



Appreciation: Ronald A. Cohen

By Khursheed F. Moos

Ronald Alban Cohen, a great scholar and dental historian, teacher, and dental surgeon, died on November 12, 2001 at the great age of 94. It was my privilege and great pleasure to have worked with this gifted, unassuming perfect gentleman between 1969 and 1974; at that time I knew relatively little of his scholarship. He was the appointed dental surgeon to the Warneford Hospital, Leamington Spa, but had his dental practice in Warwick. As the respected chairman of the local family practitioner committee for 17 years he had an intimate knowledge of dental and medical practitioners in the area, and I learned much from him about dentistry and the local hospital service. His loyalty and advice to the newly appointed consultant were invaluable and greatly appreciated.

At that time, I had little interest in dental history but Ronald would often come out with interesting comments and words of wisdom and it soon became clear that here was a great expert and an erudite scholar. He had been a distinguished student in the Birmingham Dental School and had maintained his links there as honorary lecturer in dental history and senior research fellow. He was responsible for founding the Dental History Unit, with later support from the Wellcome Trust. For some 21 years he delivered, biennially, an historical lecture at Queens University, Belfast, and he lectured widely in the UK and in Europe. He gave the MacGregor lecture at the University of Birmingham, the Menzies Campbell lectures in the Royal Colleges of Surgeons of England and Edinburgh, and the Wallis lecture at the Royal Society of Medicine.

He was a reticent man who never sought honours but was awarded many, including an honorary MA from Birmingham University, a Fellowship from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and from the Society of Antiquaries. He was one of the first Tomes Medallists and the first recipient of the Lindsay Medal, and an honorary member of the Lindsay Society. There were also honorary memberships of the American Academy of the History of Dentistry and of the *Société Française d'Histoire de l'Art Dentaire*. He was president of the Central Counties branch of the BDA, the Odontological Section of the Midlands Medical Institute, and vice-president of the Odontological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine as well as chairman of the Leamington Medical Society.

He had a long creative life, with 100 literary contributions: these included the introduction to the facsimile of the first English dental text in 1685, Allens operator for the teeth. He edited the centenary history of the British Dental Association. The Lindsay Society in 1997 marked his ninetieth birthday uniquely with a booklet containing a selection of his major historical papers over 60 years of writing.

It was my pleasure to search more recently for dental historical items for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons' quatercentenary and for a talk on the history of orthognathic surgery. My first port of call was Ronald – receiving as always a very

warm welcome and hospitality. Immediately, he was able to pinpoint certain items in his superb historical library for me to take out and study there, and subsequently there were invaluable letters, comments and suggestions and a desire to know how everything worked out, and a request for a copy for himself.

Betty, his first wife, by whom he had a son and two daughters, died in 1976, which was a huge loss. Muriel, whom he had known for some time as librarian of the BDA, in a sense came to his rescue and they married in 1981, creating a most successful partnership which, with her support, led to a further 20 years of creative literary activity, which has sadly come to an end. Both Muriel and Ronald were perfect hosts and were always delighted to see one, but one had to be careful with gifts of wine, as Ronald (a founder member of the Warwick Claret Club) had a discriminating nose. He was also an excellent after-dinner speaker with a superb sense of humour and timing, which was always greatly appreciated by the company, whether they were students or senior colleagues.

Ronald was indeed a perfect Christian, English gentleman, self-effacing and courteous, always warm and welcoming, a man of wisdom and wit and a true master of dental history whom it was my privilege and honour to know. We shall sadly miss his kindly presence but rejoice in the memory of his friendship over so many years.

Acknowledgement to Derek Barrowcliff – funeral address