Bernard T. Donovan was born in London in 1927 and has spent most of his scientific life at the Institute of Psychiatry. After a spell as an assistant chemist at the Wellcome Laboratories of Tropical Medicine, and another as a radio electrician in the Royal Navy, he was a science student at Chelsea Polytechnic and University College, London, and graduated in 1952. He held a Medical Research Council Scholarship (1952–1954) and a Beit Memorial Fellowship (1954–1958) before joining the teaching staff of the Institute. His work in London has been punctuated by periods as visiting professor in the Institute of Physiology, University of Lund, in the Department of Anatomy, School of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco, and in the Department of Physiology-Anatomy, University of California, Berkeley. His joint studies with J. J. van der Werff ten Bosch on hypothalamic lesions and puberty in rats won them the Ciba Foundation Prize for Basic Research Relevant to the Problems of Ageing in 1957.

Dr. Donovan has long been associated with the Journal of Endocrinology and became its editor in 1974. Together with G. W. Harris he edited a three-volume treatise on The Pituitary Gland (Butterworths) which appeared in 1966, and with J. J. van der Werff ten Bosch he wrote the Physiology of Puberty (Edward Arnold), which was published in 1965; he also wrote Mammalian Neuroendocrinology (McGraw-Hill, 1970). He delivered the Laqueur Memorial Lecture to the Dutch Society for Endocrinology in 1970, and was G. W. Harris Memorial Lecturer at the International Congress of Physiological Sciences in Paris in 1977.