

Cecily Blair

Born 1926, died 2005

Cicely Pearl Blair (née Hopton) was consultant dermatologist to Oldchurch and Harold Wood Hospitals in Havering for nearly 20 years. She was a devoted clinician and a loyal colleague, and I personally owe it to her that I myself entered dermatology.

Cicely was a delightful person, with charm, a ready wit, and a deep underlying humanity, which often showed itself in the love and concern which she had for others. As a result she was a natural teacher, with great patience, and an able trainer of her junior colleagues. I particularly remember with affection the lunch time lectures which she gave to us juniors, often accompanied by her large and friendly poodle, Jacko.

Cicely was born and brought up in Huddersfield where both her parents were teachers. After attending the local high school, she gained a place to study medicine at the Royal Free Hospital and migrated to London, where she spent the rest of her life. Cicely qualified in 1951, and it was during house jobs at her teaching hospital and the London Jewish Hospital, that she met her future husband, Henry Blair. They were married in 1954, and Cicely joined him in general practice in Chingford. While in practice, she became increasingly interested in dermatology and eventually in 1969, she left to embark on a new phase in her career, as a dermatologist. Her husband, Henry, was developing a special interest in allergy and he was to become, clinical allergist



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to the respiratory medicine department at Whipps Cross Hospital. Cicely and Henry were both dedicated to their chosen over-lapping specialties, each active in research, but combining zeal for their professional work with an abiding interest in people.

Before appointment to Oldchurch Hospital, Cicely had held various posts in dermatology, including that of

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research assistant in the skin department at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. It was while researching the nature of the acne comedone that she demonstrated that the pigment in black-head comedones was melanin, a finding later substantiated when she studied albino patients with acne, and found them to have only white-head, and not black-head comedones. This she considered her most important contribution to dermatological knowledge at the time. After her appointment as consultant at Oldchurch Hospital, she continued researching, writing a paper in 1979 on the rash caused by the caterpillar of the Browntail Moth.

Also, while at Oldchurch Hospital, Cicely encouraged fund raising for the skin department, chairing a committee of patients and volunteers to this end.

As a result, a PUVA machine and other equipment were purchased for the department. One fund-raising event in particular was a success. This involved hosting an evening at the local greyhound stadium.

Cicely outlived her husband by over 20 years, but continued after his death in the tradition they had established of warm and generous hospitality to colleagues and friends. An able photographer and a member of the Royal Geographical Society, Cicely travelled extensively after Henry's death. She enjoyed showing photographs, particularly those she took of the flora and fauna in the Falklands and Galapagos Islands. On two occasions she acted as visiting dermatologist to the Falklands.

Her creativity found further outlets in painting and silversmithing, both of

which she increasingly enjoyed in retirement. She had a particular talent, and for several years exhibited in the summer exhibitions at the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal Society of Medicine, and at the Mall galleries. Her skills as a needlewoman are on display in the outpatients department of Harold Wood Hospital where she contributed to the embroidered wall hanging made to celebrate the opening of the new department.

In 1990 she generously presented a silver chain of office to the British Association of Dermatology which she had worked herself, to be worn by the president of the association. That it was completed just in time to be worn by the president for that year, Dr. Harvey Baker, gave her no small satisfaction.