

Robert Harold Champion

Born 21 March 1929, died 16 October 2004

Bob Champion, Consultant Dermatologist at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge from 1961-1991, and to various hospitals nearby, died on 16 October 2004. He grew up in rural Kent, educated at Blundell's School, Tiverton and was a major scholar at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge. He qualified from the Middlesex Hospital Medical School in 1953. Medicine was planned; dermatology came by chance. Following his national service in Germany he applied for a houseman's post at Addenbrooke's, mainly for its paediatric component, but soon became fascinated with his other duties, in dermatology. In this he was inspired by Arthur Rook who quickly saw the potential in Bob and appointed him as his Registrar. A period as Senior Registrar at St. Thomas' Hospital followed before he returned to Addenbrooke's in 1961 to become a Consultant on Howard Whittle's retirement.

The next decade saw major Cambridge developments in postgraduate education. Establishment of the 'Biology of the Skin' and 'Progress in the Biological Sciences', editorship of the British Journal of Dermatology and Recent Advances, plus the birth of the encyclopaedic Textbook of Dermatology were all initiated by Arthur Rook. Bob's involvement ensured that they materialised, were sustained and thrived. He succeeded Arthur as editor of the BJD and Recent Advances (1974-81), made major contributions to the Textbook's first three editions and became co-editor of the 'Rook Book' as it became known from the fourth edition.

In this period clinical work at Addenbrooke's was growing enormously, with improved facilities and development of Outlying clinics. General Practitioner teaching thrived, postgraduate students from the UK and abroad were welcomed and the weekly Joint Teaching Clinic became a focus for

East Anglian dermatologists. Bob's intellectual powers, industry, and infectious enthusiasm were evident to all who visited. His role in the growth of Cambridge's Dermatology reputation was recognised by colleagues throughout the UK and beyond; their trust and friendship with him was crucial in winning the wider support so essential for the department's academic activities. Bob Champion was also the initiator of most of the department's original research in the 60s and 70s. His work with associates in immunology (W E Parish in atopy and eczema, P J Lachmann in insect bite reactions) and in livedo and urticaria always had a strong clinical foundation. On urticaria he published a much cited, large scale clinical study and a monograph (jointly with R P Warin) and became a world authority.

He encouraged a succession of registrars, involving them unselfishly in his projects. All found in him a learned but practical clinical teacher, a trusted guide and friend. Bob maintained a near perfect professional relationship and warm friendship with Arthur Rook throughout his life based on admiration, respect and loyalty and this indeed was fully returned. He shared with Arthur an aversion to medical politics and was never happy in committees but he was supportive of those of us who undertook these necessary activities, marveling when we enjoyed them. His loyal friendship was equally extended to his younger colleagues. Those of us who enjoyed the privilege of working closely with him saw the youthful boyish enthusiast become, over the years, the wise, vastly experienced clinician respected by all. By the time he became President of the BAD in 1988 he knew, though far too modest to assert it, that he had an acknowledged place in International Dermatology; the equal partner and worthy successor of his distinguished mentor.



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The other partnership central to his life was his marriage to Phyllis Gaddum in 1965. They had three children. Their eldest, Clare, is a research engineer. Their two sons both suffered from a progressive glycogen storage disease needing much care before they died in their teens. This care was given with great love and total commitment by both parents. This huge burden became for Bob and Phyllis a privilege and a joy. It was humbling experience to visit and see Bob soothing one of the boys with one hand while correcting manuscript proofs with the other.

Bob's own health was far from perfect. From his thirties he had severe lower back problems. When ill he would often work from home, lying on the floor. On one occasion in 1978, he discovered that he had massive splenomegaly. Calling on him a few minutes after this, I well remember his wry smile as we discussed the grim differential diagnosis. The cause proved to be polycythaemia rubra vera. It was soon controlled and the stoical patient characteristically made light of it. Bob was a lifelong knowledgeable gardener and took great pleasure in bird watching. With Phyllis, an accomplished clarinetist, he shared a deep love of music and he learnt to play the flute. He was an enthusiastic

collector of jade, pictures and particularly of postage stamps, being a distinguished member of the Royal Philatelic Society of London. In 1991 he retired from Addenbrooke's after nearly thirty years and in retirement saw through to publication the sixth edition of the Textbook. In 2001 he was awarded the Archibald Gray Medal by the Association. He received this with great satisfaction and modest pride. By this time he had slipped quietly out of dermatology but had

followed with pleasure the growth of dermatology in East Anglia and the progress and enlargement of his old Department which his colleagues and successors have achieved. In September 2003 he learned that his haematological condition had entered an untreatable leukaemic phase. Sustained by maintenance transfusions and the support of his family he continued to live life to the full. He had become a collector of revenue stamps and licenses and he

completed writing the text of a delightful small book on this subject. He traveled, received friends, said his goodbyes and planned his funeral. He died at home with Phyllis and Clare by his side and, after a moving service in the crowded village church, was buried in autumn sunshine almost in sight of his own beloved garden.

Stephen Roberts

Cambridge
