

Obituary

Editor: Henry R. Rollin

JOHN MORRIS LOUGHRAN, formerly HM Commissioner, The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland.

Dr John Loughran, a Fellow of the College, died on 1 May 1988. Born in Port Glasgow in 1923, he was educated at George Watson's College in Edinburgh before graduating MB ChB at the University of Edinburgh in 1946. After house officer jobs he served in the RAMC from 1947 until 1950, attaining the rank of Major. Despite the affliction of tuberculosis and subsequent thoracic surgery, he embarked enthusiastically on what was to be a distinguished psychiatric career. His training jobs in the Edinburgh and Newcastle areas brought him into contact with such diverse medical giants as Sir David Henderson, Professor Alexander Kennedy and Sir Martin Roth.

He worked at a number of hospitals, including Gogarburn in Edinburgh and St George's at Morpeth, before becoming a consultant psychiatrist at the State Mental Hospital at Carstairs from 1965 to 1967 where Dr Robert Brittain was Physician Superintendent.

John was a modest, self effacing, thoughtful man whose opinion and advice were much valued and much sought. Natural endowment and extensive experience combined to equip him admirably for what he undoubtedly regarded as his life's work in medicine, namely, as one of Her Majesty's Commissioners with the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland from 1967 until 1985. His contribution was immense. He could deal with the most difficult of problems with commonsense and wisdom. Patients

and staff greatly benefited by his knowledge, demeanour, integrity and very example. All this he did very quietly and embraced the broadsweep as well as the up-to-date detail.

He was wont to remark that the two greatest advances in psychiatry in his day were the elimination of GPI and the introduction of ECT. The role of psychotropic drugs he viewed with perceptive caution and balanced reservation somewhere in the range between 'all heal' and new and powerful 'poisons'. The other 'advances' he regarded merely as the enigmas and variations of the inevitable cycles of fashion which posterity may or may not regard as significant.

John was much concerned with the respect and dignity to be accorded to the individual patient as well as to the psychobiological and social connotations. He had a deep awareness of the ever-delicate and nerve-wracking balance between the considerations of individual liberty and the safety of Her Majesty's lieges. To judge a potential homicide or suicide aright is surely one of the hardest and most onerous tasks in the whole of medicine. John was not often wrong. A suicidal patient's 'pressured' liberty which indeed led to his death caused John wryly but cogently to comment, "Well, we can only say—he died with his rights on."

John was musically gifted, keen on bowling and golf, and maintained a journalistic interest. He held office in the Church of Scotland. His domestic life was a happy one and he is survived by his wife Moyra and his daughter Verne.

ANMB
MMW