

LET THERE BE LIFE:

An Intimate Portrait of the Birth of IVF in Manchester

Tuesday 24 July - Manchester Royal Infirmary

18:15 - 19:15

SPEAKER PROFILE

Roger Gosden

**Visiting Scholar at the College of William & Mary; Virginia Writer,
Publisher & Naturalist**



After his PhD and fellowship with Robert Edwards in Cambridge, he joined the physiology faculty at Edinburgh University in 1976. He moved to a chair at Leeds University in 1994 and afterwards to North America, appointed to McGill University, the Howard and Georgeanna Jones Professor of Reproductive Medicine at EVMS, and Weill Cornell

Medical College in NYC, where he joined Lucinda Veeck Gosden on the faculty, the embryologist for America's first IVF baby. His research focused on oocyte development and fertility preservation. He now works fulltime as an author, biographer and publisher, and volunteer in conservation research and education.

LECTURE ABSTRACT

Forty years after the birth of Louise Brown, it is hard to remember the scandalous origins of IVF technology. Controversy raged from the authenticity of claims to the reproductive safety and ethics of conceiving babies in vitro. The Manchester gentleman-scientist Walter Heape demonstrated embryo transfer in 1890, but seventy years passed until MC Chang, a Cambridge-trained biologist in Massachusetts, presented proof that animal eggs fertilized in vitro are healthy. Robert Edwards dreamed of adapting this technology for treating infertility. A Mancunian born in Yorkshire, his efforts in London and Cambridge were frustrated until he met the Oldham gynaecologist Patrick Steptoe. Steptoe was ridiculed for developing laparoscopy and Edwards derided for research on human embryos; they were matched as mavericks and both were determined to succeed. Their experimental IVF programme was based on a shoestring budget in the Oldham & District General Hospital and then at Dr. Kershaw's cottage hospital. It was valiantly supported by nurse volunteers, junior doctors, Edwards' assistant Jean Purdy, and the health authority, but least known are the patient volunteers who could only have timid hopes that IVF could help them. When the final breakthrough came in 1978 after a decade of struggle and controversy, the NHS turned down a request for a nationwide service and Edwards and Steptoe had to open a private clinic. A few years later IVF was standard practice, and well over six million babies worldwide vindicate the pioneers' endeavour.

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