

## Bernie Mapstone

First female medical officer to serve with a Guards regiment

Defying convention throughout her life, Captain Bernie Mapstone, who has died at the age of 95, was the first woman medical officer to serve with a Guards regiment and the only female medical officer in north Africa when she arrived there in 1946.

Although she grew up in modest circumstances in Ireland at a time when women had to choose between marriage or a career, Bernie Noone, as she then was, succeeded in entering medicine and later the army.

### Head girl

Born in Ahascragh, County Galway, in 1914, the eldest child of the village postmaster, she was baptised Bridget Bernard Noone—her middle name being the result of confusion or collusion between her father and the parish priest—but was always known as Bernie. She attended the local convent school, where she proved herself academically gifted and became head girl. But with five younger sisters, and a brother in an institution after having meningitis, along with her mother's death after a long illness, she knew that she would have to provide for the family.

Fortunately, she won a scholarship to study medicine at the National University of Ireland, Galway, at a time when few Irish women became doctors. She qualified in medicine and surgery in 1940 but had to turn down an offer of training in the newly emerging specialism of cosmetic surgery, her favoured career choice, because of the need to support the family. Her financial aid helped three of her sisters to train in nursing. After briefly working in Galway Central Hospital, now University College Hospital, she moved in 1941 to an industrial practice in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, where she treated miners' injuries, before transferring to a practice in Potters Bar, London, where she spent the war years.

Afraid life was passing her by and inspired by a desire for adventure, she volunteered for the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1945 and found herself the only woman in training at Aldershot. The next year she was attached to the 1st Guards Brigade and posted to Tripolitania, in modern day Libya. The arrival of Captain Bernie Noone was greeted with surprise and consternation: the



regiment had assumed their new medical officer was a man. The commanding officer had to vacate his quarters to accommodate her. Quietly determined she took all obstacles in her stride. "She would not have called herself a feminist," said her daughter Deirdre Robson. "But there was a certain generation of Irish women who didn't think of themselves as equal to men, they saw themselves as superior."

Relocated to the base military hospital at Tripoli and allocated a German prisoner of war as her driver, she spent three years as the only female medical officer in north Africa. She returned to civilian life in 1949.

In 1951 she married Jimmy Mapstone, a lieutenant with the Royal Engineers whom she had met during the trip. The couple had a daughter in 1954 and a son in 1956, and the family settled in Northamptonshire, where Bernie combined motherhood with part time working as a schools medical officer in Coventry. Always putting her family duties before her own ambitions, she accepted medical posts that fitted with her husband's work. But in 1956, with a new baby and toddler in tow, the family was on the move again, relocating to Kenya for Jimmy to take up a post in the colonial service as a civil engineer. In Kenya, Bernie was appointed a medical officer for health, again becoming the first woman to take on such a role. Faced with the scourge of tropical diseases, she eliminated a mosquito infestation in Lake Nakuru by importing fish from a neighbouring lake to eat the larvae. A family photograph shows her knee deep in the lake introducing the predators wearing a stylish dress and wellingtons.

### Irish nationalist

Having returned to Britain in 1960, she took locum posts in north Wales while the family lived

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in Anglesey. But unable to settle to British life, in 1963 the family moved to South Africa, where she took a series of government medical posts. An Irish nationalist all her life, she was politically conservative, said her daughter. "If she had any problems with apartheid in South Africa, she kept them very much to herself."

Initially she worked as a casualty surgeon in the non-white section of the General Hospital in Pretoria but was later appointed a district surgeon responsible for public health, prisons, and police work, when she once again found herself the first female in such a position. Her children having already returned to Britain, she followed in 1974 and settled in Surrey where she worked as a clinical medical officer in schools for the last 10 years of her working life. "I think she missed the excitement and the responsibility of being abroad," her daughter said.

After retirement in 1989, now living in Northamptonshire, she helped as a volunteer medical adviser to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Families Association, and as an expert medical witness she helped several veterans win disputes with the War Pensions Agency.

Having developed dementia in the last 18 months of her life, she died on 16 January of pneumonia. She leaves her husband, daughter, and son.

### Wendy Moore

Bridget Bernard Mapstone (née Noone), military medical officer (b 1914; q Galway, 1940), died on 16 January 2010 from pneumonia.

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**Noorali Dewi Dhanji**

Former general practitioner Sydenham, London (b 1925; q Karachi 1954, Edinburgh 1956), died from pneumonia and heart failure on 20 August 2009.

After house posts in Greenock and casualty posts in Warwick, Noorali Dewi Dhanji settled in Sydenham in 1961, retiring in 1995. A compassionate and good all round general practitioner, he had a particular interest in obstetrics, mothers, and children. He encouraged home confinements and made himself available at any time for deliveries. He was doctor to the local Salvation Army children's home and clinical assistant to Middlesex Hospital Family Planning Clinic, first at Soho Hospital and later at the Middlesex. He was chairman of the local BMA in the 1970s and treasurer of the Royal College of General Practitioners in Lewisham. He leaves a wife, Iris; four children; and seven grandchildren.

**John Bolt**

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**Douglas Thomson Gordon**



Former general practitioner Plymouth (b 1927; q Aberdeen 1950; DPH, MD), d 28 January 2010 after a major stroke. After qualifying, Douglas Thomson Gordon did his national service as medical officer to the Royal West African Frontier Force in what was then the Gold Coast (Ghana). On returning he worked at Ham Green Fever Hospital near Bristol, where he obtained the DPH and prepared his MD thesis on tetanus. After a short time as senior hospital medical officer at Scott Fever Hospital, Plymouth, Douglas went into general practice. He took early retirement at the age of 62 but continued for some years doing much locum work—medicine without the onus of running

a practice. He leaves a wife, Louise; two children; and two grandchildren.

**Ivor Hadley**

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**Robert William Hall**



Former consultant anaesthetist Harefield Hospital, Middlesex (b 1929; q Cambridge/Guy's Hospital, London, 1954; FRCA), died from metastatic colon cancer on 4 March 2010.

After house jobs, Robert William Hall joined the Royal Army Medical Corps for two years of national service in the Far East. He then trained as an anaesthetist, being appointed consultant at Harefield in 1970. At this time open heart surgery facilities were rapidly expanding, and he became heavily involved in operations on babies and then in heart and lung transplant operations a few years later. He retired in 1990, taking up golf and travelling widely. In 2006 he had a severe stroke and was largely chairbound, although he became adept at driving an electric wheelchair one handed. He leaves a wife, Helen.

**R E Maclaurin**

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c2343

**Helen Howard (née Raw)**



Former staff haematologist Liverpool (b 1942; q Queen's University, Belfast, 1966), died from acute myeloid leukaemia on 10 November 2009. Academically bright and inquisitive, Helen Howard (née Raw) was interested in medicine and anything scientific, especially physics and astronomy. She had 15 years away

from medicine to bring up her family and followed her husband and his career, which took them all over the country. She started working in clinical microbiology at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn, co-writing a paper on slow release antibiotics for urinary infection. She eventually worked in the Mersey and North Wales Regional Blood Transfusion Centre, which led her to clinical audit and research on blood in the newborn. In retirement she studied extensively with the Open University. She leaves a husband, Rodney; two children; and two granddaughters.

**R W Howard**

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**Sharafat Hussain-Qureshi**



Former senior environmental health officer Yorkshire Regional Health Authority (b 1929; q Dow Medical College, Karachi, Pakistan, 1956; DTM&H, FFCM, FRIPH), d 29 December 2009.

Born in Agra in India, Sharafat Hussain-Qureshi emigrated to the newly formed Pakistan with his family in 1947. After qualification in Karachi, he gained further degrees from Manchester and Edinburgh Universities. A caring and compassionate man, he developed his career in various parts of the United Kingdom. He settled in Bradford in 1967, retiring as senior environmental health officer. He leaves a wife, Rehana; five children; and a granddaughter.

**Abrar Hussain-Qureshi**

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**James Alexander McCheyne Paterson**

Former general practitioner Winchester (b 1920; q Edinburgh 1944; MRCGP), died on 26 October 2009 from pneumonia after a stroke. After training, James Alexander



McCheyne Paterson ("Jim") joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and spent a year in India. He joined a practice in Winchester in 1948, where he was a partner until retirement in 1985. A committed family doctor, he was also a founder member of the College of General Practitioners. Jim worked part time for his last five years to travel, particularly to research family history, which he continued in retirement. He had a stroke in 1999 which gave him right sided weakness but he became mobile, taught himself to write left handed, and resumed driving. Predeceased by his wife, Janet, in 2004, he leaves four children and 10 grandchildren.

**Andrew Paterson**

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c2339

**Elizabeth Joan Stokes**

Former clinical bacteriologist University College Hospital (UCH), London (b 1912; q UCH 1937; FRCP, FRCPath), d 28 January 2010.

Elizabeth Joan Stokes ("Joan") steered the development of clinical microbiology as a new discipline. Her career at UCH from 1946 to 1977 spanned the rise of antimicrobial chemotherapy; quality control, including the comparative controlled antibiotic testing method that bears her name; hospital infection control; short course antimicrobial prophylaxis in surgery; and computerisation and automation in the diagnostic laboratory. Her important textbook *Clinical Bacteriology* was first published in 1955, the 7th edition in 1993. She and her husband, John, were the first married fellows of the Royal College of Physicians, and Joan was a founder fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists, serving on council twice. She leaves John, two children, and five grandchildren.

**Geoff Ridgway**

**Brian Harrison**

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