

Obituary



JOHN FERGUSON SIMPSON 1902-1995

John Simpson was born on 10 October 1902, the son of Colonel P. J. Simpson, D.S.O., a Fellow of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. His paternal grandfather and a great-uncle were also veterinary surgeons and they were instrumental in founding their college.

John Simpson did not follow the family tradition but chose instead to study medicine; and after leaving Reading School he entered the old medical school at St. Mary's Hospital in London in 1920. Whilst he was a student there he played rugby football for the 1st.XV and was at one time secretary of the Medical Society. Qualifying in 1926, he became House Surgeon in the following year to Warren Low, then the senior surgeon at the hospital; and only two years later he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.

After working at the ear, nose and throat hospital in Golden Square as Assistant Surgeon to Lionel Colledge, an early pioneer of laryngeal surgery, he was appointed to the consultant staff of St. Mary's in 1936. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, he joined the Royal Air Force Voluntary Reserve and, finding himself in France when hostilities were clearly imminent, he drove home non-stop in his 4¼ litre Bentley and reported immediately for duty at the RAF hospital at Halton, subsequently serving as a specialist in the rank of Squadron Leader. After returning to St. Mary's he

continued to serve on the consultant staff until his retirement in 1960.

John Simpson was best known to his colleagues as an authority on cancer of the head and neck, and in the 1950's he developed several innovative surgical procedures for pharyngeal cancer, at a time when highly unsatisfactory multiple-stage operations were being gradually replaced by radical single-stage surgery. His anatomical knowledge of this complex region was unsurpassed, but his professional interests encompassed the whole expanding field of his speciality.

In 1962 he was elected President to the Section of Otology at the Royal Society of Medicine. His Presidential Address was a biographical study of his illustrious predecessor, Joseph Toynbee, who in 1857 had been appointed as 'Aural Surgeon' to St. Mary's, 'the first teaching hospital in Europe to set aside beds for diseases of the ear, and to institute teaching of the subject' ... Exactly 100 years later, in 1957, Simpson published the first edition of the *Synopsis of Otorhinolaryngology*, of which he was senior author, and he dedicated it to Toynbee's memory. His admiration for Joseph Toynbee was further expressed in his founding of the biennial Joseph Toynbee Lecture.

John Simpson belonged to the old school of teaching hospital consultants who were proud of their 'Honorary' status, who regarded it as a great

privilege to serve their *alma mater*, who enjoyed the well-earned respect and affection of their patients and of all who worked with and for them, and who never arrived late for their clinics or operating lists and never left early. All those who were privileged to work for him gained immeasurably from his teaching, his wisdom, his friendship and his loyalty.

In 1947 he married Winifred ('Pegs') Rood, whose hospitality was legendary, and all their homes were

distinguished by exceptionally beautiful gardens, in which he laboured hard and took great pride. In his earlier days he had also had a considerable interest in entomology.

He died on 12 September 1995, only a month short of his 93rd birthday, and is survived by his wife, their children Jen and Rob, and his step-daughter Sall.

JOHN BALLANTYNE