

# OBITUARY

Peter Wright, FRCS FRCP FRCOPHTH

b 7 September 1932, d 26 May 2003

Peter Wright was an exceptionally gifted ophthalmologist whose energy and accomplishment extended into other fields. As youthful in his attitude to life as in his appearance, his death at 70 has dismayed his friends and colleagues, especially those who were unaware that he had been battling for some years with chronic myeloid leukaemia.

Born a Londoner, he was educated at St Clement Danes and King's College, and graduated MB, BS in 1955, having won prizes in both ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology at King's College Hospital. Simultaneously he was studying music, and for a period was unsure which of his two main interests he should follow. Recognising that medicine had the stronger hold, he put his energies into a highly productive career that was briefly interrupted by national service in the Royal Air Force. After lectureships in anatomy and physiology at Guy's Hospital Medical School he was appointed to the house at Moorfields Eye Hospital. On gaining his fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England he took a senior lectureship at the Institute of Ophthalmology and a year later became senior registrar in ophthalmology at King's College Hospital, an appointment that was followed soon afterwards, at the age of 33, by a consultant appointment in the same department, which he held for the next 13 years.

Having encountered both Sir Stewart Duke-Elder, the director of the Institute of Ophthalmology, and Barrie Jones, the professor of clinical ophthalmology based at Moorfields, Wright's ambitions homed in on exciting developments that were taking place in London ophthalmology. With unerring vision, Jones had established a network of special interest clinics at Moorfields, which provided both a superb clinical service and an ideal environment for clinical research. Wright was duly appointed as consultant in charge of the external disease service and became responsible for



clinics that catered for a wide range of conditions. He took a special interest, which in his case meant a deep involvement, both intellectual and practical, in tear deficiency and dysfunction, and in infective, inflammatory, immunopathological, and cicatrising disease of the ocular surface. His medical world, like the diseases that fascinated him, encompassed not only ophthalmology but also other specialties such as dermatology and rheumatology. It fell naturally to him to identify and characterise the proctolol oculo-cutaneous syndrome when it emerged. A steady stream of thought provoking publications forms the permanent record of this long and fruitful period of his life. Those who were fortunate enough to be taught by him, through the Moorfields registrar rotation and at King's, were witness to a clinical phenomenon combining profound knowledge, rigorous logic and exemplary thoroughness, leavened by a disarming humanity, which made an unforgettable and at times transcendental impression.

Honours in the form of six named lectureships and acclaim, both national and international, followed. Wright transferred to a full time position at Moorfields and after a term as president

of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom became involved in the foundation of the College of Ophthalmologists, first as a member of council and ultimately in 1991 as its second president. It pleased him that the college achieved royal status during his term of office.

Wright was very proud of his three children, and often spoke of them. The family was devastated when his only son was lost in the Lockerbie air disaster, and there was further sadness when, a few years later, his 32 year marriage to Ella Donoghue was dissolved. He subsequently found companionship with John Morris, with whom he moved to Devon on his retirement in 1994.

Wright's private life was that of a Renaissance man, replete with interests in most of which he excelled. His musical world centred on the piano, on which he delighted in playing, with great aplomb, the most complex and formidable scores; his contributions to many an OSUK and college concert became almost legendary. In retirement he installed two Steinway grand pianos in his music room and hosted local piano recitals and workshops. His approach to both gardening and culinary skills was equally ambitious and thorough. A supremely thoughtful and generous host, Wright brought together friends from his many spheres and entertained and charmed them all.

Blessed with a need of little sleep, Wright achieved more than most during his barely greater than biblical span. His sheer energy and breathtaking productivity may have disorientated some, of whom he could be at times dismissive; but he won the admiration of his colleagues, the gratitude of his pupils, the confidence of his patients, the affection of his numerous friends, and the respect of all who were fortunate enough to know him.

Roger J Buckley