Obituary

Alexander Tomkin, MA, MB, BCh, FRCS, DO

Alexander Tomkin died at the early age of 47 on 16 May 1984. Born in 1936 in Dublin, he received his early education at Castle Park Preparatory School and at St Columba’s College, Dublin. He subsequently entered Dublin University and graduated in medicine from Trinity College Dublin in 1960, receiving the MA in 1964. He decided early in his medical career to specialise in ophthalmology and was appointed house officer to the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin, where his father Dr Harris Tomkin was an eminent ophthalmic surgeon.

In 1965 Alex was appointed resident ophthalmic surgeon to Moorfields Eye Hospital, High Holborn, London, and was in the vanguard of contemporary Irish surgeons to serve in this prestigious institute. Alex gained the diploma in ophthalmology in England in 1964 and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1969. On leaving Moorfields Eye Hospital in 1968 he worked as senior registrar in ophthalmology at St George’s Hospital in Tooting. In 1969 he returned to Dublin to join the consultant staff of the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital and later became consultant ophthalmologist to Dr Steven’s, Sir Patrick Dunn’s, and the Rotunda hospitals and the National Children’s Hospital in Harcourt Street. He also joined his father in private practice at 1 Fitzwilliam Square and developed a special interest and expertise in the field of therapeutic contact lens practice. Alex played a major part in the organisation and administration of the diploma and fellowship examinations of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and was a capable fund raiser and administrator, being honorary secretary of the Medical Board of the Eye and Ear Hospital until shortly before his death.

In 1972 Alex married Julie Hajnal in Hungary, and since that time they both worked tirelessly towards the advancement of the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital and in particular the development of the ophthalmic research unit. A keen musician and an accomplished cellist, in his time he played for the London Hospitals Orchestra and in various string quartets among his friends in Dublin. Above all, Alex was a family man, never happier than with his children whether instructing them in music, tennis, or on holiday abroad. He will be greatly missed by his Irish ophthalmological colleagues and his many other friends for his warmth, kindness, generosity, and unswerving integrity in all matters. Few will forget his fortitude in the last year of his life and his resolve to serve his patients until literally a few days before his death. He leaves a widow and three children.

Maurice Henry Whiting, OBE, MB, BChir, FRCS

Maurice Henry Whiting died on 19 June 1984 four months before his 90th birthday. Most of his professional life was spent as honorary ophthalmic surgeon to the Middlesex Hospital and the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital, later Moorfields Eye Hospital. Earlier in his career he had served with distinction as ophthalmic specialist with the Royal Army Medical Corps in the first world war, for which he was mentioned in dispatches and later awarded the Order of the British Empire. He also served the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Paddington Green Children’s Hospital, and St Saviour’s Hospital. He was President of the Old Millhillian’s Club in 1950 and of the Downing College Association in 1953. He delivered the Montgomery Lecture in 1933 on ‘Modern developments in cataract surgery,’ and his book on ophthalmic nursing reached its 7th edition in 1959. He was elected President of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom for 1950 and 1951.

Maurice Whiting’s surgical career was seriously disrupted by the first world war, and it was not until this ended that he was able to take the FRCS. But unlike most of his contemporaries, with only one exception on the Moorfields staff, he formed a sound basis for his career by becoming house ophthalmologist at the hospital and later its pathologist.

Shortly after becoming FRCS in 1920 he was appointed honorary consultant to the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital and for 25 years carried out his unpaid duties with complete loyalty. He brought from the Army valuable experience of wounds of the eye and was most proficient in removal of magnetic intraocular foreign bodies, which even in civilian life were common when steel hand tools and hammers were in general use. He was skillful in the use of the giant magnet to draw forward the foreign body through the suspensory ligament without damage to the lens for final removal by hand magnet through a corneal incision.

Maurice’s surgery was characterised by thoroughness and careful attention to detail based on the sound training he had been fortunate to receive in early years. His techniques, though effective, may appear very crude to the modern generation of consultants, who are ophthalmologically his grandchildren, but were up to date in their day and served as models for his assistants, many of whom later became his successors. Though his own surgery with only local anaesthesia was conservative and his cataract extractions extra-capsular, preferably without iridectomy, he kept an open mind and was interested in the development of intracapsular extractions and later intraocular lens implantation.

Maurice’s personality was cheerful and serene. Even the death of his son in 1942 in action with the Royal Air Force seemingly failed to ruffle his calm, though the loss of his only child grieved him very deeply. In 1952 his first wife died suddenly after a long illness, and later he married Dorothy Miller, a widow with six adult children. She had worked as an ophthalmologist at Moorfields for many years and was distinguished in being the youngest of 20 children. She and her family restored great happiness, and her loving care made the closing stages of Maurice’s long life comfortable, enabling him to retain interests and to attend reunions and ophthalmic meetings until well into his tenth decade.

Note

Paediatric ophthalmology

The New Orleans Academy of Ophthalmology will hold its 34th annual symposium on paediatric ophthalmology and strabismus on 20–24 February 1985. Details from Emily Busby, Executive Secretary, New Orleans Academy of Ophthalmology, 2025 Gravier St, Suite 512, New Orleans, LA 70112, USA.