

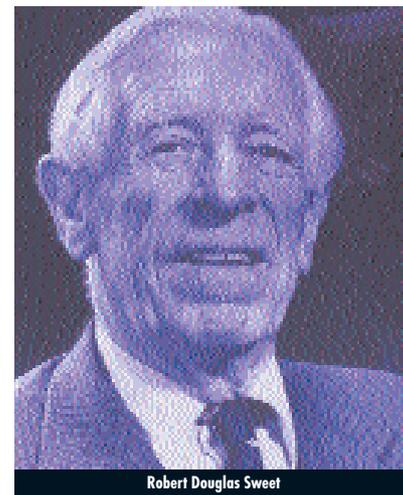
# Dr Robert Douglas Sweet 1917 – 2001

**D**ouglas Sweet (Consultant Dermatologist, Plymouth, 1950 – 1980) died at the end of September 2001. He had a major stroke three years ago but he fought the medical consequences tenaciously all the way through to the final two weeks of his life.

He was born during the First World War in Weybridge, Surrey, where his father was a RAMC Doctor. However, at the age of six months his family moved to Auckland, New Zealand where he remained until his late teens, when he returned to the UK to go to Cambridge University, followed by St. Thomas' Hospital in London. He was appointed Consultant Dermatologist in Plymouth in 1950, but set up home in the Stannary Town of Tavistock on the Western edge of Dartmoor where he and his wife Zita brought up their four children. His abiding recreational interest throughout his life was fox hunting, and he pursued this actively across Dartmoor for many decades, latterly in a four-wheel drive vehicle. Tavistock remained his home, apart from a most enjoyable interlude for a year with his family, working in Jamaica during the 1960s. After retirement in 1980 he had the time to broaden his rural interests beyond fox hunting, and acquired some land on the outskirts

of Tavistock where he started an active policy of three planting. The growth of these trees over the subsequent years of his life gave him a lot of pleasure, and he became very conservation minded.

During the late 1950s and early '60s he collected a group of patients with skin problems that he had previously not seen, and had hitherto not been described in the Dermatological literature. It is always interesting to look back at his original case material and the disease which he was later to describe as Acute Febrile Neutrophilic Dermatitis. This began life in his notes as Gomm-Button Disease, names derived from his first two patients with this disease. His findings were presented to the Dermatological world in two papers published in the British Journal of Dermatology in 1964 and 1968 under the lengthy, but in the time, based on his cases, accurate title of Acute Febrile Neutrophilic Dermatitis. The serendipitous combination of this lengthy title, given to an apparently new disease by a single monosyllabic author with an unusual name, ensured eponymity for Sweet's Syndrome, and thus it has remained. In many ways the name Sweet's Syndrome is preferable since one or more of the three original descriptive adjectives is not infrequently absent. As far as I can



Robert Douglas Sweet

establish he is the only Medical Doctor to have come from Plymouth with the disease named after him.

Another of his interests was the Glucagonoma Syndrome with necrolytic migratory erythema. He described one of the very early cases who subsequently and apparently uniquely survived for some 30 years.

Douglas Sweet leaves not only a disease in his name, but also memories to those who knew him, of a very likeable, straight forward and sincere man. His wife Zita and their four children survive him.