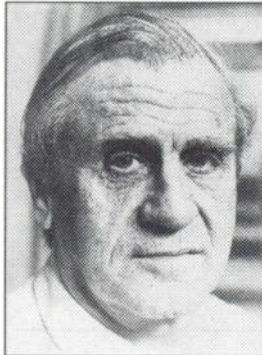

Obituary



J. A. N. Corsellis 1915–1994. *Neuropathologist of Psychiatric Disease*

Nick Corsellis, Emeritus Professor of Neuropathology at the Institute of Psychiatry, made a particular contribution to the pathological understanding of psychiatric disease both through his own research contribution

and through the encouragement he gave to others. Although for the last part of his official working life he held the chair of neuropathology at the Institute of Psychiatry he did most of his work in the department which he had established at Runwell Hospital near Wickford in Essex, to which he returned for long into his retirement. Here he made his most important contributions and inspired a small band of co-workers and collaborators with enthusiasm for the approach to the problems of psychiatric disease through brain morphology.

Perhaps his most important contribution was as ambassador from neuropathology to academic psychiatry, and as a penetrating commentator on issues to which his discipline could make a contribution. He was always willing to join in discussions across boundaries and into the more psychological and psychiatric fields into which few fellow pathologists were willing to follow. He was well qualified to do so as he had himself begun training as a psychiatrist but had been forced to abandon this career as a result of a tuberculous infection. He and the field were perhaps fortunate in that his early psychiatric experience was at Runwell Hospital where a distinguished group of researchers in all disciplines had been assembled by the physician-superintendent Strom-Olsen, whose suggestion it was that Corsellis should consider moving in the direction of pathology. This he was by temperament well able to do, and thus could be seen as a representative of a tradition, almost extinct in the middle decades of the century, of an interaction between clinical psychiatry and histopathology and neuroanatomy. The origins of this cross-fertilisation were clearly in Germany at the end of the last and the beginning of this century and amongst its most distinguished proponents at this time were Wernicke, von Gudden, Meynert,

Alzheimer, Westphal, Nissl, von Monakow and at a later date Kleist and Leonhard. When the impact of these basic sciences again began to be felt in the mainstream of psychiatric thought in the second half of the century, Nick Corsellis was a worthy member of this tradition.

Corsellis made major contributions in three areas:

(1) In 1962 he published his Maudsley Monograph on Mental Illness and the Ageing Brain, a systematic and comprehensive survey of the prevalence of Alzheimer-type changes in senile dementia, which up to that time had been a relatively neglected problem. In the course of this work and later he did much to introduce rigorous quantitative approaches to the assessment of neuropathological change.

(2) In 1973 he published a seminal paper with C. J. Bruton and D. Freeman-Browne entitled "The aftermath of boxing" (*Psychological Medicine*, **3**, 270–303). This paper drew attention to the frequency and severity of gross brain damage in the brains of those subjected to levels of trauma which previously had been thought innocuous, and fuelled the intense and continuing debate on the medical consequences and ethics of the sport.

(3) In collaboration with Murray Falconer, the neurosurgeon, he extended knowledge of the aetiology and pathogenesis of epilepsy by his studies of focal dysplasia.

In 1976 in the third Edition of *Greenfield's Neuropathology* he contributed an adventurous and thought-provoking chapter on Psychoses of Unknown Aetiology including particularly what was known at that time about the schizophrenic psychoses. He later encouraged and stimulated collaborative studies particularly in collaboration with the staff of the Division of Psychiatry at the MRC Clinical Research Centre at Northwick Park. This work led in due course to seminal papers which confirmed in post-mortem material the ventricular enlargement that had previously been demonstrated in a CT scan study (Johnstone *et al*; *Lancet*, 1976, *ii*, 924–926) and demonstrated an asymmetrical thinning of the parahippocampal gyrus (Brown *et al*; *Arch Gen Psychiat*, 1986, **43**, 36–42), and loss of asymmetry of enlargement of the temporal horn (Crow *et al*; *Arch Gen Psychiat*, 1989, **46**, 1145–1150) and reduction in brain weight and length (Bruton *et al*; *Psychol Med*, 1990, **20**, 285–304), independent of the presence of identifiable histopathological change.

As an individual Nick Corsellis was a critical scientist with a wry and self-deprecating sense of humour and an astute but basically tolerant ability to comment on the frailties of human nature, including those of his colleagues. He was an enthusiast for research into the nature of psychotic illness who facilitated progress without concern for credit for himself. In a fitting tribute the staff of his department have with support from the MRC and the Southend Hospital Trust ensured that much of the material that was

collected in his time at Runwell will be made available to interested researchers as the Corsellis Collection.

T. J. CROW

This appreciation has also been written as an entry for Munk's Roll at the Royal College of Physicians.