

Obituaries

WILLIAM RICHARD LEFANU

(1904–1995)

The death of William LeFanu on 1 April at the age of 90, marks the end of an era in medical librarianship. He was born on 9 July 1904 into an Anglo-Irish family of Huguenot origins and strong literary associations. Educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, where he took a first in the Classical Tripos in 1926, his first appointment was as Assistant Librarian at the Hellenic Society. Two years later, in 1929, he was appointed Librarian of the Royal College of Surgeons, a post he served with great distinction until his retirement in 1968.

The library was then badly in need of modernization and LeFanu set about this with the support of Sir D'Arcy Power, the Honorary Librarian. In 1937 he collaborated in a survey of London medical libraries, which recommended that they should be completely reorganized on a co-operative basis, but the war intervened before the report could be implemented. In 1938 there appeared his first major publication, *British periodicals of medicine 1684–1938*, still valuable today.

In 1940 LeFanu and the library were evacuated to Shropshire, leaving only a core collection in Lincoln's Inn Fields. When the College was bombed in May 1941 the library survived, though badly damaged, but most of the building was destroyed. The post-war period was very busy; the library's stock was moved constantly as rebuilding work progressed and its role was expanded to provide for the needs of a new teaching and research institute on the College site. LeFanu revived his ideas for improved co-operation between medical libraries when, with colleagues, he founded the Library Association Medical Section and, in 1953 chaired the First International Congress of Medical Librarianship. At this time he published his *Bio-bibliography of Edward Jenner* in 1951, on whom he became a recognized authority.

His many contacts brought him international recognition, particularly in North America, where he delivered the Garrison lecture in 1971. In 1963 he was Visiting Librarian at the Osler Library, McGill University. Among his many friends were Sir Charles Sherrington, a generous donor to the library, and Sir Geoffrey Keynes, successor to D'Arcy Power as Honorary Librarian. It was LeFanu who provided the translations for Keynes' editions of Thomas Browne and William Harvey.

Tall, spare and aristocratic, with a gentle and courteous manner, LeFanu was a wise counsellor and a delightful friend. The most modest of men, he wore his learning lightly and was unfailingly generous to those who sought his aid. He was joint editor of three volumes of the *Lives of the Fellows of the RCS*, and compiled the definitive catalogue of the College's portraits and sculpture, handlists of John Hunter's books and early English books in the College library, as well as innumerable articles and reviews. In retirement he edited family papers and published a study of Nehemiah Grew, the naturalist. President of the Huguenot Society from 1956 until 1959, it was largely through his influence that its library was deposited at University College, London.

In 1930 he married Elizabeth Maconchy, the composer: they had two daughters, the youngest of whom is now Professor of Music at York University. Their later years were clouded by his wife's illness and he nursed her until shortly before she died, in December 1994, only months before his own death.

Ian Lyle