

Retirement of Mr. HENRY S. SHUCKSMITH

Henry Shucksmith retired in September 1975. Despite a life of hard work in surgery and ill health which dogged him during the previous 12 months, he agreed to carry on as his own locum until his successor is actually in post. This is quite typical of a man who, in his youth, worked far harder and longer than is expected of any young surgeon today.

He will be remembered surgically as the man who pioneered vascular surgery in this area and his precepts have been carried far and wide by men taught by him who have been appointed consultants both in this country and abroad. He will be remembered as a man for his many kindnesses and his bluff good humour characterised by a certain bluntness of expression! A hard worker himself, he had little time for the shirker and, in his youth, would divide both his colleagues and his juniors into the workers and the drones.

There is a widely held belief that before the Second World War, only money and patronage led to the top. Henry's career disproves this completely. He was born at White Barn Farm, Alvingham, in Lincolnshire in 1910. He took pride in being born a farmer's boy but it must be remembered that in those days, farming was not the road to prosperity. He duly went to the local elementary school and later to the King Edward VI Grammar School, Louth.

He became a medical student in Leeds in 1927, roughly halfway between the General Strike in this country and the appalling Wall Street crash in America. To state that he worked hard hardly does him justice.

He virtually carried all before him. In 1930, he obtained both the Infirmary Scholarship and the Littlewood Prize for Anatomy. Four years later, no fewer than four honours fell to him. He obtained the Edward Ward Prize for Surgical Anatomy, the McGill Prize for Clinical Surgery, the Hardwick Prize for Clinical Medicine and the William Hey Gold Medal.

It almost goes without saying that he obtained the Degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery with First Class Honours in 1934. He had previously graduated Bachelor of Science with first class honours in Physiology in 1931. After about only one year's post-graduate study, he received the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

With such a distinguished undergraduate career behind him, he naturally received the appointment which he desired most, namely that of House Surgeon to the late Mr E R Flint. They were kindred spirits and it is doubtful if any single man exerted more influence over Henry Shucksmith than did Mr Flint. All went smoothly until he was appointed Resident Surgical Officer in 1937 and he continued to hold this post until the outbreak of War. As a matter of course, he joined the Territorial Army in the year of Munich and the following February became junior Surgical Tutor in the University of Leeds.

The War could hardly have occurred at a worse time for Henry as far as his career was concerned. The months of the 'Phoney War' prior to the Blitzkrieg in 1940 must have been particularly galling to him but this never showed in his demeanour. The Fourth (First Northern) General Hospital was formed in Leeds and was largely staffed by his friends. He was a specialist in surgery but had no surgery to do! Prior to being evacuated from France in

1940, he used his energies to create a garden behind his Nissen hut. He later served in Malta and left there to take charge of a Field Surgical Unit which worked in Sicily and participated in the invasion of Italy with the Eighth Army. This experience formed the basis of a Hunterian lecture given at the Royal College of Surgeons in April 1945.

1946 was a momentous year. Henry fell in love! An attractive medical student, Miss Mary R Sykes, graduated M.B. Ch.B. in 1946. She duly obtained a house appointment and, after a lightning courtship, they were married in 1946, the year in which he was appointed Honorary Assistant Surgeon to the General Infirmary at Leeds and Honorary Surgeon to the Leeds Public Dispensary. Two years later, he was appointed to a number of hospitals in Leeds, Wakefield and Dewsbury. It was in that year that he joined us in the group of hospitals which has now become the Eastern District. This was at a very important time in the development, particularly of St James's Hospital. It was during these post-war years that the present senior staff were all recruited with the aim of providing a second major general hospital in the City of Leeds.

This decision had been taken by the City of Leeds before the inception of the National Health Service and it must be difficult for the younger generation to appreciate the vast changes which have taken place since the War. Henry Shucksmith has played his full part in this advancement.

We in the East wish Mr and Mrs Shucksmith a long and happy retirement and they can be assured that they will be very welcome visitors at any time.

D B Feather
Consultant Surgeon

Published in the News East – the newsletter of the Eastern District of the Leeds area health authority No. 18, February 1976