

Obituary

JOHN JOYCE KEEVIL (1901-1957)

IN a review of *Medicine and the Navy, 1200-1900*, vol. I, in the *Lancet*, a succinct tribute to the accomplishments of Dr. Keevil was paid by the reviewer when he commented on the fact that no one, sailor, surgeon, or man of letters, had until now written a history of naval medicine, and added that this deficiency had been made good by one who had distinguished himself in all three vocations.

Dr. Keevil, having been educated at Marlborough, and Caius College, Cambridge, joined the Royal Navy in 1927. With his distinguished naval services we are not here concerned; but rather with his contributions to medical history. He had displayed an interest in this field early on, and when he retired from the Navy in 1946, and later became keeper of the library of the Royal College of Physicians, he expected the appointment would provide opportunities to pursue this interest. That this proved possible, his articles on Goulston and Scarburgh, and his books on the Hameys show; but he had first to attend to the restoration of the College library after the war, a task that was exacting both physically and mentally. To it he brought patience and meticulous care, and the present fine condition of the books is due in a very large measure to him alone. All the time, however, he was impatient to undertake historical research. It came as no surprise when he resigned his appointment at the College at the end of 1952. For a while Dr. Keevil acted as honorary visiting representative for the British Records Association, and most painstakingly laid the foundations for the Association's approach to London solicitors in connection with the campaign for rescuing accumulations of documents.

About the end of 1954 he gave up this work and devoted himself to what would have been his chief contribution to medical history, and for which, as has already been suggested, no one was more adequately equipped. His interests in librarianship had been theoretical rather than practical. Nevertheless, he was ever ready with his advice and never unwilling to share his learning with others. Many were the conversations we had together; these were always stimulating and ranged over a wide field. He held strong views about those would-be writers who expected librarians to do almost all their work for them. In one of the last letters I received from him he returned to this point. 'I know writers abuse the assistance given . . . when my volume II reaches print you will see how much my debt to librarians is acknowledged.' Though he has not lived to see this work through to its end, his place as a medical historian is assured.

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