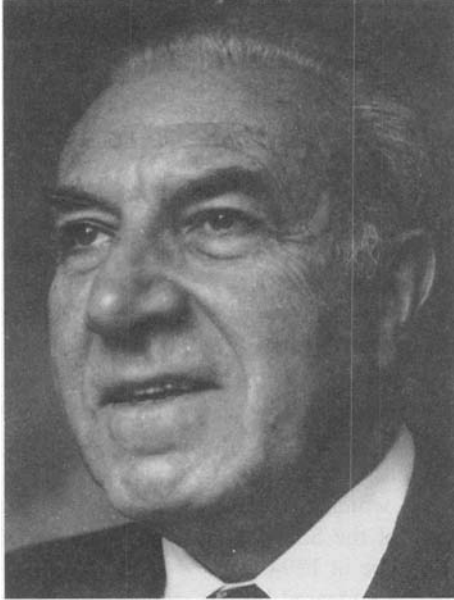


Obituary



WILLIAM H. JOPLING, 1911–1997

Dr William Jopling, well known to nearly all leprologists of his generation through his writings, research and friendship, died on 21 August 1997 at the age of 86. He was a specialist in leprosy, a humane physician and a family man who enjoyed life.

Born of British parents in Italy, he went to school in England and then studied medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London. Later he gained the FRCP at both the London and Edinburgh Colleges. After undertaking a variety of junior hospital posts, he travelled as ship's surgeon on a six months voyage to the Far East. This was followed by appointment as Government Medical Officer in the Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) Medical Service, where at one time he was the only doctor for some 70,000 patients scattered over a huge area, about the size of Yorkshire. This proved to be an impossible assignment, and he was obliged to spend the war in Africa. He decided to learn more about leprosy after learning that a leprosy patient of his could only travel by rail if ankle deep in lime! He also took the patient to hospital by car. Subsequently, he paid visits to a leprosarium and spent one of his leaves there. After the war he returned to London, and took a post at the Hospital for Tropical

Diseases where he was later appointed Consultant Leprologist. He also became Consultant in Tropical Dermatology at St John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin, and he retained both these posts until his retirement. Other appointments included membership of the Editorial Board of *Leprosy Review* over a number of years. His contributions were always valuable.

William Jopling's eminence was as a clinician. He was an astute observer, with shrewd judgement with an understanding of his patients that owed much to the time he devoted to them; there was nothing he would not do for a patient in need, and many became devoted to him.

He seldom initiated research, but the dependability of his clinical judgement made him an invaluable and much sought after research partner, and for many years he was a central figure in the Hospital for Tropical Disease's leprosy research programme. When in 1950 the Jordan Hospital was established to cater for 24 leprosy inpatients at Earlswood in Surrey, the Jopling family were put in residence. (A situation that initially caused embarrassment among the local community.) Although there were only a small number of patients the proximity to London offered an outstanding opportunity for clinical research. These patients, perhaps the most intensively investigated leprosy patients anywhere at any time, became a model for what could be achieved in pilot trials. This hospital closed in 1967 when it became possible to treat the patients on an outpatient basis in London, but the programme continued. Jopling's first researches were therapeutic evaluations, old drugs versus new. This was a field that he never gave up, and later he conducted an early trial of multidrug therapy in Malta. He had a matter-of-fact turn of mind, and a preference when permissible to simplify. These qualities were much needed at a time when orthodox leprology was weighed down with niceties as the distinction between reactional tuberculoid and tuberculoid in reaction, borderline and dimorphous, and this was true particularly in relation to the classification with which his name is linked. His work in this field, which did so much to clarify the understanding of leprosy, was recognized by the award of the Sir Rickard Christophers medal of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in 1994.

His good humour and commonsense endeared him to students; teaching was one of his more important contributions to leprosy, and beyond that to tropical dermatology and medical practice in the tropics. In addition to lectures and articles Jopling was the author of a range of books that were all well received. His main work, *Handbook of Leprosy*, has just reached its fifth edition. Other titles were *Treatment of Tropical Diseases*, *Differential Diagnosis for Practitioners in the Tropics*, and *Travellers Guide to Health Protection Abroad*.

William Jopling was a generous friend, and long after retirement he remained in touch with old colleagues from around the tropics. In his younger days he was an athlete and rugby player, and he enjoyed fishing. Among his other interests he composed music, setting poems to song. He was a man of political conviction, and in a tolerant sort of way a supporter of left-wing causes. During the last three years he suffered progressive illness and failing eyesight, remaining always outwardly cheerful and grateful for his good fortune. He was twice married, and is survived by his first wife, their three sons, a daughter and eleven grand children.

D. S. RIDLEY