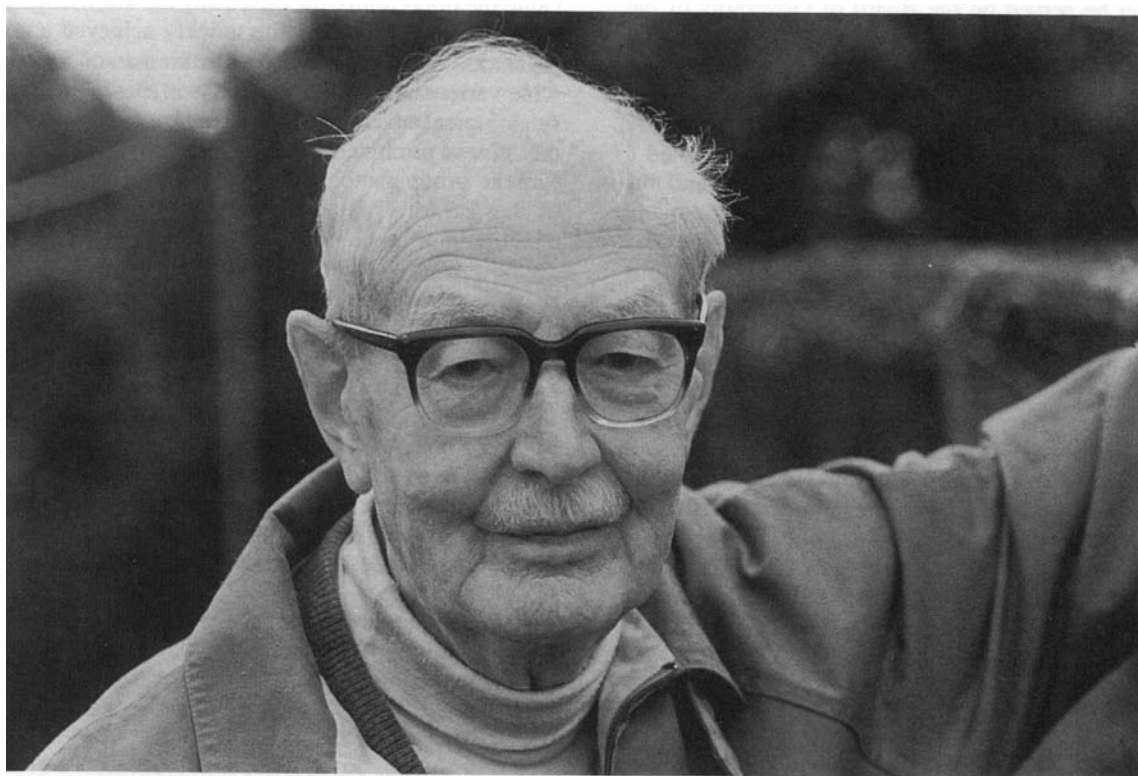


Obituary



RONALD GRAEME MACBETH M.A., M.D., F.R.C.S.E., F.R.C.S.

To those of us fortunate enough to train and then practice otorhinolaryngology during the halcyon two decades now ending, the death of Ronald Macbeth in December 1992 marked the end of an era which saw this specialty rise from the roots to the very pinnacle of the surgical tree. Such a development did not occur spontaneously but was a result of the enthusiasm, vigour and unbridled optimism of a small number of exceptional clinicians. Foremost amongst these was surely Ronald Macbeth who sadly failed by just three months to reach his 90th birthday and two weeks short of the birth of his first great-grandchild. Such an age might imply that many of today's practitioners were unaware of the significant contributions made by this generous, intellectual 'giant'. This is not so, for his disciples are spread far and wide within the United Kingdom and Overseas. My own reasons for accepting the almost impossible task of condensing a lifetime of service and endeavour into limited text are primarily those of gratitude. Although I never had the privilege of working within his renowned department at Oxford, I shared the same belief in the future of our specialty and as a new and inexperienced examiner for the English F.R.C.S. Ronald took me, as he had many others under his benevolent wing, thereby initiating a longlasting friendship. Our last social meeting was again typical of this kindly thoughtful man, when he held a dinner at his old college Oriel in April 1991 to mark my Mastership of the Eighth British Academic Conference.

Many however would wish to learn of the 'meat on the bones' of this truly singular individual. Despite his considerable devotion to Scotland he was born in Stevenage, Herts on the 27 March 1903 later going to Norman Court School, Barnet and then as a Senior Exhibitioner at Highgate School. He qualified at King's College Hospital London in 1928 with an Oxford Degree for he had been a scholar at Oriel College. Indeed his affection for his old college persisted up to his last days and is where his Memorial Service will be held. Surprisingly he was never given a fellowship of this college but this lack of tangible recognition of his many contributions to academia was to many of us a feature of Ronald's career, though never commented upon by himself. He received scholarships at both King's and Oxford and obtained a F.R.C.S.E. in 1933 and a D.M. (Oxon) in 1950. His F.R.C.S. of England (*ad eundem*) came in 1954. After various training posts he was appointed Consultant ENT surgeon to the Radcliffe Infirmary Oxford in 1931 eventually becoming Director, a responsibility he held until his retirement at the age of 65 years. During this period he developed this department into one of the foremost in the country with many of today's specialists owing their skills and treatment philosophy to his clearly defined principles, for he was a man of considerable determination and when deemed necessary . . . outspoken!!

Many might think however that his major contributions

were made within the field of specialist education. He was Vice-President of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (1963–64), Vice-President of the Section of Laryngology RSM (1947–50) but President of the Section of Otolaryngology (1959–60), Examiner for the Fellowship of the Surgical Colleges of England, Edinburgh and Ireland and Master of the Third British Academic Conference in Otolaryngology held not surprisingly in Edinburgh in 1971. In addition he served on the Board of Governors of the Radcliffe Infirmary representing the Oxford City Council on which he was a University Representative. In 1972 he became County Director of the St John Ambulance Brigade a body he had supported enthusiastically for many years. It was not generally known that he had gained a half-blue at Oxford for cross-country running and his enthusiasm for caravanning within the wilds of Scotland was the source of many imaginative and harrowing tales of survival in a hostile environment. These expeditions served to indoctrinate his family of three girls and two boys into the delights of hill-walking and the outdoor life.

Perhaps his greatest contribution within the field of progressive education was his initiation, against some opposition it must be said, of the British Academic Conference. The background to this as far as it can be told was the subject of a monograph distributed at the last conference in Dublin. Sufficient to say that it is generally agreed that the idea was his and that he originated it about 1959. Together with a small nucleus of other influential colleagues, he helped to form the Holding Committee and in 1963 the first Conference was held in London. He chaired the important General Committee for the second in Oxford and then appropriately was Master for the third in Edinburgh. His address given in the impressive MacEwen Hall was mem-

orable as was expected from an individual who had taken these conferences so close to his heart. They alone will remain as a memorial to an inspired educationalist but of course his contributions to surgical technique and the medical literature should not be forgotten. They covered a wide range of interests, particularly with reference to the aetiology of ethmoidal adenocarcinoma and of course the osteoplastic flap for frontal sinus disease. With retirement came the opportunity for increasing his knowledge of the local flora and fauna and he quickly achieved a notable reputation as an accomplished naturalist and writer on a wide variety of topics. His interest in matters otorhinolaryngological never lessened and the knowledge of his serious illness prompted his many well wishers to have an 'urgent' group photograph taken at the December meeting of the R.S.M. This reached him just prior to his death enabling him however to derive pleasure by recognizing all those whose careers had occupied so much of his life.

No man achieves so much without the support of an understanding and often, compliant wife. Margaret died in 1982 but Ronald was so very fortunate to find happiness again with Audrey and it is to be hoped that realization of the prominent role he played in the development of otorhinolaryngology, and the high esteem with which he was held will in some small way lessen her loss and that of his family which included a large number of grandchildren on which he doted. Perhaps the words of Albert Einstein most succinctly describe Ronald Macbeth's contributions to our specialty:

'It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.'

This he certainly did.

DONALD HARRISON.