

Obituary

DR ROBERT GREENHILL COCHRANE
CMG, MD, FRCP, DTM & H
1899–1985

With the passing of Dr Cochrane, the doyen of British leprologists, we come to the end of an era. He did more than anyone of his generation to 'put leprosy on the map' and to advocate that the disease should be studied scientifically. He was the first to use dapsone in the treatment of patients suffering from leprosy, and was senior author of a book that was for several years the standard text on leprosy. He had many associations with BELRA (now LEPRO), but he was bigger than any one organization—he was a world figure.

Robert Cochrane ('Bob' to his friends) was born on 11 August 1899 of missionary parents in China. When but a few months old, his life almost came to an untimely end, for the whole family was captured by the Boxers, and narrowly escaped. Nothing daunted, they returned to China after leave in Britain. His father, Dr Thomas Cochrane had visions of founding a Christian Hospital and Medical School. With money from the Chinese reparations to the Great Powers and a personal gift from the Empress Dowager herself, he embarked upon the creation of the prestigious Union Medical College in Peking.

The young Cochrane received his early education from his mother, but when he was 9 he entered the School for the Sons of Missionaries in Blackheath, later in Eltham, where he was awarded his Rugger colours and founded a Christian Union. He graduated in Medicine from Glasgow University in 1924, and took the Conjoint Diplomas and the London DTM & H. The same year, he sailed for India under the auspices of the Mission to Lepers (now the Leprosy Mission), and, after sitting at the feet of the renowned Dr Ernest Muir in Calcutta for 3 months, he was appointed to Purulia and then Bankura in West Bengal. During this time, he began his world travels, in the course of which he met several outstanding leprologists in the Far East.

He severed his connection with the Mission in 1927, the year he was admitted to MRCP. The next year, he submitted a thesis on leprosy to his old University, for which he was awarded its MD. In 1929 his long association with BELRA began, when he became its first Medical and General Secretary. This young organization (founded in 1925) needed a person of Dr Cochrane's drive and professional standing in those early critical days. In this capacity he resumed his journeys abroad, visiting the West Indies and several countries in Africa. He was invited to Manila in 1931 to a meeting of persons interested in leprosy called by the Leonard Wood Memorial Foundation. It was here that the International Leprosy Association was founded. Dr Cochrane became its first Secretary-Treasurer.

In all these travels and contacts, including a short spell in India in 1932, he was building up his acquaintance with leprosy as a world problem, but he felt that he ought to resume clinical work to supplement his growing knowledge. He therefore (in 1935) applied for appointment, successfully, as Chief Medical Officer of the Chingleput Leprosy Sanatorium (known then under the name of Lady Willingdon), and while there was asked to become Director of the Leprosy Campaign for the whole of Madras State. He continued to discharge these functions when, in 1942, he began his long association with the Bellare Christian Medical College and Hospital. For 3 years (1948–51), he was

back at Chingleput again, before he left India, having been awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal in Gold, First Class, for his outstanding public services.

For the next 3 years, he resumed his connection with BELRA, as its Medical Secretary, but he had other irons in the fire. He founded the Leprosy Research Fund in 1951, which was renamed the Leprosy Study Centre in 1965—a teaching, co-ordinating and histopathological reference Centre. Part of the funds necessary for this initiative came from Dr Cochrane's appointment as Technical Leprosy Adviser to the American Leprosy Missions Inc, and part from the Wellcome Trust. Based in London, Dr Cochrane was being called upon increasingly by governments and missions to advise on their leprosy programmes and to conduct seminars. He was a most stimulating—not to say provocative—lecturer. He kept himself up to date, and encouraged clinicians and others to interest themselves in the disease that he himself found so fascinating. It was he who saw the possibilities of a rimino-phenazine derivative known under its code number of B 663, and prevailed upon me to conduct clinical trials in Nigeria. Now known as Lamprene (or clofazimine), this drug is generally recognized as an excellent anti-leprotic, with anti-inflammatory activity.

Dr Cochrane was unashamedly a Christian. It was his faith that motivated him and inspired him in his varied and long life. It kept him going during the years when he was campaigning for the inclusion of leprosy in medical curricula, and for the abolition of the stigmatizing epithet 'leper'. Some people might have felt that at times he was a little too aggressive and self-opinionated, but they forgave him because of his undoubted qualities and his pertinacity.

His memory is perpetuated in the 'Robert Cochrane fund for Leprosy', which is administered by the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, and in the incomparable collection of some 16,000 series of stained histopathological sections housed in the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London.

Dr Cochrane leaves, to mourn his loss, a widow (his second wife), and 3 children from his first marriage.

Many people in many lands will honour the memory of a great and a good man.

STANLEY G BROWNE

The following is reprinted from *The Times*, 6 August 1985. © Times Newspapers Ltd.

Dr Robert Cochrane, one of the world's leading leprologists, who played a noteworthy part in the introduction of modern sulphone therapy died on August 3 at the age of 85.

Robert Greenhill Cochrane, son of Dr Thomas Cochrane, the famous missionary founder of the Union Medical College, Peking, was born in North China on August 11, 1899. He was educated at the School for the Sons of Missionaries (now Eltham College) Blackheath and did his medical training at Glasgow University and St Bartholomew's Hospital, London. He had already decided to devote his life to leprosy and, in the mid-1920's under the auspices of the Mission to Lepers, sailed for India to work at Purulia in Bihar after a period of special training in Calcutta. He rapidly earned a high reputation as a worker in the field of leprosy.

In 1929 Cochrane was appointed general and medical secretary of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA), but in 1933 he returned to India and began his great work as chief medical officer of the Lady Willingdon Leprosy Sanatorium at Chingleput, Madras, which soon attracted the best leprosy research workers in India, and which was chosen, after independence, to become the All India Institute of Leprosy Research and Training.

In 1944 he was appointed director and principal of the Christian Medical College at Vellore. He converted the institution from a women's college to a co-educational one and played a leading role in making it the outstanding medical college in India.

In 1948 Cochrane returned to England and rejoined the service of BELRA for a period before leaving to become technical medical adviser to American Leprosy Missions Inc working from London. With help from the Wellcome Medical Foundation Cochrane founded the Leprosy

Research Fund and financed the leprosy centre in Wimpole Street to aid leprosy research and training. From 1961 to 1965 Cochrane was adviser on leprosy to the Ministry of Health and consultant leprologist to the Tropical Diseases Hospital. In 1966 he returned again to India to work in Madras State. Then in 1968 he transferred his activities to Tanzania under the Africa Inland Mission.

Cochrane performed notable service in getting leprosy recognised as a “respectable” disease worthy of integration into general medicine, in pioneering early diagnosis, and in introducing sulphone into treatment. He also helped persuade surgeons to take an interest in the prevention and correction of deformities. The textbooks which he wrote became standard works on the subject.

A sincere practising christian, Cochrane was equally at home in the pulpit and at the bedside.

From his first marriage in 1927 to Ivy Nunn he had three children, two of whom have served in the mission field. After the death of his first wife in 1966 he married in 1968 Dr Martha Jeane Shaw, a missionary in Tanzania, who survives him. While at the Vellore Medical college, Cochrane was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind medal, first class in gold, for public service in India. In 1969 he was appointed CMG.

DR STANLEY GEORGE BROWNE CMG, OBE

It is with the greatest of regret that we announce the death of Dr Stanley Browne on 29 January 1986. A full obituary will be published in the June issue of this Journal.

Editor