Club for Surgery of the Hand” and in 1968 became the British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH), with a formal constitution. The first President was Guy Pulvertaft, the sole member of the original Hand Club to take part in the formation of the new Society. Other former Hand Club members were invited to join, including Rainsford Mowlem, JIP James, and John Barron, who played an important part in promoting the harmony between orthopaedic and plastic surgeons that has been the hallmark of the Society.

Since then, the BSSH has grown to over 800 members, comprising of overseas, honorary, associate, affiliate and companion members. It holds two annual scientific meetings in the Spring & Autumn and a triennial combined meeting with the British Association of Hand Therapists (BAHT). It was given charitable status in 1975.

From the start, the Society took a close interest in the training of surgeons involved in Hand Surgery, both in terms of running meetings with instructional content, and in trying to establish training opportunities. The Education & Training Committee was set up in 1970 with this purpose.

Graham Stack had already published reports of meetings during the early Second Hand Club days, formalizing these as “The Hand” in 1969. He continued to edit this pioneering journal on Hand Surgery and oversaw its expansion and metamorphosis into the Journal of Hand Surgery (British and European volume) in 1984. The journal continues to flourish and has a truly international stature, being both sister journal to the American Volume of the same name, and having been adopted by the European Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand as its official journal. It became the Journal of Hand Surgery (European volume) in 2007.

The BSSH pioneered the concept of an “Interface Specialty” in 1991, setting up a committee in cooperation with the Speciality Advisory Committees (SAC) in Orthopaedic and Plastic Surgery known initially as the Standing Liaison Group in Hand Surgery and later as the Interface Committee, with the purpose of establishing advanced training posts in Hand Surgery for trainees in either specialty. The posts were specifically designed to provide some complementary training in orthopaedics for plastic surgeons and vice versa. Ten combined advanced training posts for year 4-6 trainees are now established and funded. So far, more

than 140 trainees have received advanced Hand Surgery training through this scheme with many taking prominent positions within the BSSH Council & Committees.

Instructional sessions have been a feature of BSSH meetings from the start, but a new and far more comprehensive teaching programme was started in 1999 with the “Instructional Courses in Hand Surgery” under the chairmanship of Simon Kay on behalf of the society. A gratifying feature of these courses has been the enthusiastic attendance of many European trainees and established surgeons, and those from further afield, and this has underlined the International character of the society, which has always maintained a very active profile in the European Federation (FESSH) and the International Society for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH) having already provided three Presidents of that organization & we are due to hold the triennial IFSSH meeting in London in 2022.

Since 2007 the Society has run a Diploma in Hand Surgery which has been developed with the University of Manchester. The Diploma is aimed at maintaining the high standards of Hand Surgery in the UK. Postgraduate surgical training is changing rapidly and the Society has been concerned to protect the standards of care that patients should expect. The Diploma is based on a comprehensive syllabus, practical experience, tutorial-based teaching and a final examination. The Society is engaged in promoting these developments and has also taken active steps to develop academic activity in Hand Surgery.

The first Chair of Hand Surgery in the UK was set up in Manchester in the mid-1990s, having been underwritten by funds from BSSH, and Professor John Stanley was the first appointed to that post. Other personal Chairs have also been created. The BSSH has shown how inter-specialty cooperation pays dividends in promoting clinical and academic development, training and education, and it is committed to continuing and developing those roles.

A detailed account of the first 30 years of BSSH is to be found in the Journal of Hand Surgery (British and European volume), 1998, vol 23B, pages 711-723, written by Nicholas Barton.

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