
Obituary



Alan Richardson Wilson, formerly consultant psychotherapist at the Cassel Hospital

Alan Wilson was born in 1923 in Withernsea, East Yorkshire, the youngest son of a methodist pastor. He qualified in medicine at Oxford and St Mary's in 1948. After National Service and house jobs he went into psychiatry at Napsbury Hospital where his interest in psychodynamic psychotherapy began to develop. He subsequently moved to the Tavistock Clinic where he spent four years. During this time he began his training at the Institute of Psychoanalysis, qualifying in 1961 and becoming an Associate Member in the same year. His long-lasting link with the Cassel Hospital began during his analytical training. He worked as a senior hospital medical officer from 1960–1965, returning as a consultant in psychotherapy in 1969. He was simultaneously working as a child psychia-

trist at Earls Court Child Guidance Clinic, St Stephens Hospital and in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. He became very interested in the psychological aspects of pregnancy and the puerperium using group analysis as a means of research. He published his findings in 1968 in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, in a paper which conveys his curiosity and deep interest in psychological development and the ways this can be facilitated.

When I met him in 1977 he was the consultant in charge of the families unit at the Cassel. His intelligence and genuine interest in thinking were immediately apparent; this attitude presented both a challenge to think for oneself and a sense that he was someone whom a great deal could be learnt from. He had an idiosyncratic way of expressing himself which initially could be difficult to understand. However, once one got on the same wavelength he was an inspirational thinker and teacher. But all this was done in a quiet way. He never sought to impress or dazzle with his intelligence. I and many others who worked with him found him to be an immensely kind and supportive person. He had a particular skill in understanding the anxieties inherent in learning and never sought to expose ignorance.

He became particularly interested in the therapeutic potential of the community group at the Cassel and this informed his work as the Medical Director. After Tom Main retired from the Cassel in 1977, Alan saw the need for the hospital to continue developing rather than becoming ossified. He was very aware as Tom Main had been of the human potential for converting procedures into rituals. He developed a link with Elliot Jaques' department at Brunel University, setting up a joint project to study the staff working relationships in the in-patient units and within the therapeutic community. His thinking about this presented a challenge to the established ways of doing things, which led to strong disagreement with some consultant colleagues. In 1980 he organised a successful International Jubilee Conference at the Cassel, which was to have been the launch of some of the new ideas arising out of the Brunel project. A research institute linked to Brunel was planned but this never took place. In retrospect this idea of a university link was a very good one which many specialised clinics and medical schools have followed. Alan retired from the post of

chairman and continued working as a consultant in the families unit until 1984 when he retired from the NHS and from his psychoanalytic practice.

He married Eileen in 1949, they had met at Oxford. She also became a psychoanalyst and a consultant child psychiatrist. They had two sons

and now have three grandchildren. He and Eileen moved to Dorset in 1986. Alan led a very active retirement, travelling a great deal and pursuing his interests in computing, philosophy, furniture making and music. He died on 26 August 1998.

JOAN SCHACHTER

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Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8PG
 Tel: +44 (0)171 235 2351 extension 146, fax: +44 (0)171 245 1231