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OBITUARIES

Cyril Geoffrey Arthur Thomas

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Former consultant microbiologist, Norfolk and Norwich Hospitals (b 1924; q Oxford and St Thomas', London, 1948; MA, FRCP, FRCPath), died from cardiovascular disease on 17 January 2012.

Cyril Geoffrey Arthur Thomas was born in 1924 in Clapham, south London, the oldest son of two talented doctors, Cyril and Dorothy Thomas. For the next 20 years the family lived in homes belonging to various mental hospitals (Lancaster, Whittington, Wakefield, and Knowle), where his father was a psychiatrist. He was educated at Wakefield and Portsmouth grammar schools and as a wartime evacuee at Charterhouse.

In 1942, Geoffrey became a medical student at Balliol College, Oxford. Most of the students were there for only a few months before being drafted into the armed forces, and the remainder were mainly engaged in secret wartime activities. His own career at Oxford included exploring the roofs of Oxford with Tom Bourdillon (who, according to plan, should have been the first man to conquer Mount Everest), to making up a four man Balliol crew to take a full sized Oxford punt through the Carfax drain, the tunnel that runs under the centre of the city. In 1945, he won the Theodore William scholarship in pathology at Oxford and the university entrance scholarship to St Thomas' Hospital. He qualified in 1948, the first year of the NHS. In 1949, he married Dr Barbara E Porritt of East Leake, near Loughborough. His best man was fellow student, Oliver Smithies, who shared the Nobel prize for medicine in 2007 for his work on genetics.

After house jobs at St Thomas's, during which he won several prizes, he spent two years in the Royal Air Force. He returned to St Thomas', as lecturer in chemical pathology and later in bacteriology. In 1954 he was awarded the John Radcliffe travelling fellowship of University College, Oxford, and spent a year studying tissue culture as a postdoctoral fellow in bacteriology at the University of Rochester, NY. In 1956, he became a lecturer in bacteriology at Guy's Hospital and in 1958, senior lecturer in clinical pathology.

For several years he was an editor of the bacteriology section of one of the journals run by the notorious "Captain" Robert Maxwell. Geoffrey's own concise textbook (*Bacteriology*, later renamed *Medical Microbiology*) first published in 1964, proved popular with medical students and by the 6th edition (1988) had sold more than 100 000 copies.

In 1961 Geoffrey was appointed as the first consultant microbiologist at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. As controller of infection officer he toured East Anglia in a series of cars bearing his distinctive registration plate PUO 1 (pyrexia of unknown origin), checking operating theatres, kitchens, and laundries in the numerous hospitals and nursing homes in the region. At the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, he authorised the theatre sister to allow a cat to wander around the main operating theatres. The cat confined itself to the temporary postwar storage areas and was never known to enter the inner sanctums. It was an excellent mouser. In the orthopaedic theatres, the staff discovered a family of mice living in an armchair in the rest room. One surgeon, a stickler for hygiene and sterility, was not informed of this until he retired some years later. At Kelling Hospital, Geoffrey turned a blind eye on the swallows that darted through the clerestory windows, catching midges in an area that overlooked the food preparation in the kitchen.

Early in his career Geoffrey initiated a tradition of awarding a prize to any of his technicians who helped in the diagnosis of rare or unusual pathological conditions. The prize was set at half a crown (two shillings and sixpence, 12.5 pence), later rounded down to 12 pence when the half pence was discontinued. Diseases in the award category included cystinuria and cystine stone, carotenaemia (mistaken by clinicians for jaundice), porphyria, anthrax, listeriosis, Q fever endocarditis, orf virus (contagious pustular dermatitis of sheep), melioidosis (Whitmore's disease), and amoebiasis. Amoebic abscess was particularly common in Norwich because of the capture of the Royal Norfolk Regiment in Singapore in 1942 and subsequent work of the prisoners on the Burma railway.

Geoffrey was a member of a large number of committees and became chairman of the consultant staff committee in 1983. In 1986 he was the president of the Norwich Medico-Chirurgical Society.

He retired in 1988 and devoted most of his time to his three main interests: medical education, travel by train, and his pet tortoises. In 2003 he was delighted to see his initials "CGAT" on the new (2003) £2 coin, celebrating the discovery of the structure of the double helix of DNA 50 years earlier.

He leaves his beloved wife Barbara, a retired anaesthetist (whom he always called "Porritt"); a son, William; a daughter, Amanda; and four grandchildren, His other daughter, Elizabeth, predeceased him.

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