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JJC Cormack LVO, MD, FRCGP, FRCPEd 1934-2002

Socius Librorum Custos

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Abstract

When the history of the Royal Medical Society in the second half of the twentieth century comes to be written, a name which is certain to feature prominently in it will be that of Jack Cormack, whose death on 7 July 2002 is a most grievous loss not just to the Society but to the entire Edinburgh medical community. There was never a more faithful champion of the Society's highest ideals and it was this which inspired his incomparable service to it in many different capacities.

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J. J. C. Cormack LVO, MD, FRCGP, FRCPEd 1934-2002

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When the history of the Royal Medical Society in the second half of the twentieth century comes to be written, a name which is certain to feature prominently in it will be that of Jack Cormack, whose death on 7 July 2002 is a most grievous loss not just to the Society but to the entire Edinburgh medical community. There was never a more faithful champion of the Society's highest ideals and it was this which inspired his incomparable service to it in many different capacities.

John James Callender Cormack, the son and grandson of well known and highly respected general practitioners was born in Edinburgh in 1934 and educated in his native city at the Edinburgh Academy and at Edinburgh University from which he graduated MB.ChB in 1959. As a proud and loyal Academician he was honoured and delighted at a later stage in his career to serve for 18 years on his old school's Court of Directors, to the affairs of which he made a notable contribution.

He joined the Society at the beginning of its 219th session and from the very first was a highly active member who rapidly developed an enthu-

siastic reverence for its history and traditions and a very special interest in its remarkable library. At an early stage he was appointed to the Library Committee of which in 1958-59 he became a most energetic and efficient Chairman and this responsibility stimulated him to investigate in detail the library's history. The result of these studies was the scholarly dissertation entitled simply "The Society's Library" read to the Society on 28th February 1958 for which he was awarded the Fellowship. This is not only a fascinating and highly readable account of the development of a most extraordinary collection of books but also an authoritative reference document.

After holding resident posts in Edinburgh, Jack spent two years working overseas first with the Grenfell Mission in Labrador and then in the Mission Hospital Mlanje Nyasaland (Malawi). He returned to Edinburgh in 1963 and joined his father in the Corstorphine practice which had been founded by his grandfather 38 years previously. Over the next three and a half decades this expanded progressively and at his retirement in 2000 Jack was the senior partner of a large, efficient and very highly regarded group practice.

Despite having professional commitments Jack maintained close contact with the Society and continued to be involved with the Library. The sale of the greater part of it to raise funds for the rehousing of the Society caused him no little distress but he accepted that there was no practical alternative and willingly gave expert advice on the selection of those volumes of special interest which were retained by the Society.

When the R.M.S. Trust was established in 1980 he was invited to become a Trustee and to take on the duties of Joint Trust Treasurer. It would be impossible to exaggerate the value of his services in these capacities over the next 22 years and many Senior Presidents and other office-bearers owe him a substantial debt of gratitude for the wise counsel and sound practical advice which he gave both graciously and unobtrusively.

His warm rapport with the Permanent Secretary Mrs Pat Strong ("A.P.") was immensely beneficial to the Society in all sorts of ways. Her death in 2001 affected him deeply and the very moving address which he delivered at her funeral was a truly heartfelt tribute which will be long remembered by all who heard it.

In 1985 a Steering Committee was formed to plan the celebration of the Society's 250th Anniversary and Jack undertook its Chairmanship with the utmost pride and pleasure. A year later he was appointed Vice-Chairman of the 250th Anniversary Appeal and the success of this and of the commemorative celebrations was in no small part due to his energy and enthusiasm.

Jack's higher qualifications bear eloquent testimony to his professional distinction but the ultimate accolade came in 1992 with his appoint-

ment as Apothecary to H.M. Household at the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Following his retirement this and other outstanding services were recognised by the award of the Royal Victorian Order with the rank of Lieutenant (L.V.O.).

Jack was a man of many parts and a list of the non-medical activities to which he made his own distinctive contribution would fill many columns. He was highly articulate with total clarity of thought and an unfailing ability to focus upon the essentials of any problem which made him a Key member of the many committees, both lay and professional, on which he served. These additional duties were invariably discharged punctually and efficiently in a straightforward self-effacing manner.

Throughout his life Jack never deviated from a personal code of conduct based solidly upon courtesy, consideration for others, and firm religious convictions but solemnity and austerity were foreign to his nature. He greatly enjoyed convivial gatherings, not least those organised by the Society and was a polished and entertaining after-dinner speaker. His splendidly dramatic rendering of "Tam o'Shanter" was an absolute tour-de-force which by itself could guarantee the success of any Burns Supper and the Society had the pleasure and privilege of hearing this on many occasions.

Jack Cormack's warm out-going personality, his easy gracious manner, his strength of character, his kindness and his compassion endeared him to his patients and his host of friends from all walks of life, who are united in mourning his untimely death. No member of our Society has served it more diligently or enthusiastically and we salute his memory.

Mr Iain MacLaren FRCS