Obituary

James Reid Wheeler, 1898–1973

James Reid Wheeler, formerly Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon in the Belfast Ophthalmic Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital, died at his home on March 22, 1973.

Born in Belfast on December 27, 1898, the son of a surgeon at the Royal Victoria Hospital, he was educated at the Methodist College. In 1917 he volunteered for the Royal Artillery, and served in France where he was wounded twice and mentioned in despatches. He qualified M.B., B.Ch., B.A.O., in 1923 and after house appointments went to the London Hospital where he studied for and took the D.L.O. (1926) and D.O.M.S. (1927). In 1929 he became F.R.C.S. (Ed.), and thereafter returned to Belfast where he joined the Belfast Ophthalmic Hospital, and shortly afterwards the Royal Victoria Hospital, as a member of their Honorary Visiting Staff. To these institutions and to the teaching of students he devoted himself with application and enthusiasm.

In 1937 he was appointed Lecturer and Head of the Department of Ophthalmology in the Queen’s University and was later made a member of the first Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority. From 1961–1963 he was Chairman of the Medical Staff Committee of the Royal Victoria Hospital.

In professional organizations Mr. Wheeler played a full part, being a member of the O.S.U.K. and the Royal Society of Medicine where he was President of the Section in 1959. During his year of office the Section met in Belfast. He was a Council member of the Faculty of Ophthalmology and of the Ophthalmic Group Committee of the B.M.A. He was a past president of the Irish Ophthalmological Society and of the Ulster Medical Society.

In his younger days Jim Wheeler was an outstanding exponent of rugby football and while a student figured in the University Fifteen as a member of several famous teams. He played as one of the half for Ireland on five occasions. Later, as a referee, he took charge of several international matches, including three for the Calcutta Cup. He was president of the Irish Rugby Football Union in 1959 and retained until the end his interest in the game.

To him, as the leader of the group of medical staff concerned, is due much credit for the commodious and well-equipped “Eye and Ear Clinic” opened for use just as he retired. To his colleagues who worked with him he has left a memory of a maturity in his professional outlook and of an integrity and a love of humanity that was all his own.

He is survived by his wife, who had been a fellow student and who helped him for many years as a clinical assistant in the Belfast Ophthalmic Hospital, and by a son and two daughters, to whom we offer sincere sympathy.