

Obituary

JESSIE DOBSON, MSc

Miss Jessie Dobson, who died on 19 June 1984, was Curator of the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons of England from 1954 to 1971. She was appointed to this post after the death of Frederic Wood Jones, FRS, whose assistant she had been in the restoration of the Museum following the Second World War. She completed the work, begun by Wood Jones, of remaking the Museum as John Hunter had planned it: a display of specimens to illustrate adaptation of structure to function throughout nature, including the human body, in each physiological system, in health and disease. The remnant of Hunter's collection was refurbished, and the gaps filled by replicas based on his descriptions.

Jessie Dobson became an expert in methods of museum display, and an authority on Hunter and his contemporaries. She crowned her work by compiling the *Descriptive catalogue of the physiological series in the Hunterian Museum*, published by the College in 1970–71 in two large volumes, which was based on a thorough study of Hunter's manuscripts and the various printed catalogues of the old Museum. She also proved an excellent lecturer and demonstrator.

She was born at Salford, Lancashire, on 11 July 1906, the daughter of Frank and Gertrude Dobson (née Whimparry). She graduated BA Manchester in 1927, and took the Diploma in Education in 1928. After teaching in a girls' school at Eastbourne for several years, she went back to Manchester, qualified as an Associate of the Institute of Secretaries, and was appointed secretary to Professor J. S. B. Stopford, FRS, in the anatomy department of the Manchester University Medical School, and then to his successor, Wood Jones. When, on retiring, Wood Jones was called to London to restore the Hunterian Museum, he persuaded Jessie Dobson to follow him. She had taken the MSc at Manchester in 1944 by thesis, and was inspired by her chief's wide-ranging unconventional interest in all aspects of natural history to explore, and write about, the background of her work in the Museum.

Miss Dobson's first book was a useful annotated catalogue of *Anatomical eponyms* (1946, 2nd ed. 1962). This was followed in 1954 by a life of William Clift, FRS, who was appointed the first Curator of the Hunterian Museum when the government gave it to the Royal College of Surgeons in trust for the nation. Sir Richard Owen, the great comparative anatomist, who was Clift's son-in-law and successor, developed the Museum on a vast scale before moving to the British Museum to refound the natural history departments. Just before she died, Jessie Dobson had completed a life of Owen, which awaits publication. She published in 1969 a life of John Hunter, which showed him in the context of his times, and explained the didactic purpose of his collecting.

After retiring, she played an active part in many societies. She was elected a Trustee of the Museum for which she had done so much; was for a time a curator of the Hunterian Society's memorabilia and prepared their catalogue; was archivist of the Barbers' Company and wrote, with Robert Milnes Walker, FRCS, a history of *The barbers and barber-surgeons of London* (1979). She was also president of the Osler Club of London, and a vice-president of the Section of the History of Medicine at the Royal Society of Medicine. Her natural enthusiasm sometimes outran her judgement, and led her to rush into print without adequate checking or acknowledgement of her sources, but she was warm-hearted, generous of time and help, and a loyal friend, who will be missed by a host of friends from all the groups with which she was associated.

William LeFanu
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