Ronald Grainger, professor of radiology, was instrumental in the development of radiology as a specialty. He was a prodigious worker who, as well as running a busy clinical practice, wrote hundreds of papers and wrote and edited several seminal textbooks.

He was a specialist in contrast media—agents that show up images and systems on x-ray films and scans—and he conducted research on new types of non-ionic contrast media. These were safer than traditional media as they were less toxic and caused fewer allergic reactions and less pain on injection. This was a boon for both patients and doctors as patients were less likely to move around during investigations, thereby reducing image quality.

Researcher and author
This work changed how congenital and acquired heart disease, as well as a range of neurological disorders, was diagnosed. It also led to Grainger being asked to conduct the UK clinical trials of four major contrast agents. His other research interests included the radiological evaluation of the pulmonary and bronchial circulations and their influence on health and disease.

Grainger co-wrote several radiological textbooks, including the first edition of the Textbook of Radiology with David Sutton. But his real baby was Diagnostic Radiology: an Anglo-American Textbook of Imaging—written with David J Allison and still known among radiologists throughout the world as “Grainger and Allison,” the sixth edition of which was published this year. This was a huge undertaking, and Grainger started working on it in 1980, with the first edition published in 1986.

Grainger was an exacting editor and would return edited manuscripts to his authors, often leaders in their specialties, covered in red ink, with both their radiological and grammatical errors corrected. He oversaw the printing of the first edition in person, checking that the paper, ink, typeface, and image reproduction quality were all of a high enough standard as the book rolled off the presses.

The book was a Sisyphean task—as soon as one edition was published, it would be out of date, and work would have to start on the next one. Grainger worked on successive editions of the book for two decades. His sons remember how papers would be scattered around the house, and the staircase was used as a filing cabinet, with each chapter stored on a different step. He worked on three editions of the book, which still bears his and Allison’s names, and he remained in contact with the publishers and editors up until his death.

As an author he was meticulous in his research, exemplified by his 1981 Mackenzie Davidson lecture. In it he traced the history of contrast media and unearthed a controversy surrounding one of its pioneers, Moses Swick. Swick’s contribution was forgotten when his professor took the credit for Swick’s original research. Grainger tracked down Swick in New York and gave a very detailed, but evenhanded, outline of the 50 year old controversy in his lecture, which helped to rehabilitate Swick’s reputation.

Grainger was born in Leeds to a tailor, Abraham Goldberg, and his wife Hettie. Abraham was born in Krakow, Poland, but, as a young child, fled the pogroms of eastern Europe with his family. Grainger studied medicine at Leeds University, qualifying in 1945. He was the only one of his family, which included a brother and two sisters, to go to university, with his brother following his father into the tailoring trade.

His first jobs on qualifying were in the Leeds area but he moved to London in the early 1950s, working as a registrar in various hospitals around the capital. He delayed his consultant appointment in order to continue training in different specialties, developing detailed knowledge of anatomy, pathology, and radiation medicine.

In 1951 he decided to change his name from Goldberg to Grainger, even adding Graham as a middle name, as he believed it would be easier to find a consultant position with this anglicised name—a sad indictment of the attitudes that prevailed in postwar Britain. It was in London that he met his wife, Ruth, and the couple married after he was appointed a consultant radiologist in Sheffield.

Raising the status of radiology
Grainger became the inaugural professor of radiology at Sheffield University and helped set up a state of the art radiology department in the new Royal Hallamshire Hospital. He also led a campaign to obtain Sheffield’s first whole body computed tomography scanner in 1985, two years before he retired. He served as vice president of the Royal College of Radiologists in 1983, having served on many committees throughout his career.

Grainger was a great teacher and speaker, with a colleague saying that one of his great assets was his “clarity of thought” and his ability to get to the heart of a problem. He travelled relentlessly and was awarded 18 visiting professorships, most of which were in the US and Canada.

He also acted as an expert witness, including in the case of Samuel Perera, a Leeds dentist who was eventually found guilty of killing his adopted daughter. Perera became infamous because of the body parts and bone concealed around his home, on which Grainger performed tests.

Grainger’s career in radiology started when it was still very much a secondary specialty. He was instrumental in raising its status and in its transformation into the frontline specialty it is today. Giles Maskell, president of the Royal College of Radiologists, described him as one of the “giants of the specialty and an inspiration to generations of young radiologists.”

Work and family were at the heart of his life, and his busy career meant that he had little time for other interests. He did locum jobs until he was 70 and carried on writing and studying into his retirement.

He leaves his wife, Ruth, and his two sons.

Anne Gulland, London
annegulland@yahoo.co.uk

References are in the version on thebmj.com.

Cite this as: BMJ 2014;349:g6740

OBITUARIES

Ronald Grainger
Contrast media expert who was instrumental in the development of radiology as a specialty

Ronald Graham Grainger, professor of diagnostic radiology (b 1922; q University of Leeds 1945; MD, FRCP Lond, DMRD Eng, FFR, Hon FACR, FRCR, Hon FRACR), d 22 August 2014.