

Obituaries



PHILIP VERNON READING (1906–1998)

Philip Vernon Reading, who died on July 7, aged 92, was an outstanding otolaryngologist, serving Guy's and its associated hospitals from 1945 to 1969 as consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon.

He entered the medical school at Guy's from St Dunstan's School, Catford, in 1924, and was awarded the university gold medal in the London final MB in 1931 with distinction in surgery and midwifery. Later that year he gained the FRCS and within two years the London MS.

He was appointed general surgical registrar at Guy's in 1932 pinning his hopes on promotion to the senior staff in due course. Such a vacancy unfortunately did not occur and in 1935 he took up duties at Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham, where in the words of a friend of that period, Mr A. M. Nussey: 'it was recognized at once that he was an exceptionally fine operator whose technical ability was fully matched by sound clinical judgement and outstanding personal qualities'. Eventually a post came up

not in general surgery but in ear, nose and throat surgery. Reading was urged to apply and was successful.

With characteristic energy and enthusiasm, he proceeded to prepare himself for his new career. With a huge volume of work going through a busy department and with his standards set high, he rapidly became very proficient in his adopted speciality. Thus when Guy's looked for a successor to T. B. Layton, who was about to retire, it was to Philip Reading that they eagerly turned.

Reading was appointed to the consultant staff at Guy's in 1945 but was almost immediately called up to do two years National Service and was posted to a British military hospital in Egypt. His influence on the department at Guy's therefore only really began upon his return in 1948. He brought a new look to ENT surgery at Guy's at a time when the frontiers of otological surgery were being rapidly expanded, and

the momentum existed to take over much of head and neck oncological surgery which was traditionally regarded as the province of the general surgeon.

Well before the concept of combined cancer clinics had been established, he recognized the need to treat head and neck cancer collaboratively rather than in competition with the radiotherapists, and in 1949 he set up a monthly combined clinic with his radiotherapy colleague, John MacArthur.

Reading appreciated the immense psychosocial and educational problems confronting deaf children, and the need to tackle them on a broad collaborative front. It was thus that the hearing and language clinic for deaf children was developed at Guy's with Dr Mary Sheridan.

Philip Reading was a brilliant teacher, particularly of undergraduate students. He early on built up a wide collection of slides, posters, and films. Such was his enthusiasm for visual aides in teaching that when the Department of Medical Illustration and Photography needed a new director in 1958, he was the natural choice for the post. His passion for teaching and the manner in which he taught is remembered, however, not only by undergraduates but also by his postgraduate trainees, as many generations of ENT

registrars will testify. His book *Common Diseases of the Ear, Nose and Throat*, started during National Service when he had time on his hands, was published in 1950 and ran to four editions.

He became an examiner in the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. In 1968 he was elected president of the section of otology of the Royal Society of Medicine shortly before his retirement. Reading served as medical adviser to the Commonwealth Society of the Deaf.

Philip Reading was a skilled otological and head and neck surgeon, a born teacher, and a wise and compassionate doctor. He set himself high standards to which his juniors aspired, and served as the role model of kindness, courtesy, modesty and intellectual honesty.

He retired from Guy's in July 1969 and moved with his family to Alfriston in East Sussex where he devoted himself to his books, music, wood carving and his beautiful garden. In 1935 he married Kathleen Seery, a Guy's nurse, who died in 1994. He leaves his daughter Pat.

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