

Sir THEODORE FOX
MD, FRCP

Sir Theodore Fox, a landmark among medical editors, died on 19 June. He worked in the *Lancet* office for nearly 40 years, being editor from 1944 to 1964.

Theodore Fortesque Fox was born in 1899, the son of a rheumatologist. When he left Leighton Park School in 1918 he joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit and was in France with the unit for eight months. He won a scholarship to Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1919 and completed his medical studies at The London Hospital, qualifying MRCS, LRCP in 1924. His association with the *Lancet* began in 1925 when he was offered what was called locum work in the editorial office. It proved a long locumship. The editor at that time was Sir Squire Sprigge, who was in the chair from 1908 to 1937. Dr Egbert Morland succeeded Sprigge; and Fox took over when Morland retired in 1944.

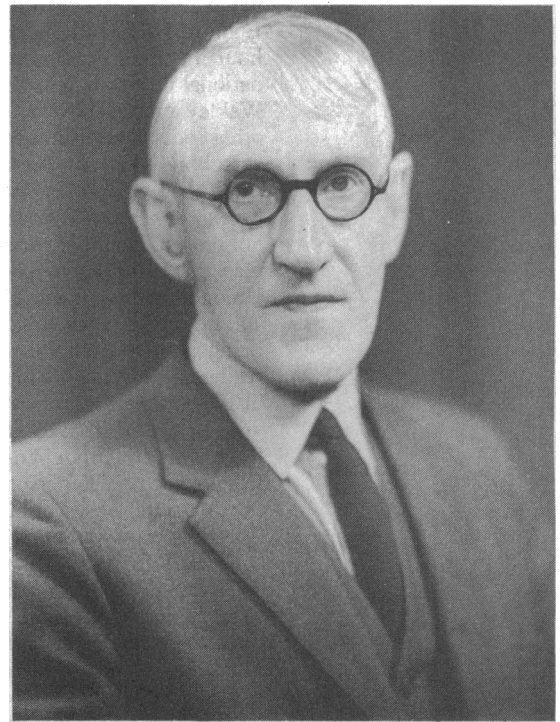
In 1936 he visited the Soviet Union, and his experiences provided material for three articles in the *Lancet*. He also incorporated his impressions of Soviet health services into his MD thesis on the relationship of doctor and patient in the modern state. In the second world war he served as a regimental medical officer in France until 1940, when he was among those evacuated from Cherbourg. After working in the army blood transfusion service and editing the *Army Medical Department Bulletin* at the War Office he rejoined his colleagues at the *Lancet* in their wartime office in Aylesbury.

He was knighted in 1962. The universities of Glasgow and Birmingham gave him honorary degrees (LLD and DLitt); and he held honorary fellowships of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the New York Academy of Medicine. He delivered the Croonian lecture (1951) and the Harveian oration (1965) of the Royal College of Physicians, the Heath Clark lectures (University of London; 1963), and the Maurice Bloch lecture (University of Glasgow; 1966). After he retired from the editorship he was director of the Family Planning Association (1965-7).

He married Margaret McDougall, who died in 1970, and they had four sons.

IM writes: I joined the staff of the *Lancet* in 1952. At my first meeting with Robbie Fox he was friendly but somehow awesome. The long silences after my bursts of nervous merry chatter made me wonder whether I had dropped some heavy brick. Perhaps I had. I came to realise with time that he wasn't really one for a merry chat. The surroundings were awesome too. I'd been invited to join him at an imposing club. I was in such a fluster by the end that I picked the wrong coat off the hook in the hall. The true owner, who happened to be approaching, reclaimed it with military authority—I barely had breath to apologise to Field Marshal Montgomery. After all that I was glad to be offered a job.

He set a cracking example for work in the crowded editorial room. He seemed to read every word of everything before it went to the printer; and new recruits had their subediting efforts (sometimes the total dismemberment and reconstruction of articles) scrutinised and amended by him until they were quite old recruits, for years in fact. It was a ferocious training, but I enjoyed most of it and the *Lancet's* authors and readers certainly benefited. Subedited papers tended to accumulate awaiting his inspection, for even he had to stop occasionally. He allowed large



Sir Theodore Fox

stacks of documents to grow up around him: tricky submitted papers, thorny letters, or just things he wanted to read when he had time. If a senior colleague ventured to suggest that an item somehow mislaid might be in his pile he would hump the lot off to his sanctum on the top floor. I can confidently assert that in this aspect of his editorial life I matched his example faithfully. But in little else.

All the weekly routine, the toil with paper, pencil, and rubber, the writing of kindly letters to unsuccessful authors, the handwritten editorials (like the telephone, I think, the typewriter was in his view an appurtenance of civilisation whose invention was premature), the obituaries (which could often be several pages long in those days and which he made a work of art), all this and more were punctuated by the occasional preparation of brilliant lectures. He spent days, weeks maybe, over them. Therefore, unlike many lectures, they could be turned into splendid articles. Look again at two I particularly remember: "The greater medical profession," to the Manchester Medical Society in 1956 (*Lancet* 1956;ii:779-80), and "Purposes of medicine," the Harveian oration of 1965 (*Lancet* 1965;ii:801-5). I marvelled at his ability to produce these masterly extracurricular items while taking no great time away from his basic commitments.

Then there were the Heath Clark lectures of 1963, which turned into his book, *Crisis in Communication* (1965). This little masterpiece is his most cited writing. At that time the world total of medical journals could have been as high as 9000; and he questioned whether all that was printed need necessarily have been published in the traditional way. He suggested a need for a few more "newspaper" periodicals of comment and assessment, fewer recording journals, and the availability perhaps of new reports in a form other than expensive print. Now, I understand, biomedical journals exceed 20 000 in number, so his crisis has worsened—or has it been resolved by retrieval from electronic stores?

Obituaries of any doctors will be considered for publication provided that the doctors have worked in the United Kingdom for a large part of their career. Obituaries must be submitted exclusively to the BMJ and should be up to about 400 words long; they should be sent within six months, and preferably within three months, of death. "Self written" obituaries are welcome.

His championship of the NHS in the *Lancet* at times when its formation and then its survival were at hazard brought a voice of reason into debates that easily strayed into intransigent slanging matches. In my youth I was slow to realise what impact the journal was having on British medical politics in the '40s and '50s. Looking back, I think that this was probably its finest hour in support of an indubitably just cause, albeit a national rather than a wider one, since the days when Wakley grappled with the College of Surgeons and other roots of self interest in the profession.

Robbie Fox had the ability to make a short and hectic trip to another country and then write, in no time at all it seemed, a balanced and evocative picture not only of health services in that land but also of the place itself and its people. He first went to the Soviet Union in 1936 and wrote three articles for the *Lancet*; and he was there again in 1954, his "Russia revisited" being an important historical record. He also gave readers his colourful and shrewd impressions of China in 1957 and of Australia and New Zealand as seen by a visiting doctor in 1963. Perhaps the hardest of these feats, which he brought off splendidly, was the 18 page saga entitled "The personal doctor and his relation to the hospital: observations and reflections on some American experiments in general practice by groups (*Lancet* 1960;i:743-60). With masses of facts and observations to encompass these chronicles might in lesser hands have become indigestible, but a touch of fun and a dash of wry sadness made them palatable.

Similar qualities graced his after dinner speeches, which no doubt also received minute preparation to ensure that impromptu air. I am told that he resorted to verse on special occasions: that was why it was revealed to an astonished company one night that the chief medical officer at the Ministry of Health, Sir John Charles, could never hear rales.

Last year he did me the honour of writing a preface to the beautiful little book with which Stephen Lock, the *BMJ*, and other kind friends astounded me on my retirement. Robbie was good enough not to mention the embarrassing incident of Monty's coat, but he did refer to his early discovery that I took a ridiculous interest in cricket. A remark of his comes back to me: when once I was heard bemoaning the abandonment of an important test match because of rain the editorial rejoinder was, "Experience suggests there will be another one." There can hardly be another Robbie.

SL writes: When the four great editors of British medical journals come to be weighed in the balance Robbie Fox will emerge the clear leader: he had none of the braggadocio of Thomas Wakley, none of the deviousness of Ernest Hart, and none of the blindspots of Hugh Clegg. But his claim to pre-eminence rests on much more than the absence of negative qualities: he was a consummate craftsman (I once saw him reduce a 150 page book to a three page *Lancet* article over the weekend, to the delight of an initially outraged author) and he had the humility and good humour appropriate to a descendant of the founder of his religion—even if the *Lancet* joke book does record another view: "He's no true member of the Society of Friends: he's just a demi-semi Quaker."

Fox's other great quality was an almost total open-mindedness of ideas (was this because he did only one house job, thus failing to acquire the classic medical omniscient arrogance?). Dotty some of the concepts in his *Lancet* might have been, but they were wrapping up the fish and chips within the year and the gains from the lateral thoughts that were true were immense. Under him the journal ranged widely, over all topics and most countries, to the envy of other journals and his successors. In particular, I hope that some historian will document Fox's major role in persuading the

profession to enter Bevan's NHS as well as his much later efforts in the Family Planning Association to make contraception both acceptable and respectable. He thought and wrote deeply about many issues, and his solution for the proliferation of journals and other publications is as thought provoking and necessary today as it was when he gave the Heath Clark lectures, *Crisis in Communication*, 25 years ago.

JH writes: So Robbie Fox is gone from this world. Wherever he is now the inhabitants must be rejoicing in their new member. For there was nobody more loved and admired than Robbie. He had time for everyone, and he made even his most casual contacts into friends. He positively wanted to know people, and he had the patience and genuine interest to draw the best from them. A Quaker and a pacifist, he none the less felt a duty to serve his country. During the second world war he helped the army medical department by editing—and largely writing—its new *Bulletin*, which aimed at giving serving medical officers something more acceptable to read than army council instructions. When the *Lancet* felt that it had to recall him if it was to continue making its proper contribution to the war effort he gave help in finding a suitable successor. His immediate successor fell ill and he was again pressed for a name. He found that I had written by invitation a few things for his successor, and he asked where I was. "He sometimes writes for us and he tells me he took a postal course in journalism," he told the members of the War Office who were struggling to keep the *Bulletin* alive. So I came to know Robbie personally because he kept a careful watch on what I was doing with "our *Bulletin*." I learnt something new about journalism every time I met him.

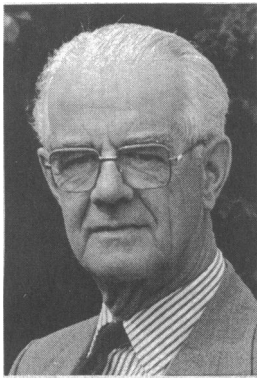
His insights—so numerous and so incredibly generous—never ceased to advance the cause he supported; and he picked the right causes. He loved his garden and indeed the whole world of nature, and he had a way of thinking of people and conferring on them the names of plants or animals. "He's a hedgehog," he said of one of our acquaintances, and I pressed him to say why. "Never mind why," he answered, "a hedgehog he is; and hedgehogs are good."

During the arguments for and against the proposed NHS Robbie's *Lancet* was surely the government's best friend. One sceptical editorial in the *BMJ* suggested that the BMA's attitude should be to cooperate with the NHS while acting as a watchdog for the profession. "Since when," retorted Robbie's *Lancet*, "has cooperation become an attribute of watchdogs?" That was Robbie all over: compelling and persuasive in argument but gently amusing in presenting the case.

I last saw him about 20 years ago shortly before he was due to go for some surgical operation. I knew he was getting short of time to catch his train and warned him: "It's 20 minutes' walk from here." "Good," he replied, "that's 10 minutes' run," and set off at a good speed. Every Christmas right up to the last he sent one of his highly personal "Fox cards".

Robbie often argued with me about the Christian faith. Intellectually he could not subscribe to it; but in practice and by instinct he lived a life that most good Christians would gladly emulate.

GG writes: When Robbie Fox retired from the *Lancet* a quarter of a century ago he left a journal with a far wider international than British readership and yet an influence in Britain that had helped sustain and develop the NHS without the journal becoming in any way an instrument of the government or of the organised medical profession. Under his guidance the *Lancet* was temperately, but firmly, behind the development of the NHS, confident of its value but aware of its shortcomings. Its influence was invaluable



P G A Irvine



G Wilson

in steadying the profession at times when narrow professional interests seemed to obscure or endanger the wider social programme of which the NHS has been—and should be—such an important part. Yet the *Lancet* was not an instrument of government or of Aneurin Bevan, but a detached critic of excess on either side.

Once the NHS was in place and functioning there were many shortcomings requiring critical review and constructive change. Robbie from his position of independence was able to publish such as the Collings report on general practice (1950) and then to help develop the College of General Practice and move on to promote the rapidly enlarging programme of postgraduate medical education. He was at a conference on postgraduate medical education sponsored by the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust at Christ Church, Oxford, in December 1961 and later published George Pickering's distillation of its proceedings, which led on to one of the most heartening and least selfish professional developments in the NHS. It was a happy coincidence that Robbie's own long contribution to the evolution of health care in Britain was recognised by a knighthood in 1962. Few know that he had declined honours a dozen years earlier lest the *Lancet's* independence might be doubted.

A most humane doctor, in an early lecture, "The greater medical profession," he effectively made a point that we doctors too often forget, that in health care there is a family of professions in which medicine may earn a central place but has no automatic title to dominance. Indeed, the primary focus is not a professional at all but a patient. Perhaps that has been Robbie's great legacy to us, because for all its scientific bias the *Lancet* still has room for these other issues. To be chosen Harveian orator of the Royal College of Physicians is a great honour for a physician, but Robbie was also once a close contender for the presidency of the college—remarkable for one in neither clinical nor laboratory practice.

After his retirement Robbie helped the Family Planning Association for a few years as its director and wrote a little, though mainly privately. He kept in touch with a small circle of close friends through his whimsical but often penetrating comment on the Christmas cards he drew and coloured himself. He was a friend, a friendly critic, but always a help. Sadly, Lady Fox died 19 years ago, but there is still a Fox at the *Lancet*.

P G A IRVINE
DSC, MB, BCHIR

At the outset of the second world war Peter Irvine joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve coastal forces, not disclosing that he was a medical student. He served initially in the north Atlantic and then, after gaining a commission, in motor torpedo boats. He saw much active service and after a particularly courageous action against enemy U boats in the English Channel was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

While he was in practice he took great interest and pride in the Newton Abbot division of the St John Ambulance Brigade, becoming an officer brother of the Order of St John in 1978. Not only did he devise scenarios for local competitions but he trained his crews to such a high standard that, on more than one occasion, the Newton Abbot division represented the south west in the national finals of the St John Ambulance first aid competition. Having started as the junior partner of three he retired as the senior partner of six. He believed strongly in the traditional values of general practice and cared for the whole family, always

placing the patient's illness into the wider context of his or her family.

He retired six months early, after an operation, and then pursued his many interests. He played golf regularly and loved cricket, being a member of the Middlesex Cricket Club. He was a keen carpenter and made toys for his grand-daughter, Zöe. After joining the Coastal Forces Veterans Association he renewed many friendships with wartime colleagues. Above all he was a family man. He is survived by his wife, Jean, and his three children, two of whom are radiographers while the third is training to be an ear, nose, and throat surgeon.—MCGI.

Peter Geoffrey Annesley Irvine, general practitioner in Newton Abbot 1952-86, died 23 April aged 68. Born in Seaford, Sussex, 3 October 1920; educated Sherborne School and Pembroke College, Cambridge, and St Thomas's Hospital (MB, BChir 1950). Served in navy (awarded DSC).

G WILSON
MB, CHB, FRCS

Geoffrey Wilson made two specific contributions to surgery: he introduced vascular surgery into the eastern district of Leeds and was an enthusiastic surgical teacher of both undergraduate and postgraduate students. His style was dogmatic: a surgical principle learnt from his lips or demonstrated by him in the operating theatre was unlikely ever to be forgotten.

Despite a large hospital and private practice Geoffrey found time to indulge for several years in deep water sailing. He was also an enthusiastic gardener. His wife, Audrey, whom he married in 1948, cared for him throughout his last illness. She survives him with their three daughters.—FGS.

Geoffrey Wilson, consultant surgeon to St James's and Chapel Allerton Hospitals, Leeds, 1961-87, died 23 April aged 66. Born in Silsden, Yorkshire, 13 February 1923; educated Keighley Boys' Grammar School and Leeds University (MB, ChB 1947). Appointments in Leeds.

ETTA FRIEDMAN
MB, CHB

For a few years family life interrupted Etta's medical career, but in 1967 she returned to medicine, choosing to train in clinical neurophysiology, becoming senior registrar at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street. She showed considerable aptitude in the difficult subject of paediatric electroencephalography with her commonsense approach and sound judgment. During this period she made a special study of so called recurrent syndromes of childhood. Her appointment at the Whittington entailed sessions at Hill End Hospital, Hertfordshire. Her knowledge of and skill in paediatric neurophysiology had a crucial role in the understanding of a child's disability, helping to provide explanation and support to parents. She retained links with the Hospital for Sick Children and held an honorary consultant appointment there.

Over the years Etta served on several committees, combining tolerance with an ability to offer wise and considered counsel. In all aspects of life her warmth and generosity were always felt. She is survived by her husband, two sons, and a daughter.—AH.

Etta Friedman (née Movsovic), consultant neurophysiologist at the Whittington Hospital, London, since 1975, died 6 May aged 64. Educated Capetown University, South Africa (MB, ChB 1946).