

Obituary**JOHN ALFRED LEE**

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First President of the History of Anaesthesia Society

The British History of Anaesthesia Society mourns the loss of Dr Alfred Lee its Immediate Past, and First, President (1986-1988). British and world anaesthesia acknowledges with sadness the passing of one of the great pioneer leaders of the modern specialty, the most dramatic developments of which to date were echoed by the milestones of his own career.

Doctor Alfred Lee, a son of the manse, was born in Liverpool in 1906. He qualified in 1927 from the medical school of Newcastle upon Tyne, which was then an integral part of the University of Durham. He then held a variety of resident appointments at the Royal Victoria Infirmary and other hospitals in Newcastle upon Tyne, including some that involved the administration of anaesthetics. He was thus unusually well qualified for his generation when he set up in practice at Southend-on-Sea as a general practitioner. Many of his contemporaries would have gone straight into practice after qualification.

It is almost certainly no more than a coincidence, but a fortunate one, that like the great nineteenth century anaesthetist John Snow, who also served his medical apprenticeship in the Newcastle upon Tyne area, Alfred Lee combined general practice with the administration of anaesthesia at the local hospital. It was this beginning that, in later years, led to Southend General hospital becoming a Mecca for both trained and trainee anaesthetists.

Dr Lee continued in general practice until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, when he became a whole-time specialist anaesthetist in the Emergency Medical Service. This organisation cared for both civilian air raid casualties from the London area and wounded servicemen evacuated from the various war zones. He passed the Diploma of Anaesthetics (then the only existing qualification in anaesthetics) in 1940 and continued in the Emergency Medical Service until the organisation was disbanded after the end of the war. The first edition of Lee's famous 'Synopsis of Anaesthesia' was published in 1947 following this war service.

The inauguration of the British National Health Service (N.H.S.) in 1948 enabled Dr Lee and many other anaesthetists to become salaried consultants devoting their time exclusively to anaesthesia without having to combine it with previously financially essential private practice.

The 'Synopsis' rapidly became a best seller. It was immediately recognised as a vade mecum for anaesthetists of every seniority and nationality, both for immediate consultation in the clinical context and as a source of vital references for further reading. The book has run to ten English editions, and it has been translated officially into six other languages as well as being pirated in the Far East and elsewhere. Dr Lee was the sole author of

the first four editions. He was joined first by one, and then by two of his colleagues at Southend and continued to undertake his full share of the work involved in compiling successive editions up to the time of his sudden, though not entirely unexpected, death. He also edited or contributed to several other volumes on local anaesthesia and a history of his own hospital.

Alfred Lee retired from full-time employment in the N.H.S. in 1971 on reaching the compulsory retiring age of 65, but he continued to work and teach actively as a locum in the Southend Department and elsewhere until after his eightieth birthday. He was a superb practising clinician, always on the lookout for new ideas throughout his career. His special interests were in the field of regional anaesthesia and in pre- and post-operative management; indeed it was he who organised the first post-operative (recovery) ward in the United Kingdom and one of the earliest pre-anaesthetic evaluation clinics. He rejoiced in the performance of practical skills such as blind nasal intubation, and he actually passed his own endotracheal tube under local anaesthesia before subjecting himself to general anaesthesia for thyroidectomy.

Dr Lee's reputation as clinician and teacher drew many overseas students to Southend in addition to his established N.H.S. residents. The Department was very well organised and time was allowed for study even in the era before such concessions were either expected or usual. Many anaesthetists throughout the world have good reason to remember his teaching skills, patience, kindness and interest in their welfare and prospects with deepest affection.

Alfred Lee was President (1959) and Hickman Medallist (1976) of the Section of Anaesthetics of the Royal Society of Medicine, President (1972-3) and later an Honorary Member of the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland and he was elected and re-elected to the Board of Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal College of Surgeons of England; he was the Faculty Clover Lecturer in 1960 and was awarded the Faculty Gold Medal in 1976. It cannot be said that he found public duties or public speaking entirely enjoyable, but he undertook them willingly, competently and successfully.

Alfred Lee received many well-deserved honours; in addition to those already mentioned, he was elected to the Honorary Fellowship of the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1970, he was Gaston Labat Lecturer to the American Society of Regional Anesthesia (1985), Thomas Seldon Lecturer to the International Research Society (1986) and Koller Gold Medallist and Lecturer at the meeting of the European Society of Regional Anaesthesia held in Vienna in 1984 to commemorate the centenary of the first public demonstration of the use of cocaine as a local anaesthetic.

Alfred is survived by his wife Norah after a marriage which lasted nearly 60 years; like her he was a lover of opera and they frequently attended the major festivals such as those at Bayreuth and Glyndebourne together; to her Alfred's friends and colleagues express their deep sympathy.

Dr Alfred Lee's knowledge of the history of anaesthesia, particularly that of regional anaesthesia, was encyclopaedic and made him the natural choice as the Founder President of the History of Anaesthesia Society; indeed his career spanned nearly half the modern era of anaesthesia which began in 1846, and the most dramatic period in the history of the specialty. Many will remember with great pleasure his very interesting and humorous address to the Second International Symposium on the History of Anaesthesia in 1987, in which he described his experiences as a house surgeon anaesthetist in 1927. The contributions Alfred Lee ('the King') himself made to the specialty during the six subsequent decades cannot be acknowledged adequately.

T.B.Boulton

President History of Anaesthesia Society
Senior Registrar Anaesthetist
Southend-on-Sea, 1957-8

TRIBUTE TO Dr JOHN ALFRED LEE

Dr R.A. Atkinson

Alfred Lee died on 27th April. He enjoyed a wonderful life, witnessing the evolution of anaesthetic practice from the days of the gauze mask to the present time. Moreover, he was interested in all these developments, even after retirement and right up to the last week of his life. He attended the meeting of the Section of Anaesthetics of the Royal Society of Medicine at the beginning of April and was the first to register for this meeting in Edinburgh.

Alfred was interested in all branches of the specialty, but especially in regional analgesia, extradural block and the history of anaesthesia. We are proud that he was the first President of this Society. He is, however, best remembered as the author of the 'Synopsis of Anaesthesia', the first edition of which appeared in 1947 and the tenth in 1987, something of a record in itself. He contributed many articles to the literature on historical and biographical subjects and was the British editor of the Proceedings of the First International Symposium on the History of Anaesthesia.

Dr Lee was the first President of this Society and as such played an important part in the design of the logo and tie. He was pleased that the meeting eighteen months ago was held at Southend. Always a good supporter of meetings at local, national and international levels, he was often to be seen in the hospital library and visited the offices of the Association of Anaesthetists in the week of his death.

It is not possible in this address to mention all his achievements. Suffice it to say that he made contributions to all our national bodies. He was a member of the Board of Faculty and was awarded the Faculty Medal. He was President of the Association of Anaesthetists and before that Assistant Editor of 'Anaesthesia' and Chairman of the Editorial Board. It is now 30 years since he was President of the Section of Anaesthetics of the Royal Society of Medicine in 1959. He has also received the Hickman Medal. Foreign honours include the award of the first Carl Koller Medal of the European Society of Regional Anaesthesia on the occasion of the centenary of the first use of local analgesia in Vienna and the invitation to deliver the Gaston Labat Lecture to the American Society of Regional Anesthesia.

What of the man? He was acclaimed as a teacher, and took particular interest in overseas graduates. Indeed, he was in Thailand at the beginning of this year. Repected for his wisdom, he was also known for his absolute integrity and for his humility. He was a loyal friend and there must be many in this room who have received a little note of encouragement or thanks following some service or contribution.

We have lost a great man.