



obituaries

John Deryk Pollitt

Formerly Physician-in-Charge, Department of Psychological Medicine, St Thomas' Hospital, London

John Pollitt was consultant psychiatrist at St Thomas' Hospital from 1961 to 1983, having been on the clinical staff there since 1958. Generations of patients, medical students and psychiatric colleagues owe a debt of gratitude to John Pollitt who was the epitome of the London teaching hospital psychiatrist, and whose influence has been enduring.

John was born in Plumstead, south-east London, in 1926 and was the son of a master builder. From preparatory school at Fox Hill, John moved to the City of London School, where he was a scholar. He entered St Thomas' Hospital as a 2nd MB student in 1944. His undergraduate career was soon disrupted by pulmonary tuberculosis which, in pre-antibiotic days, led to 2 years of rest and the advice to relinquish his career. Having been strongly guided, at the age of 17, by the late Dr Lance Ware, co-founder of MENSA, he used this time to study formal logic, social psychology, physiognomy and cranio-metry, which laid the foundations of a broad approach in medicine. Ignoring negative advice, he returned to St Thomas' Hospital, gaining the Peacock Scholarship for the leading achievement in the 2nd MB.

John graduated MB BS (London) in 1950. His early training posts were in London and Surrey, where he gained invaluable experience in psychiatry and neurology. Although still aiming for a career in neurology, he was steered into a junior psychiatric post by Dr William Sargant, whose enthusiasm brought him into psychiatry, and encouraged him to scrutinise closely the existing theoretical basis of all aspects of current treatments. A further year at St George's Hospital, with Professor Desmond Curran and Sir Paul Mallinson, confirmed his views on physical approaches to treatment, and enabled him to start his research into obsessional states. He did seminal work on the hitherto relatively uncharted area of the natural history of mental disorder, particularly in his paper 'Natural history of obsessional states' published in 1957. His higher professional training continued at St Thomas' Hospital and at Northampton, before his return to St Thomas' as chief assistant in the psychological medicine department in 1958.



At St Thomas' Hospital, his research brought him under the influence of Dr Eliot Slater, Sir Aubrey Lewis, Professor Erwin Stengel, Dr Thomas Tennant and Dr Fraser Roberts. He passed the MRCP in 1953. In 1959 he was awarded the MD (London), the Gaskell Gold and Bronze Medals of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association in the same year – the only person to gain this unique distinction. Later that year he was awarded a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship in Medicine to study the natural history of depression at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center and at Harvard. While there, he formulated the concept of the 'functional shift' in depression, drawing attention to the physiological effects of the illness not seen in unhappiness. His pioneering paper on this concept, 'Depression and the functional shift', appeared in 1960.

Shortly after his return from the USA, in 1961, he was appointed to the consultant staff at St Thomas' Hospital, and progressed to take charge of the EEG department, after tutelage from Sir Denis Hill.

John was elected FRCP in 1969 and became a Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He was recruited as examiner for the College and served on the Boards of Conjoint Medicine, PLAB and DPM (London and Newcastle upon Tyne), MRCPsych and MD (Cambridge).

The full clinics at St Thomas' Hospital and a busy west end practice brought him in contact with many patients from all social groups and many parts of the world. This enhanced his clinical research, and he strongly encouraged his junior staff in the study of hypothalamic control of mood states, lithium therapy and cranio-metry in anorexia, and the place of unilateral ECT. Expansion of the department enabled him to arrange that each of the four senior registrars worked in the

main out-patient clinics, including the lithium clinic.

Following his research in the USA, he remained interested in Bumke's observations on recurrent depression and in life rhythms generally. He drew attention to the wide variety of precipitants for depressive illness and the wide range of clinical presentations of the illness which he maintained were not a product of the precipitant, but a product of the individual patient's basic personality. On Dr Eliot Slater's advice, he studied the differences in hereditary loading among patients whose depressive disorders seemed precipitated by physical or chemical factors, and those seemingly following emotional loss.

John acted as an assessor for papers submitted to the *British Journal of Psychiatry* for 30 years. He was commissioned by Heinemann to write one of the first monographs on depression (*Depression*, 1965) and later wrote a *Textbook of Psychological Medicine for Students* (Churchill). He wrote several specialised chapters in general medical and psychiatric textbooks and many articles on depressive illness, anorexia nervosa and dementia in *The Practitioner* and *Hospital Medicine*. He was also in demand by publishers to assess submitted textbooks and plays with psychiatric themes. He gave several short talks on BBC radio and appeared on television in *The Hurt Mind* and *Your Life in their Hands*. He lectured on the changing patterns of symptoms in depressive illness, modulated by age and/or personality, at many British centres, and in the USA, Portugal and Iran, receiving a British Council Fellowship.

John concentrated his later research on the therapeutic problems encountered in his busy practice, especially the search for all possible predisposing and precipitating factors in depressive illness and the reasons for failure of some patients to respond to antidepressants. He investigated the effects of psychotropic drugs on driving skills and explored the modulating effects of hormonal changes on symptoms in women. He reported several aspects of his work at the Section of Psychiatry of the Royal Society of Medicine, where he was initially Member of Council and then Honorary Secretary. He selected the 'sex differences in psychiatric epidemiology' for his presidential address of that section in 1977.

He designed the accommodation for academic psychiatry for the new building of St Thomas' Hospital, which opened in 1966, but his hopes for a full academic establishment were not achieved. He then assisted in the design of new facilities at the South Western Hospital prior to the



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transfer of responsibility for the West Lambeth District Psychiatric Services to St Thomas' Hospital. Later he was appointed Regional Postgraduate Dean for South East Thames and Assistant Director of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation where he represented the Committee of Postgraduate Deans on the Royal College of Psychiatrists Education Committee, submitting a comprehensive report on the future requirements for manpower and training in psychotherapy for the country as a whole. He was the first psychiatrist to be appointed as a postgraduate dean, and he also acted as advisor in psychiatry to the Chief Medical Officer of the Metropolitan Police and, later, Imperial Chemical Industries.

In 1983 he was appointed Medical Director to a newly built private psychiatric hospital in west Kent, showing a meticulous insistence on high clinical standards and, *pari passu*, building up the

educational opportunities for junior staff. He also worked at the Chaucer Hospital, Ticehurst House Hospital and Godden Green Clinic. His last clinical years before retiring at 70 were spent in medico-legal reporting on accidents and other litigation.

John spared little time for his life-long hobbies until his retirement in 1996. Having taken up sketching during the long periods of rest with tuberculosis, he spent much time in later life on watercolour painting. He was an active member of the Dover Art Group. He also studied anti-quarian horology and repaired his own collection of antique clocks, and those of several friends and colleagues. His other absorbing interest for the last 25 years of his life was letterpress printing for which he owned four presses; he was soon making his own blocks from his drawings and printing cards. He was a member of the Antiquarian Horological Society for 25

years and a member of the Gaskell Dining Club and the John Carpenter Club.

In contrast to the busy life he led in medicine, John was a home-loving family man, a serious-minded private person, with a pawky sense of humour. He interpreted broadly throughout his professional and family life, the motto from his escutcheon, 'let everyone learn, let everyone teach'.

John died suddenly and unexpectedly at his home in Dover on 9 February 2005, from an acute cardiovascular collapse. He will be greatly missed by his wife Erica (née Ratzowsky) whom he married in 1953, who supported him so admirably and also worked as his private secretary, their two daughters and their families, his surviving sister and many friends, former colleagues, who revered him, and ex-patients – who kept in touch with him for over 40 years.

Alan Poole, Howard James

Richard Vereker

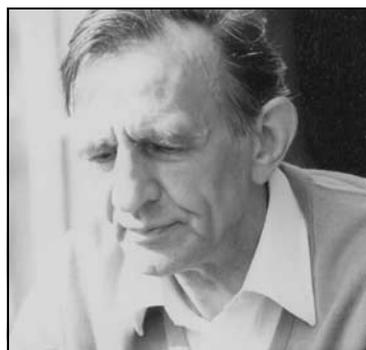
Formerly Medical Superintendent, St George's Hospital, Stafford

Richard Vereker was born in 1920, the son of a prosperous farmer with lands on the banks of the River Suir in South Kilkenny. As a boy he loved his home, Moonveen, and reading. He was educated as a boarder at St Kieran's College in Kilkenny where he distinguished himself academically.

Dick, as he was known to all, studied medicine at University College Dublin. He qualified MB BCh (Hons) in 1944 and became a house officer at his teaching hospital, the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Dublin.

His interest in psychiatry started early in his career, and he went to Manchester in 1945 as a medical officer at Crumpsall and then Prestwich Mental Hospitals. He gained a Diploma in Psychological Medicine (Dublin) in 1946. Dick volunteered for the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the same year, where he was a specialist in psychiatry and neurology for 2 years, attaining the rank of squadron leader. He was stationed at Ely and Wilmslow, and vividly remembered flying over Germany in the bombardier's position of a Lancaster bomber, a flight he undertook to better understand the experiences of the airmen under his care.

After the RAF, Dick continued to study psychiatry. He was awarded the MD



(Dublin) in 1950 by examination in psychiatry and general medicine and was elected MRCPsych in 1971.

He undertook original research and read papers to the Royal Medico-Psychological Association. He published a paper 'The psychiatric aspects of temporal arteritis', describing the first case in the world literature to come under psychiatric care, in the *Journal of Mental Science*; this was then selected for publication in the *American Year Book of Neurology and Psychiatry* in 1952. He pursued his interest in antipsychotic medication and published a paper 'Fatal case of agranulocytosis due to chlorpromazine' in the *British Medical Journal* in 1958. He also undertook research into prognostic factors in depression, the use of an anticonvulsant in epilepsy and the relationship of casualties and sedatives.

Dick took up his first consultant post in 1954 as Deputy Medical Superintendent at St Edward's Hospital in Cheddleton, Staffordshire. His considerable knowledge of new psychiatric approaches,

particularly psychopharmacology, helped to modernise out-of-date practices.

In 1960 Dick went as Clinical Director to Westborough State Psychiatric Hospital in Massachusetts where he headed the National Institute of Mental Health-funded Antidepressant Drug Research Project. Always interested in personality disorders, he was intrigued to see a patient known as the 'measuring man' who went on to become the infamous 'Boston Strangler'.

Dick was appointed Medical Superintendent of St George's Hospital in Stafford in 1962 on returning to England. St George's had approximately 1200 psychiatric beds for south Staffordshire in the early 1960s, with many long-stay and older adult patients. There were profound changes over the next 20 years with a reduction of beds to about 800. He worked with tireless commitment overseeing the gradual reduction of the long-stay population with considerable concern for the welfare and loss of sanctuary of some of the most vulnerable members of society. There was a managerial reorganisation in 1971. Dick continued as a consultant at St George's with in-patient beds at New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton, until his retirement in 1980.

Dick always considered himself foremost a clinician. He was a compassionate doctor with astute clinical judgement, and was known to have a marked ability to get straight to the centre of a problem. He took a special interest in depressive disorders and was very skilled in their management with antidepressants.