

## Obituary

### **Professor Ruth Bowden OBE, DSc, MB, BS, FRCS, FRSM**

It is with deep regret that we report the death, on 19th December 2001, of Professor Ruth Bowden, aged 86 years.

Born 21st February 1915, Ruth Elizabeth Bowden was the only child of the late Frank Harold and Louise Ellen Bowden. She was born in India, but spent much of her childhood in Richmond. Educated at Westlands School and St Paul's Girls' School, Ruth then took medical training at the London (Royal Free Hospital) School of Medicine for Women. Despite being born into a family with strong Protestant affiliations—her father was a Baptist preacher who actually died in the pulpit—she converted to Roman Catholicism in her twenties. Her early career coincided with the war, when new techniques in neural and plastic surgery were being introduced. The problems of peripheral nerve injuries among the casualties were great, and Ruth's researches contributed greatly to the advances that were made in the knowledge and management of such disabilities.

Her widely varied career included time as House Surgeon and later House Physician of the Elizabeth Garret Anderson Hospital (1940–1942); House Surgeon of the Royal Cancer Hospital (1942); Graduate Assistant in Nuffield Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and the Peripheral Nerve Injury Unit in Oxford (1942–1945) a branch of medicine to which she made a significant contribution. She was Assistant Lecturer in Anatomy, Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine (1945), later Lecturer, then University Reader in Human Anatomy (1949). At just 36 she became Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine (London University), a post she held for 30 years.

Ruth won a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship (1949–1959) which enabled her to carry out special research at the polio laboratory at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore, and the results of her work were published in 1951. Also in that year, she gave a Hunterian Lecture at the Royal College of Surgeons of England on factors influencing functional recovery after peripheral nerve injuries. She later became Hunterian Professor, at the Royal College of Surgeons. WHO Consultant in Anatomy in Khartoum University on several occasions (1972, 1974 and 1977); Ruth was also part-time Lecturer, Department of Anatomy, St Thomas' Hospital Medical School (1980–1983). She became Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine from 1951 to 1980 (later Emeritus), and President of the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1970. After retirement, Ruth took over the Chair of Anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

She was a member of both the Executive Committee (1989–1997) and Medical Advisory Board (1993–2001) of LEPRO, and was also a Hospitaller member of the Charitable Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem. Ruth was extremely active in the women's educational movement, and Riding for the Disabled. Ruth was a Patron of the Saint Gregory's Foundation,

which fights to relieve the poverty and suffering of the peoples of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. She was awarded the Jubilee Medal in 1977.

She was a Fellow of the British Orthopaedic Association, Vice-President of the Linnean Society; Vice-President and Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (Chairman 1960–1970); Honourable Research Fellow at the Institute of Neurology since 1980, and President of the Institute of Science Technology from 1960 to 1965).

In her concern for women and their role in society, Ruth had been a leading light in the Medical Women's Federation for many years, and served as President (1981–1982). She was a Member of the Executive Committee of the Women's National Commission from 1984, and on the Council and Executive Committee of the North London Hospice as Chairman of the Professional Sub-Committee.

One of her greatest interests was the repair of nerve damage in leprosy, and she wrote several articles on the subject: *Peripheral Nerve Injuries* (1958); contributions to *Peripheral Nerve Injuries Report of Medical Research Council*; contributions to the *Oxford Companion to Medicine* and contributions to medical scientific journals including *Leprosy Review*. She made many visits to India, where she trained surgeons to repair nerve damage caused by leprosy, to enable those with the disease to regain the ability to work by restoring movement in their hands. Her choice of recreation was reading, music, painting, walking, gardening and carpentry.

She gave enormous support to many medical students and to doctors during her years in the profession, and provided support and friendship to colleagues or their families whenever she heard of someone who was distressed or bereaved. She will be greatly missed by all those whose lives she had touched and influenced. A Requiem Mass was said for her at the Church of the Assumption, Warwick Street, London on 11th February, and a Memorial Service was held at the Royal Free Hospital on 22nd February.

IRENE ALLEN  
(for Lepira)