

Obituary: Norman Roy Grist (1918 - 2010)

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Norman Roy Grist was born in Doncaster on 9th March 1918. His inquisitive mind and love of nature was evident at an early age. Among his childhood possessions were astronomy books and a telescope. When he moved to Glasgow as a schoolboy he lived in Shawlands where he put the garden to good use; he set up a den with his Meccano set, created a museum with a Great Diving Beetle as a central exhibit, and made an aquarium in a basin with snails, beetles and tadpoles.

At Shawlands Academy he excelled academically, especially in Science. He expanded his love of music, made many friends and cycled through the Highlands. He became Dux of the school, and gained a Bursary to Glasgow University where he studied for a combined science and medical career. As a student at the outbreak of war, Roy volunteered to help man a First Aid Post in Pollokshaws Baths. He graduated BSc in 1939 and MB, ChB in 1942.

In 1941 he met his future wife Mary. During many tennis matches, films, theatre visits and dances, they got to know each other, and they were married in 1942. Wartime duties and university studies kept them apart for much of the war.

After completing his medical studies, Roy embarked on military training in Leeds, which led to his involvement in the D-Day landings as a captain in the Royal Medical Corps. He went from the beaches of Normandy through Northern France, Belgium, Holland and through to the Rhine, enduring many hardships of war, and later went on to serve in Palestine.

Returning to Glasgow in 1946 he was reunited with Mary, now discharged from the WAAF, and started what became an internationally renowned medical career. His specialism was infectious diseases, at which he excelled. He pioneered research into influenza at

Knightswood and Ruchill Hospitals in Glasgow which helped to improve the lives of many Glaswegians. While his reputation spread internationally he continued with his love of natural history; for example taking great delight in pointing out Kestrels nesting in the tower of Ruchill Hospital.

By 1952 Roy was a lecturer in virus diseases, and became head of the Regional Virus Laboratory at Ruchill from 1958 to 1983. He became closely involved with the World Health Organisation, travelling abroad giving lectures, some of them in his fluent French. He became Professor of Infectious Diseases at Glasgow University in the mid 1960s. Meanwhile, previous collaboration with other leading workers in the field led to the formation in 1967 of the Communicable Diseases (Scotland) Unit, recognised as a prime example of a national surveillance centre. He was honoured by the Spanish Government for his meticulous study (with others) of the Legionnaire's Disease outbreak in Benidorm in 1973.

He was part of the virology initiative in creating the first virus laboratory, was a founder member of the first university virology department in 1962, and advised the Western Regional Hospital Board from 1960 to 1974. He was a member of the Expert Advisory Panel on Virus Diseases to the WHO from 1967 to 2001. He developed a diagnostic and epidemiological service in smallpox and polio.

Roy retired in 1983 but never stopped inquiring and learning. Roy's life with Mary was central; they shared many interests and were always together. They continued various activities into their eighties, including their cottage in Arran which they shared with Mary's brother Angus and his family. For 40 years they lived in their home at Sydenham Court, where they enjoyed working in the garden and watching wildlife.

They were both keen members of the Glasgow Natural History Society and this undoubtedly played a big part in their lives. Roy was President of the GNHS from 1993 to 1996. His almost obsessional interest in natural history was demonstrated at a medical colleague's retirement when he was wearing his slug tie and talked about slugs in his garage from the starter right through to the coffee with no problem at all. His passion for wildlife and knowledge generally was amazing. He edited the GNHS newsletter for many years until 2004, when he passed it over in very good shape to his successor.

Roy and Mary were very sociable, outgoing people, and it was with great sadness to Roy that Mary passed away in 2009. Roy's life was appreciated greatly by many people. He lived a good life and the world was a better place for his contribution to it. Roy spent his final year in the Red Cross House at Erskine Care Home. Even there he had a computer set up with an

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internet connection and would still send contributions for the GNHS newsletter!

Roy died on June 7th, 2010 at the age of 92.

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