

Mortimer Sackler

Psychiatrist, pharmacology pioneer, wealthy drug company owner, and philanthropist

During the past 50 years, Mortimer Sackler made a lot of money as co-owner with his two brothers of drug companies—and he gave away millions, donating for medical and scientific research as well as for the arts. With the Sackler name adorning medical schools, universities, and art museums around the world, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, Sackler was perhaps primarily recognised as a successful businessman and philanthropist.

But business and philanthropy are only part of his story. As a young psychiatrist in the late 1940s and '50s, Sackler and his two brothers, also psychiatrists, helped pioneer research of the biology of psychiatric illnesses, research that helped open the door decades later towards drug treatments.

"In retrospect, he was kind of a visionary," said Dr Jeffrey Lieberman, chairman of psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City.

Biological basis of behaviour

In the 1940s, when psychiatry was dominated by psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic theory, the Sackler brothers were among a small group of psychiatrists to "search for the biological basis of behaviour and mental illness," said Lieberman, who is also director of the New York State Psychiatric Institute. When Sackler and his brothers found that chemicals and hormones in the body were associated with mental dysfunction, they felt that perhaps pharmacology might be the key to treatment, not psychoanalysis, Lieberman said.

In 1949, the brothers coauthored a paper that compared non-convulsive biochemotherapy with histamine with traditional electroconvulsive therapy in the treatment of people with schizophrenia, manic depression, and involuntary psychotic episodes. The brothers, convinced that pharmacology could play a part in the treatment of mental illness, continued publishing papers in the 1950s.

Mortimer David Sackler was born on 7 December 1916 in New York City, the son of eastern European Jewish immigrants who ran a grocery shop in Brooklyn. His parents steered him, his older brother, Arthur, and younger brother, Raymond, towards medicine.

But Mortimer Sackler failed to gain admittance to a New York medical school, which then

restricted by quota the number of Jewish students. So in 1937 he crossed the Atlantic for Glasgow, where the Jewish community helped him enrol at Anderson College of Medicine, beginning his life long affection for the UK. He returned home in the summer of 1939 but cancelled his return trip after Nazi Germany invaded Poland on 1 September, the start of the second world war.

Sackler resumed studies at Middlesex University School of Medicine in Waltham, Massachusetts, earning his medical degree in 1944. The next year he and Raymond Sackler began psychiatric training at Creedmore State Hospital in Long Island, New York, joining their brother, Arthur. The brothers became driving forces at Creedmore, and in 1950 their research department was expanded and renamed the Creedmore Institute for Psychobiological Studies.

After his discharge as a medical officer from the army Sackler rejoined his brothers in private practice in Manhattan and in managing Purdue Frederick, a struggling drug company that they had bought a few years before. The firm's main product was Gray's Glycerine Tonic Compound, which included "sherry wine" and was touted as stimulating "regenerative processes."

The brothers changed the company name to Purdue Pharma, now based in Stamford, Connecticut, and acquired additional firms that sold products such as the laxative Senokot, the earwax remover Cerumenex, and the antiseptic Betadine. By 1960 Mortimer Sackler had ceased direct involvement in research to focus on the business and in 1966 Purdue acquired Napp Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge.

By the mid-1970s the brothers had set up individual philanthropic foundations that in subsequent years donated either separately or jointly. The first step toward massive wealth for the brothers came in 1984, when the firm introduced

the opioid MS Contin (morphine sulphate), which by the 1990s had annual sales of \$170m (£115m; €130m). In 1995 Purdue introduced a time released, longer acting version, OxyContin, which by 2001 had annual sales of \$3bn.

Deaths from overdose

However, street addicts learned that OxyContin could be ground up and snorted, causing some deaths from overdose. Lawsuits were filed alleging that Purdue Pharma had misled doctors and patients by claiming that OxyContin's long acting quality made it less likely to be abused. The Sacklers were not accused of wrongdoing, but the company and three top executives in 2007 paid fines

of more than \$600m.

The list of Sackler's philanthropic donations, some made with his personal foundation and some jointly with his brothers, is long. Medical science beneficiaries include four Sackler institutes for developmental psychobiology, two in New York (Weill Cornell Medical College and Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons) and two in Scotland (University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh); the Sackler Institute of Pulmonary Pharmacology at King's College in London; and

the Sackler Institute of Molecular Medicine at Tel Aviv University. Art beneficiaries include the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, and the Louvre in Paris.

Sackler died, at his home in Gstaad, Switzerland, aged 93. He leaves his wife, Theresa Rowling Sackler, their three children, and four children from two previous marriages.

Ned Stafford

Mortimer Sackler, drug entrepreneur (b 1916, q Middlesex University, Waltham, Massachusetts, 1944) died on 24 March 2010.

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Gordon Easton

Former infectious diseases physician and general practitioner Glasgow (b 1916; q Glasgow 1939; MD), d 13 December 2009.

After house jobs Gordon Easton joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and served in HMS *Rockingham*. In 1946 he joined the staff of Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow, eventually becoming deputy medical superintendent. His MD was on the diagnosis of diphtheria, the hospital having 500 admissions for suspected diphtheria during 1947-8. With the coming of antibiotics, he turned more and more to general practice, working in the pioneer "air call" deputising services in Glasgow in the 1960s and '70s. He did locum GP work all over Britain, from Cornwall to the Outer Hebrides, continuing into his 70s even after his retirement. He leaves five children and 14 grandchildren; his wife, Isobel, died four months after him.

C Valenta

S MacPherson

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Abraham Stone Freedberg

Professor emeritus of cardiology Harvard Medical School (b 1908; q Chicago 1934), d 18 August 2009. A Stone Freedberg helped lay the foundation for identifying *Helicobacter pylori*. In 1940 he co-authored a paper on bacteria in the stomach, but the organisms could not be cultured so he was advised to abandon the research, which was largely forgotten until cited in 1983 by the researchers who later won the 2005 Nobel prize for discovering *Helicobacter pylori* and its role in stomach disease. Freedberg's next work on the relation between the thyroid and the heart informed clinical research and treatment for decades, and some of his work up to 1960 may yet help elucidate the effect of stress on the neuroendocrine system. Predeceased by his wife, Beatrice, in 2000, he leaves two sons and four grandsons.

Ned Stafford

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Sally Masheder (née Backhouse)

General practitioner Bristol (b 1945; q Bristol 1987; MRCGP, DRCOG), died from renal cancer on 8 January 2010. Sally Masheder (née Backhouse) worked at Montpelier Health Centre, Bristol, for the past 16 years. She qualified in medicine as a mature student, having graduated from Sheffield in 1968 and worked in Salford as a psychiatric social worker. A Buddhist in the Chan tradition, Sally had an inner calm which flowed over the daily lives of her inner city patients, and her consultation style was of generous engagement with all comers. She was at the core of a warm and creative family life, and loved nurturing her woodland on Mendip. Among her many charities was One25, a Bristol charity for street women. She leaves a husband, Mike, and two children.

Stefan Cembrowicz

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Robert Malcolm Moffitt



Former general practitioner Lancaster (b 1927; q St Mary's Hospital, London, 1956; DO, MRCP, FRCP), died from aortic valve disease and Parkinson's disease on 3 February 2010. Robert Malcolm Moffitt ("Bob") started medicine at the age of 23 after gaining a degree in modern languages from Cambridge and doing national service in the Royal Air Force Education Branch. He became a general practitioner in 1959, and was also clinical assistant to the eye department and the first medical

officer at Lancaster University. A founder member of the Royal College of General Practitioners, Bob took the MRCP in his late 40s and the MRCGP in his 50s to prove to himself his fitness to be a trainer. He spoke fluent German and was a member of the Lancaster German circle. He leaves a wife, Judy; two children; and six grandchildren.

John Chippendale

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Joyce Mary Owen (née Scholefield)



Former community paediatrician Liverpool and Birkenhead (b 1914; q Liverpool 1938), d 22 January 2010. After qualifying, Joyce Mary Owen (née Scholefield) worked in various hospitals in Liverpool, including Myrtle Street and Alder Hey. The outbreak of the second world war in 1939, with many doctors being seconded to the armed forces, saw her tackle more senior roles than she would have been qualified to do in peacetime. For a time she was the senior—that is, the only—doctor in Burnley maternity hospital. Joyce married a fellow Liverpool medical graduate in 1942, and after time looking after their sons, she returned to paediatric community work in the most deprived areas of Liverpool and Birkenhead, not fully retiring until she was 70. Predeceased by her husband, Bob, in 1991, she leaves two sons.

Robert Owen

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Ratnasabapathy Sashidharan

Consultant anaesthetist Barts and the London NHS Trust (b 1959; q Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1983; FRCA), d 30 January 2010.

Ratnasabapathy Sashidharan ("Sashi") spent his first years in hospital medicine in Sri Lanka.

He trained as an anaesthetist in London, and was appointed consultant at the Royal London Hospital in 1996. He became departmental lead for obstetric anaesthesia and committee member for the Obstetric Anaesthetists' Association. He was also college tutor, deputy regional adviser for Barts and the London School of Anaesthesia, and primary examiner for the Royal College of Anaesthetists. He was especially proud to be appointed Bernard Johnson adviser for overseas trainees by the royal college in 2008. Soon after he was diagnosed with cancer, which he bore with courage, stoicism, and great resilience. He leaves a wife, Kalla.

K Wark

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Richard John West



Former lead dean for paediatrics, and postgraduate dean South West Region (b 1939; q Middlesex Hospital 1962; MD, FRCP, FRCPCH), died from pneumonia and dementia on 1 March 2010.

Richard John West trained in paediatrics at Queen Mary's Hospital for Children, Carshalton, and Great Ormond Street Hospital. He was appointed consultant and senior lecturer at St George's Hospital, London, in 1975. He chaired the district medical committee, and from 1982 to 1987 was dean of St George's Medical School. In 1991 he became postgraduate dean to the South West Region and lead dean for paediatrics, a post he held until ill health forced his early retirement in 1999. Outside medicine his interests included windmills, history, and archaeology. He leaves a wife, Jenny; three children; and eight grandchildren.

David Hall

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