

Tsewang Yishey Pemba

Helped Tibetan refugees fleeing Chinese occupation

Tsewang Yishey Pemba, surgeon (b 1932; q 1955, University College London), died on 26 November 2011.

“Three years in Lhasa during my adolescence were very happy sunny years, full of the most pleasant memories. What a charming city to live in; willow trees, picnics, flying of kites, watching shows and spectacles, and frolicking in the warm sands close to Dekyi Linga by the banks of the Tsangpo river,” wrote Dr Tsewang Yishey Pemba, who has died aged 79, in the *Tibetan Review* in 1977. “One day there was a great excitement in our house and we all made ready from early morning to go somewhere. It was only later that I learnt that His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama was being escorted into the city after his discovery in the far East of Tibet.”

Bhutan royal family

Tsewang Yishey Pemba was famed for being the first Tibetan to be trained in Western medicine, and he served as consultant physician to the Bhutanese royal family. He helped to found the first hospital in Paro, Bhutan, and in 1967 became the first Tibetan to become a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. The rest of his professional life was spent working in India and Bhutan. Pemba is also widely believed to have written the first work of fiction by a Tibetan in English, *Idols on the Path*, published in 1966.

Pemba was born in 1932 in Gyantse, Tibet, the son of Pemba Tsering, who worked for the British and, after 1947, the Indian governments. Pemba spent his childhood in Gyantse, Yatung, and Lhasa. Although he received no formal education until the age of 9, Pemba thrived at Victoria School in Kurseong, West Bengal, India, and in 1949 went on to study medicine at the University of London. Attaining a joint bachelor of medicine and surgery degree from University College Hospital, London, in 1955, Pemba was the first Tibetan student to receive a British medical qualification.

After his graduation, return to Tibet was impossible because of the Chinese occupation and the death of his parents in a flood. Immediately on his return to India in 1955, Pemba was recruited by the future prime minister of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji, to work as a medical officer in the town of Paro, Bhutan. A short stint working in a hospital in Kalimpong, West Bengal, India, was preparation for Pemba to get used to local conditions and medical practice. He later wrote, “My Paro hospital was a large attractive Bhutanese building—almost totally empty... The entire country was mediaeval,

unchanged for centuries, standing precariously on the edge of the abyss of modernity. There was no electricity, tap water, modern roads, modern communications. Everywhere we walked or rode on horses and mules... Yet surprisingly, years later, at the FRCS [Royal College of Surgeons fellowship examinations], both in the primary and the finals, what really helped me were the things I learnt in my three years of work in Bhutan.”

It was during this time also that he wrote his memoirs, *Young Days in Tibet*, published in 1957, the first autobiography written by a Tibetan in English. The notes describe the uniqueness of Pemba's perspective: “For a country that by repute is ‘mysterious’ Tibet has been remarkably well publicised. Its ‘mysteries’ have been unveiled and its ‘secrets’ divulged by a score of English, French, German and American writers... Here, for a change, is a book written by a Tibetan.”

Pemba moved to Darjeeling in 1959, working in Dooars and Darjeeling Medical Association Hospital, a hospital under the aegis of the Indian Tea Association. The increasingly volatile situation in Tibet culminated in March 1959 with the uprising in Lhasa against the Chinese forces, causing the Dalai Lama to flee into exile. Thousands of refugees were also fleeing to India, many crowding into Darjeeling. With a massive influx into a small town, living conditions were tough, and medical care was scarce. In his free time, Pemba worked as a volunteer, looking after sick and needy people at the Tibetan Refugee School and the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre.

Pemba could count every prominent refugee, monk, and official who fled from Tibet as one of his patients. His 1966 novel, *Idols on the Path* was based on this fledgling Tibetan diaspora and describes life in Tibet before and after Chinese communist occupation and the hardship suffered by the people in their desperate attempt to escape to India and Nepal to join the Dalai Lama in exile.

Pemba became well known in the Himalayas for his medical work.

In 1965 Pemba returned to London to train as a surgeon. He was awarded the Hallett prize in 1966 for coming first in the primary examinations

of the Royal College of Surgeons and in 1967 obtained its fellowship. On returning to India, Pemba worked in Darjeeling. He moved back to Bhutan in the mid-1980s to become superintendent of the National Referral Hospital, Thimphu.

Until 1992 Pemba lived in Bhutan and was an appointed United Nations certifying doctor, sat on the committee devising a Bhutanese national formulary, and, in 1989, was a member of the Bhutanese delegation to the World Health Organization.

Pemba served as consulting physician to the Bhutanese royal family in this period as well.

A totally changed Tibet

Pemba officially retired in 1992 but continued to practise in private and also travelled to the United States, Europe, and Japan. “A dream-like ethereal visit to my Tibet, capturing old memories and renewing ties and seeing a totally changed Tibet,” he said.

Pemba was unable to attend a reunion of his peers at University College Hospital in London in 2010, but wrote to them of his daily routine in Darjeeling: “I try to be Aware: to Contemplate: to Understand. Minding this Supreme Triad enjoined by our venerable Tibetan sages. All other activities of this life, they preach, are mere ‘chasing of shadows.’ Meanwhile I sit quietly, watching the sun set over the Himalayan peaks. T S Eliot's words disturb me: ‘With the voices singing in our ears saying that this was all folly.’”

Pemba leaves his wife, Tsering Sangmo, and four children; a fifth predeceased him in 2009.

Dechen Pemba

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Pemba could count every prominent refugee, monk, and official who fled from Tibet as one of his patients

William “Ainslie” Anderson



Former consultant paediatric and general surgeon Derby Hospitals (b 1925; q Aberdeen, 1947; FRCS), died from a myocardial infarction on 3 October 2011.

After his National Service, William “Ainslie” Anderson started postgraduate training in paediatric and general surgery in Aberdeen, which included a year as a general practitioner in the Outer Hebrides; a year studying pathology in Edinburgh; and a research fellowship in Denver, Colorado, working on cardiac valve implantation techniques. He met his future wife Eileen, an anaesthetic registrar, in Aberdeen, and the couple were married in 1956. In 1961 he was appointed consultant paediatric and general surgeon to the Derby Hospitals, retiring in 1990. A member of numerous committees, he regularly attended the meetings of the Derby Medical Society and held the office of president in 1986. Predeceased by Eileen, he leaves three children and seven grandchildren.

Ken Munson

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Michael Hugh Clement



Former general practitioner, Norwich (b 1920, q Cambridge/Westminster 1944), died from carcinomatosis on 9 September 2011.

After house appointments at Westminster, Michael Hugh Clement enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and served in West Africa. After demobilisation he became a medical registrar at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital and, shortly before the NHS was introduced, he joined a long

established and expanding practice in Norwich, where he remained for 38 years. His predominant interest was the management of asthma, especially in children and adolescents. He enjoyed energetic walking, travelled widely, and was an enthusiastic Scottish dancer. Predeceased by his wife of 54 years, he leaves two daughters and four grandchildren.

Anne Jones

Peter Olney

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Richard Henry Lavelle



Former general practitioner, Derby (b 1928; q London 1955), died from ischaemic heart disease on 7 June 2011.

Richard Henry Lavelle decided early on that a career in general practice was his vocation and accepted a post back in his home town of Derby after completing his house jobs, where he stayed for all of his working life and saw the practice expand steadily. He was renowned for his long surgeries, which often ran late, but the time and attention he gave to his patients made them feel the wait was worthwhile. After retiring he helped out for many years with the Derby soup run for homeless people, and he set up a befriending scheme for elderly people. Predeceased by his wife, he leaves three children and nine grandchildren.

Peter Lavelle

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Donald MacLean

Former casualty officer, Royal Alexandra Hospital, Paisley (b 1918; q Edinburgh 1942; FFAEM), d 21 December 2010.

Donald MacLean devoted his career to the emerging specialty of accident and emergency medicine. In the 1980s, he organised fundraising for the “crash wagon,” a customised Range Rover that transported medical



personnel and equipment to scenes of crashes, which became a familiar sight around the west of Scotland. Donald was a highly respected clinician, whose rule “always see the patient” was much appreciated by staff and patients. He was an inaugural fellow of the Royal College of Accident and Emergency Medicine. In retirement, he visited his birthplace in Shanghai and enjoyed locum work around the country, as well as poetry, Labrador dogs, and his native Isle of Skye. He leaves Margaret, his wife of 50 years; one son; two daughters; and a grandson.

Gael Maclean

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Tomma Muhsin



Consultant psychiatrist, Scunthorpe (b 1950; q Baghdad, Iraq, 1974; MBChB, MRCPsych), died from metastasis of renal carcinoma on 10 November 2011.

Tomma Muhsin was a pillar of the Iraqi-British doctors’ community in the UK and South Yorkshire. He will be greatly missed by all his family and friends. He leaves his wife, Amal; his son, Salam Muhsin, a general practitioner in Manchester; his daughters, Zena and Huda; and grandson Zak.

Mohamad Jabir

Cite this as: [BMJ 2012;344:d7975](#)

Mitchell James Notaras

Former consultant surgeon Barnet General Hospital, London (b 1933; q Sydney 1957; FRCS) d 30 July 2011.

Born in New South Wales, Australia, of Greek immigrant parents, Mitchell



Notaras entered medical school in Sydney. After junior appointments at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital he travelled to the United Kingdom to further his surgical training. While at the Hammersmith as a senior house officer he obtained the FRCS in 1961. In 1972 he was appointed consultant at Barnet General, where he specialised in colorectal and anal surgery and pioneered various new treatments. In his retirement he often returned to Kythera, the Greek island that was his ancestral home and where he died suddenly. He leaves his wife, Bente; two sons; and three daughters from a previous marriage.

Rod Armstrong

Cite this as: [BMJ 2012;344:d7984](#)

Sigmar Gunar Norfried Saisch

Specialty doctor in old age psychiatry Prospect Park Hospital, Reading (b 1954; q Melbourne 1982; MSc), died from a brain tumour on 7 August 2011.

Born in Germany, Sigmar Gunar Norfried Saisch grew up in Australia, where he gained a BSc in physiology before studying medicine. He met Debbie and they moved to London, where he completed an MSc in human and applied physiology at King’s College. He worked in the department of respiratory medicine at King’s, assessing and quantifying anxiety and psychiatric pathology, and studying factors contributing to hyperventilation syndrome and chronic fatigue syndrome. After moving to Caversham, Sigmar worked in the alcohol service at Fairmile Hospital. He also held a clinical fellowship at Reading University, researching the properties of D2 receptors. In April 2010 he transferred to the department of old age psychiatry. He leaves his wife, Debbie, and two daughters.

Mark Parry

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