

OBITUARIES

Phyllis May Sykes

Michael Matthews

Former general practitioner (b 1912; q Leeds 1938), d 5 April 2012

Phyllis May Richards was born in Wakefield, the younger of two sisters. Both her parents were active participants in the life of the local church, but one died when she was still only a child and the other when she was 13, so she and her sister, Connie, were brought up by a housekeeper and her husband. They were financially supported by a benevolent uncle.

Phyllis was a clever and intelligent child who was good at all the subjects in the school curriculum, especially mathematics and science. On leaving school in Wakefield she secured a place at the Leeds General Infirmary Medical School, and specialised in paediatrics after qualifying. While training at Leeds she met her future husband, John C T Sykes. They married in 1940 and both worked as general practitioners in Yorkshire.

John Sykes joined the army as a doctor and was taken prisoner after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. Phyllis moved house to stay with her mother in law at Luddenden Foot near Halifax, all the while working in general practice. All contact with her husband was lost until she heard at the end of 1942 that he was a prisoner of the Japanese in Thailand.

John returned to England at the end of the war and they moved to Bristol, where they lived and worked together for many years.

Phyllis often invoked the wrath of the practice managers as she spent far more time with her patients than was officially allocated. Needless to say, she was in great demand, as her practice partner well remembers.

After John's death in 1991, Phyllis continued to live at Buckingham Place. She moved to Frenchay House in April 2006 as a result of failing health and the onset of Alzheimer's disease, where she remained until her death, aged 99.

Phyllis was a generous personality and friend to all she came in contact with; she was witty and had a great sense of humour. She was widely read and kept up with all the latest medical developments, liking to keep the doctors and medical staff who were treating her on their toes.

As well as caring for her patients she loved all animals, cats especially; giving many gifts to animal and children's charities. She hated cruelty to animals and wrote to her local MP on many occasions when she thought that existing legislation needed tightening up, or new legislation needed introducing. The local cat population must be missing her.

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