

G.W. SENTER

Dr George William Senter, Consultant Dermatologist: b. 28.9.1911; d. 21.6.2001. MBChB Edinburgh 1937, FRCP Edin 1961.

George Senter was born in Edinburgh. After qualifying, he joined the Royal Air Force in 1940 and served in the UK and the Middle East. On demobilisation in 1946, he obtained a Class III appointment at the Skin Department at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary before moving to Dundee as Senior Registrar in Dermatology at Dundee Royal Infirmary. In 1951 Dr Senter was appointed part-time Consultant Dermatologist for Birmingham Regional Hospital Board before taking over as Consultant Dermatologist to the Walsall Group of Hospitals.

J.J. O'HAGAN

Dr John Joseph O'Hagan, Physician: b. 26.3.1931; d. 23.9.2001. MBChB Otago 1958, FRACP 1965, FRCP Edin 1974, FRNZCGP (Hon) 1991.

John O'Hagan was born in Wellington, New Zealand. In 1958, three years after graduating, he commenced practice in Winton Southland. Eight years later with the MRCP Ed behind him, John was ready to contribute to the rapid developments in medical services at Kew Hospital, Southland. John's contributions were notable as a full-time hospital physician across the whole of internal medicine, intensive care, and in particular in medical education, where he started by introducing obligatory half-day release activities for house staff.

John was one of the founding fathers of the pilot scheme for vocational training for general practice which began in 1972 in Southland. His involvement in general practice education has continued down the years and was recognised some ten years ago when he was made an honorary fellow of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners.

In 1979 he came to the Christchurch School of Medicine to take up the challenge of developing the role of Postgraduate Dean. The issues of continuing medical education needed addressing and John tackled this, taking control of the Postgraduate Society and utilising this as a forum in which all manner of academic issues could be discussed. John made his contribution to patient care by working half-time in his specialty of Respiratory Medicine and remained at the cutting edge of this work.

By his own admission, John was endlessly fascinated by medicine. He was passionate about his work, a lateral thinker and a friend to his patients and colleagues. He was one of those who did not retire. He is survived by his wife Clare, daughters Mary, Shonagh and Lucy, and son Liam.

G.S.C. SOWRY

Dr George Stephen Clive Sowry, Consultant Physician: b. 26.12.1917; d. 4.9.2001. MBBS London 1940, FRCP Lond 1963, FRCP Edin 1986.

After house appointments at St Mary's and Hillingdon Hospitals, George Sowry joined the Royal Army Volunteer Reserve where he reached the rank of Surgeon Lieutenant while serving in Ceylon. On demobilisation he worked as house physician at the Brompton Hospital. In 1947 he was appointed Registrar at St Mary's Hospital where he became a Senior Registrar the following year. Dr Sowry was appointed Consultant Physician at Edgeware General Hospital in 1953 and he held that position until his retirement in 1983.

N.G. SANERKIN

Dr Nedjdet Gurgen Sanerkin, Consultant Pathologist: b. 30.11.1924; d. 19.5.2001. MBChB Bristol 1952, FRCP Edin 1971, FRCPATH 1975.

Nedjdet Sanerkin was born in Larnaca, Cyprus. He worked as a pathologist in Cyprus and then came to the UK in 1959 when he was appointed Lecturer in Pathology at Bristol University. He moved to Cardiff in 1963 and took the post of Consultant Pathologist at the University Hospital of Wales.

H.R. HARRIS

Dr Hilda Ruth Harris, Consultant Pathologist: b. 27.8.1916; d. recently (date unknown). MBChB Manchester 1940, FRCPATH 1973, FRCP Edin 1982.

Ruth Harris was born in Salford, Lancashire. She was appointed Senior Registrar in Pathology at the United Liverpool Hospital in 1952 and four years later became locum Consultant Pathologist there and Honorary Lecturer in Pathology at Liverpool University. In 1958 she took the post of Assistant Pathologist to the Hartlepool Group of Hospitals. Dr Harris was Consultant Histopathologist and Cytologist to the Clwyd Health South District from 1961 until her retirement.

D.A. BENNETT

Dr David Arthur Bennett, Consultant Psychiatrist: b. 14.6.1931; d. 14.9.2001. MBBS London 1954, FRCP Edin 1978, FRCPsych 1988.

After two years of National Service in the RAMC, Dr Bennett worked in hospitals in Kent and London and then started his psychiatric training. He worked as Psychiatric Registrar at Huddersfield Hospital and St

Mary's Hospital in London. In 1962 he came to Scotland and was appointed Senior Psychiatric Registrar at Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries. Dr Bennett was Consultant Psychiatrist at Basingstoke District Hospital, Hampshire from 1965 until his retirement.

R.B. STERZEL

Dr Ralf Bernd Sterzel, Professor of Medicine: b. 23.2.1940; d. 6.8.2001. MD Berlin 1966, FRCP Edin 1996.

Ralf Sterzel was born in Regenwalde in Germany. After qualifying he was a house officer for two years at the University Hospital in Freiburg and the City Hospital in Hamburg before going to the US where he worked at New York Medical College Hospital. He returned to Germany in 1971 and became a Senior House Officer and later a Lecturer at Hannover Medical School. In 1978 he went to the US again as Professor at Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven. Dr Sterzel returned to Germany in 1984 and was appointed Professor of Medicine and Chairman at Medicinische Klinik, University of Erlangen-Nurnberg.

J.M. STOWERS

Professor John Marcus Stowers, Professor of Medicine: b. 3.3.1919; d. 30.7.2001. MBBChir Cantab 1944, FRCP Edin 1962, FRCP Lond 1964, FRCOG 1980.

Professor John Stowers was born in Nagpur, India. After house appointments at London hospitals, he became Medical Registrar at the West London Hospital in 1945. He joined the RAMC in 1947 and was graded Medical Specialist. On his return to London two years later he became assistant at the University College Hospital Medical Unit. In 1953 he came to Scotland and was appointed Senior Lecturer in Medicine at Queens College, Dundee and Consultant in the Medical Professorial Unit in Maryfield Hospital in Dundee. He moved to Aberdeen in 1961 and took the post of Consultant Physician with special interest in metabolic diseases at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, and was appointed Professor of Diabetes and Endocrinology at Aberdeen University.

John Stowers was totally committed to patient care, and under his leadership the diabetic service in NE Scotland became an example for others to follow. He had a particular interest in Type II diabetes before research into this became fashionable. He was also an early exponent of tight diabetic control in pregnancy and was held in huge esteem by many female patients delivered of healthy children. He was an enthusiastic and capable teacher and, although he sometimes seemed a trifle austere to those who knew him less well, was a valued friend to many – including countless former juniors who held him

in huge regard. He was himself a diabetic and his patients mostly recognised that the tight control he exercised over his own regime would deliver for them the healthy longevity that he enjoyed. John Stowers delivered many prestigious lectures in his field of interest and can be seen as a major figure in diabetic medicine.

E.F. HVIDBERG

Dr Eigill F Hvidberg, Clinical Pharmacologist: b. 17.8.1928; d. recently (date unknown). MB Copenhagen 1955, FRCP Edin 1992.

Eigill Hvidberg was born in Copenhagen. After graduation, Dr Hvidberg worked at hospitals in the Greater Copenhagen area and at the Department of Pharmacology at Copenhagen University. In 1966 he went to the US under the Merck Fellowship in Clinical Pharmacology and worked as Assistant Professor at Emory University in Atlanta and Research Assistant at the University of Michigan. Dr Hvidberg returned to Denmark in 1969 and was appointed Lecturer in Pharmacology at Copenhagen University. In 1973 he succeeded as Professor in Clinical Pharmacology and Head of Department of Clinical Pharmacology at Copenhagen University Hospital. Dr Hvidberg was awarded RD (Knight of the Danish Dannebrog Order).

J.A.K. MEIKLE

Dr John Archibald King Meikle, Consultant Radiologist: b. 6.5.1930; d. 6.9.2001. MBChB Edinburgh 1952, FRCR 1963, FRCP Edin 1971.

John Meikle was born in Edinburgh. After graduation, he worked as a houseman at Bangour Hospital and then joined the Royal Navy Voluntary Reserves in 1953 for two years. In 1956 he became Senior House Officer at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary X-ray Department. He undertook further training in Guy's Hospital and then returned to Scotland in 1963, being appointed Consultant Radiologist at the Perth Group of Hospitals. He was a member of the College Education and Standards Committee from 1982 to 1984.

V. VIRMANI

Dr Vimla Virmani, Neurologist: b. 12.4.1919; d. recently (date unknown). MB BS Bombay 1956, MRCP 1962, FRCP Edin 1976.

Dr Vimla Virmani was the first female neurologist of repute of her time. After working for a time at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences at New Delhi, she joined The Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi and

became the Professor of Neurology there. She was one of the most renowned neurologists of India.

I. AHMED

Professor Iqbal Ahmed: b. 6.6.1929; d. 07.01.2001. MBBS Calcutta 1953, FRCP Edin 1976, FRCPCH 1998.

Iqbal Ahmed was born in Calcutta and graduated MB BS at Calcutta University. He came to the UK in 1955 and held several house appointments at hospitals in London, Manchester and Edinburgh. He returned to Calcutta in 1958 and became Honorary Paediatrician at the Islamia Hospital. Two years later he was appointed Lecturer in Paediatrics at the Christian Medical College and Hospital in Vellore, South India. In 1964 Professor Ahmed was awarded the Heinz Fellowship of the British Paediatric Association and worked as Research Fellow at the Institute of Child Health at the Hammersmith Hospital in London. He then went to Africa in 1967 and was appointed Lecturer in Paediatrics at the University of Lagos. In 1972 he became Associate Professor of Paediatrics there and Consultant at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital. Professor Ahmed became a Fellow of the Nigerian Medical College in 1974.

THE LATE PROFESSOR WILLIAM (BILL) ST CLAIR SYMMERS – AN APPRECIATION

From time to time, an individual of such individuality, luminosity or eccentricity passes from the Halls of this College that it is beyond the power of a formal obituary to do full justice to their life and character. Bill Symmers,¹ who died on 25 October 2000, was such a person.

I first encountered Bill at the wintry Pathological Society of January 1953 in Birmingham. He was in the company of Bernard Lennox. Bill was already one of the outstanding pathologists of his time. We met again in 1966. He had become Professor of Pathology of the Charing Cross Hospital Medical School. I found myself part of this School. Much later, following the death of his beloved wife Jean and after his retirement to Peebles, Bill became a close friend.

Born in Belfast on 16 August 1917, Bill was the remarkable son of a remarkable father. Professor St Clair Symmers senior had been Government Professor of Pathology in Cairo and then Musgrave Professor of Pathology of the Queen's College (later the University) of Belfast, and Dean of the Medical School. At Guy's Hospital, after the Second World War, an early association with Professor Payling Wright led to an extraordinary literary challenge. Payling Wright had published a popular *General Pathology*. He asked Bill to join him in a *Systemic Pathology*. After Payling Wright's death, Bill assumed the entire responsibility for

this work which grew to become an outstanding twentieth century work. The book, two volumes and 2,000 pages on its appearance in 1966, had become six volumes when the second edition was completed in 1980, and no less than 13 volumes when Bill relinquished the editorship in 1995. In the words of Churchill Livingstone, the publishers, this gargantuan feat classed Bill as 'the best medical editor of the past half century'. Bill's fascination with rare diseases enabled him to publish *Curiosa* (1974) and *Exotica* (1984), and these 'tales of mystery and imagination' brought him fame as he travelled on behalf of the British Council, advising foreign medical schools on their laboratories and teaching. Sadly, a text on *Fungus Diseases* was never completed.

Skill in editing is a reflection of literacy, of discipline, of a singleness of purpose, of careful, even meticulous use of language and grammar, as well as a formidable strength of character. Bill displayed these qualities in great measure and combined them with linguistic skills of a high order and a passion for music. Inevitably, he appeared a private person, by nature a bibliophile, better known on the world stage than in many British Schools and Colleges. His library rivalled in size, if not in content, that of William Osler. But his volumes, even within his own family, were to be viewed, not touched.

From his own lips, I heard how, as a pre-war medical student, he had attended the Ludwig Aschoff Institute at Freiburg in Breisgau. Walking in the Bavarian woods, whistling a melody from *Rosenkavalier*, he passed an elderly man who said: 'If you must use my tunes, please do so more precisely.' It was Richard Strauss. Tea with Frau Strauss was followed by an invitation to a social evening at a nearby schloß. Among the dozen or so guests was a man he recognised as Adolf Hitler. Bill served for six years as a Surgeon Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. His tours of duty were therefore worldwide. On a destroyer in the Mediterranean, he was close to Tobruk at the time of its capture by the Afrika Korps. Because of his knowledge of German, Bill was asked to help with a severely wounded Army officer about to be sent to a prisoner-of-war camp by a harsh Kapitan. At that moment, a senior German officer passed by and intervened sympathetically. He ordered that the wounded man be returned to British care. It was Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, for whom, in post-war years, Bill retained a high respect but an equally scathing view of the cinema caricature of Rommel by James Mason.

The privilege of writing about Bill is tinged with inescapable sadness. His idiosyncratic, Edwardian charm, with a stilted style of speech and dress, together with his handwritten correspondence, were captivating, his tales of ancient pathology and pathologists spellbinding. Bill's publishers have been deprived of an editor of international stature. The many Royal Colleges of which he was a Fellow, and the Universities from which he received honorary degrees,

OBITUARIES

have lost a literary giant and a profoundly thought-provoking character. We remember a friend whose style, conversation, literacy and wisdom cannot be replaced.

Bill Symmers was not Goethe but, in earlier years, he could have been Gibbon.

D.L. Gardner

FOOTNOTE

I A notice of the death of Professor W. St Clair Symmers was published in the *Proceedings* of this College in May 2001. A formal account of his degrees, distinctions, honours and achievements was given in the national press (*Scotsman*, 4 December 2000) in an obituary that described in detail the history of his books. Professor I. Friedman published a further eulogy in the *Bulletin of the Royal College of Pathologists* of October 2001, number 116, page 20.

The Editor welcomes contributions to the Obituaries section, either self-written or written by relatives and friends. Please keep contributions concise, limiting the piece to 200–400 words.