

Obituary

Sir DESMOND POND, Past President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists; formerly Chief Scientist, Department of Health and Social Security

It was to psychiatry and to the alleviation of the form of mental suffering with which it deals that Desmond Pond devoted the greater part of his many sided gifts and his energies. He had made a lasting imprint upon the subject. The breadth of his approach and the imagination and generosity of spirit with which he put it into effect in clinical practice and research was only one expression of the kind of man he was and the manner in which he lived.

The view that emerges from his writings encompasses the contributions made by social disadvantage, familial deprivation and the vicissitudes of the formative years of human development, along with the biological and cerebral factors as the underlying determinants of mental disorder and the stunting of personality. In some of his writings and his attempts to build bridges between psychiatry and religion, most notably in his Riddell Lectures, one discerns an attempt to form some conception or gain a measure of insight with the totality of things.

Desmond was born in London in 1919 and educated at St Olave's School. His parents were Thomas and Ada Lelia Pond (nee Clutten). A strong streak of individuality was manifest from an early age. Of his school years he has written: "My chief distinction was to have survived the English educational system without ever playing a proper team game, though physically fit". Survival was perhaps an understatement for he gained a Foundation Exhibition to Clare College, Cambridge, where he had a distinguished career. Here he met John 'Honest to God' Robinson who became a life-long friend and spiritual influence. Another contemporary at Clare has quite recently described a sense of liberation after initiation into life at the University which was probably similar to that experienced by Desmond: "To arrive in Cambridge was to discover that the ideal of what had been an intellectual minority was here so widely shared as to carry no stigma of eccentricity". He obtained a double first in Natural and Moral Sciences, having taken Psychology in Part II, an early sign of his burgeoning interest in mental life.

A Rockefeller Studentship took him to Duke University Medical School in the USA where he spent two years (1942-44). After some house jobs and a preliminary canter in a psychiatric hospital in Bristol, he arrived at the Maudsley in 1947. His interest in electroencephalography had already been aroused and with the encouragement of Denis Hill, another life-long friend, he embarked upon his enquiries into epilepsy and brain damage in early life, an area in which some of his most important contributions to science were made. His subsequent research evolved along lines that clearly expressed the wide sweep of his intellectual and scientific interest. His contributions included the EEG

of children with brain damage, temporal lobe epilepsy, an enquiry into narcolepsy (for which he obtained an MD from the University of Cambridge), a study of subjects with criminal psychopathy, and his important pioneering survey of childhood epilepsy in general practice. These studies culminated in his influential Goulstonian Lectures in which he collated the evidence that parental attitudes, family disruption and other social factors could contribute to undermine emotional stability, impair curiosity and disrupt schooling and so deny brain damaged and epileptic children the chance of achieving their full intellectual potential.

His experiences in the course of these surveys paved the way for studies of the role of psychiatry in general practice and the place that should be accorded to it in the education of family doctors. He had also become interested in the dynamic approach to the general practitioner's interactions with patients, as delineated in the contributions of Balint. His activities at this interface equipped him some years later for the leading role he was to assume on the Joint Committee of the Royal Colleges of Psychiatrists and General Practitioners which made some widely influential recommendations regarding the education of family doctors. Desmond's contributions were recognised by the award of honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

His interest in the social psycho-dynamic and biological aspects of personality development which he considered to be inextricably entwined found further expression in the mother and child unit he created in the London Hospital. This was more than a multi-disciplinary ivory tower research unit for investigating the formative years under conditions as natural as could be contrived within a hospital. It became a community service station for the treatment, social support and guidance of problem children and their mothers in Tower Hamlets in the East End of London.

In 1971 he was invited to deliver the Riddell Lectures at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. His theme was 'Counselling in Religion and Psychiatry.' His treatment of the subject matter evolved into an original exploration of the common ground and the divergences between Psychiatry, Religion, Sociology, and the Law in their attitudes to and management of individuals whose conduct brought them into conflict with Society and its mores. Desmond saw Religion both as an expression and the fulfilment of psychological needs deeply engrained in human personality. These were needs that he believed secular societies to be increasingly unable to satisfy through the weakening of social bonds and the blurring of common ideals, activities and purposes they were liable to engender. Some of these ideas had been previously expressed but others were fresh and all were explored here along original lines and with erudition that drew upon social anthropology, theology, linguistics,

psychodynamics and psychiatry. In 1964 he became a founder member of the Institute of Religion and Medicine and he served as a member of Committees and Ecclesiastical Commissions that explored problems that arose within marriage and from escalating rates of divorce.

His considerable achievements as a scientific member of the Medical Research Council (1968–72) stemmed from the wide range of his scientific interests, his openness to new ideas and dispassionate guidance. He was to serve again in virtue of his appointment as Chief Scientist at the DHSS. He found himself somewhat unexpectedly stimulated by policy making and the cut and thrust of medical politics and he played his part with unobtrusive skill. I believe he succeeded in strengthening some bridges between the Department, the Medical Research Council and the Royal Colleges and in creating some new ones.

His Presidency of the Royal College of Psychiatrists between 1978 and 1981 was a memorable success in a number of ways.

Desmond's sensibility and tolerance enabled him to encompass the character of the members of various Committees and he was good at anticipating their patterns of interaction. The Council of the College is a larger, more talkative, argumentative and turbulent body of men than the corresponding Committees of comparable organisations with which I am familiar. Desmond was a quiet Chairman and he had rare gifts of tact and discretion. He advanced with the aid of a distinctive form of positive non-intervention through a mountainous agenda and towards the resolution of knotty problems. His qualities of leadership were acknowledged when he was elected to Chair the Committee of Presidents of Royal Colleges.

In retirement he settled in the home and garden in Devon he had created over a number of years in close partnership with Helen, his wife, herself a consultant physician. He loved the countryside around which had for him a numinous quality. It was a place of green and golden enchantment that emerged from their joint labours. There were some months of tranquil happiness surrounded by his family in the period immediately after his retirement. His marriage with Helen had been close and a mutual source of growing emotional fulfilment over 40 years in which they had shared successes and some sorrows. During the year before the end when an illness of obscure origin was manifest, Helen's exemplary fortitude and forbearance sustained his hope and spirit.

Desmond was a fine musician and derived deep satisfaction from his piano and singing in choirs, an activity which he and Helen engaged in together. He was able to see more of his three daughters who visited as often as they could. Two have proved to have outstanding musical talent and the third is a gifted zoologist. Plainly the genes of both parents were at work to some extent. But Desmond, sceptical of rigid biological determinism, would have been reluctant to invoke heredity as an explanation and modesty would have inclined him to minimise the contribution made by the rich, intellectual and musical environment he and Helen had created within the family.

There was a brief surge of improvement in the Spring when his natural vitality, humour and infectious laughter returned for a while but relapse soon followed. He endured the painful weeks at the end with legendary courage and unflinching and unremitting concern for Helen and the family.

He died on 29 June this year.

This obituary was abstracted from the Address by Sir Martin Roth at the Memorial Service for Sir Desmond Pond on 28 October 1986.

ANTHONY CYRIL HAMER, formerly Consultant Psychiatrist, Royal Navy, and Oakley Hospital, Auckland, New Zealand

Dr Tony Hamer died at Gisborne, New Zealand, on 1 June 1986, aged 70.

He was one of a small band who formed the immediate post-war nucleus of naval psychiatrists in the Royal Naval Auxiliary Hospital, Knowle, where he was the most senior but one Lieutenant-Commander. The times were busy with different kinds of end-of-war reactions. He was obliged to give intravenous amyobarbitone, unmodified electroconvulsive therapy and deep insulin coma therapy and induce malaria with mosquitoes in wards reeking of paraldehyde. He tackled the enormous clinical tasks calmly; philosophically and quietly, empathising with his patients and accepting the impossibility of ever 'catching up'. Knowle was then a training ground and he taught, mainly by example, with a flair distinguished particularly by a wonderful gift with words. His descriptions of patients were quite outstanding in their vividness and clinical aptness. He was an inspiring mentor and colleague. The Knowle unit broke up in 1948 and Tony went to Plymouth. Thereafter in his distinctive and broadly intellectual but unassuming and kind style he made a deep impact on naval psychiatry. He had great charm and a lively and infectious humour. Hamer was born in Chile and qualified from Edinburgh in 1940. He joined the RNVR in 1941 and served in Iceland and was transferred to the RN in 1945. In the following year, at the Royal Naval Hospital, Great Yarmouth, he started his psychiatric career, which was interspersed with service in the Fleet Air Arm and—exceptionally for medical officers—qualified at the RN Staff College, Greenwich. He retired from the Service in 1970. He married in 1950, and emigrated with his family to Auckland, New Zealand, where he was a consultant psychiatrist in the Oakley Hospital. He worked until 1985 with great compassion and skill, being much loved and held in high regard. Already a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, he was awarded membership of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. He lived for a while in Rotorua and he wrote "Rotorua is the Lake district; huge lakes full of trout with ski lanes—actually volcanic fissures . . . it is also riddled with strange infernos in the shape of geysers and boiling mud pools . . . we get the odd 'quake. Light is very translucent . . . colours change rapidly".

He was a devoted family man and his wife Doris and three sons were at his side when he died. With them we mourn our loss.

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