

# Dr Joseph Stephen Pegum

**Born 08.09.1918. Died 02.03.2003**

Joseph Stephen Pegum was born in Ireland on 8.9.1918, where his father was in general practice. Because his mother was in poor health he was despatched to boarding school at 4 years of age, equipped (he claimed long afterwards) with only a bottle of port and a banana. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was 7 years old.

He was educated at Beaumont College where he read widely, especially the books on the forbidden list, including Voltaire. At Trinity College, Cambridge, he rejected his Catholic faith and was expelled from his family by his father with resultant great financial hardship. He was fortunately helped by the College, especially by his tutor, and ironically by the Jesuits, for whom he retained a life-long respect.

From Cambridge he went to Guy's Hospital just after the outbreak of the war, sharing in roof fire-watching duties during the blitz. After qualifying LMSSA in 1943 and M.B. B.Chir in 1944, he joined the Royal Navy and served as a medical officer on the aircraft carrier *Formidable* in the Pacific until the two atom bombs ended the Japanese war. He was able to spend some leave in Australia where he managed to join an expedition (unsuccessful) to find the Tasmanian tiger.

Returning to Guy's after demobilisation, he trained as a registrar under HW Barber and Louis Forman, quickly obtaining his MRCP. Later he moved to UCH as senior registrar to William Goldsmith and Paddy Hare. In 1951 he won a British Post-graduate Medical Federation travelling fellowship to study in Paris and Zurich and remained in contact with his Zurich landlady until his death. He spoke French and German and became a firm francophile and a regular attender of Franco-British meetings.

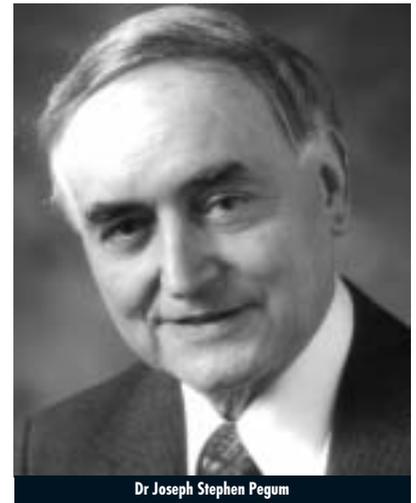
Having obtained the MD in 1952 he was appointed assistant physician to the Skin Department at the London Hospital in 1953. The early 1950's had seen the

arrival of oral therapy for skin tuberculosis, thus spelling the demise of Finsen light treatment of lupus vulgaris. The large Finsen light department, active since the beginning of the century, was converted into a modern dermatology department, still in use today. Brian Russell, his senior colleague and Joe Pegum had very different approaches to clinical dermatology, the former often stressing psychological factors which Joe Pegum's agnostic mind found difficult to accept. He believed that contact allergy, caused by allergens yet unrecognised, would prove to be important and in this he was sometimes right. Joe demonstrated experimentally that certain adhesives could pass through rubber gloves to cause dermatitis. Notwithstanding, the two men invariably maintained an equable and effective relationship until Brian Russell retired in 1968.

Joe was elected FRCP in 1966 and the following year was appointed consultant dermatologist to Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children, Hackney. Later he became civilian consultant advisor in dermatology to the Royal Navy, a post he held until his retirement from The London in 1983.

Joe Pegum was always a pillar of the British Association of Dermatologists, serving as its Honorary Secretary from 1970 to 1975 and later as President in 1980/81. He was also President of the Dermatological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine. From his earliest days in medicine, he was recognised by his contemporaries and colleagues for his incisive intelligence. His modesty concealed a well cultivated mind singularly devoid of prejudices and superficial judgements and, which he kept uncluttered by the prosaic and the irrelevant. He was very widely read encompassing history and biography as well as English prose and poetry.

To his intellectual cutting edge he added a humorous twinkle. As a houseman he witnessed an eye operation involving the use of a magnet.



Dr Joseph Stephen Pegum

Assured by the surgeon of the power of the magnet he asked whether it was capable of pulling a knight in armour off his horse. On another occasion, when a talkative woman was having a cataract operation he asked 'is this a chatteract?'

In 1958, Joe married Hazel Taylor, a nurse. He announced 30 years later at his niece's wedding that this was the best thing he had ever done. Hazel shared his enthusiasm for the BAD and the annual meeting was always one of the highlights of their year.

After retirement the Pegums moved from their London home to Langley Upper Green deep in rural Essex where they enjoyed a long and fruitful retirement.

The writer had the privilege of being Joe's consultant colleague for 15 years at The London. Throughout those years he was unfailingly courteous, supportive and co-operative and indeed a model exemplar to a series of now distinguished trainees.

Joe died of cardiac and renal failure on 2nd march 2003. He is survived by Hazel and their two children, Joanna and Jonathan.

**Dr Harvey Baker**

London