

Obituary

RICHARD J DURLING
(1932–1999)

Richard Durling's early and tragic death on 5 June 1999 came as a deep shock to his family, his many friends and past and present colleagues. The history of medicine and science during the medieval period has lost a fine and devoted scholar.

A Devonian in origin, he was educated at Sherborne School, Dorset, before proceeding to Cambridge as a Scholar of King's College for training in Classics. After the national service usual for men of his generation, he trained as a librarian at University College London. His introduction to medical history began when he joined the Wellcome Library as an Assistant Librarian in 1958. Noël Poynter, the then Librarian, gave him considerable freedom to pursue interests in early printed books and manuscript studies. One early result was his Library School thesis on the bibliography of sixteenth-century editions of Galen, subsequently published in summary form by the Warburg Institute in 1961. His subsequent, post-Wellcome, career was a sustained effort to achieve his major goal of a life of scholarly research whilst, for much of the time, having to earn his living as a librarian.

After a brief sojourn at the University of Kansas, he was Chief Cataloguer for the History of Medicine Division of the National Library of Medicine at Bethesda between 1962 and 1968. The public fruit of this period was the masterly *Catalogue of sixteenth-century printed books in the NLM* published in 1967. A more private triumph was his marriage with Sheila Parker in 1963.

To an extent Richard shared, and was certainly troubled by, the ambiguous attitude of the academic community to bibliographic work—is it scholarly research or mere librarianship? An unsatisfactory sojourn at Cambridge University Library as Assistant Under Librarian between 1968 and 1972 can only have sharpened his sense of frustration as his scholarly plans and abilities were swamped by the drudgery of everyday librarianship. His scholarly vision was always larger than the employment opportunities available to him until his final appointment at Kiel University as a Research Fellow in 1972. Here at last was the context in which he could blossom as a leading scholar of the medieval Galen.

His life's work (as he once described it in correspondence) was the explication and publication of the Galenic texts in their medieval phase: Galenus latinus. His intention was a complete account of the Latin Galen in Paul Oskar Kristeller's much admired series, *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum* (1960 onwards). This *magnum opus* was still unfinished at his death, but his editions of Burgundio of Pisa's translations of *De complexionibus* (1976) and *De interioribus* (1992) as well as *A dictionary of medical terms in Galen* (1993) more than fulfilled his self-imposed scholarly obligations. It is good news that his Galenic work is to be continued by other hands.

Wide cultural and scholarly interests, including a passion for music (particularly that of Bach and Purcell) made Richard a stimulating colleague. His erudition could be alarming but was invariably quickly tempered and defused by a self-deprecatory quip. Richard was an important member of that relatively small band of scholars that, over the last few decades, has rescued medieval medicine from the grip of the quaint and anecdotal and placed its study firmly in the mainstream of the history of medicine and science.

Our sympathies are with his colleagues at Kiel and in particular with his wife Sheila and their two sons.

Eric Freeman