

## Obituary



**JOHN ANGELL-JAMES, CBE, M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S.  
(1901-2002)**

*The following tribute was given by John Ballantyne at the Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of John ('Jack') Angell-James at St Mary's Church, Thornbury, 22 July 2002.*

We have come here to give thanks for the life and work of John Angell-James, who was born over a hundred years ago on the 23rd August 1901, and whose life came to a peaceful end just a few weeks ago on the 19th June.

Son of a highly respected general practitioner, Jack, as he was known to all his friends and colleagues, was born in the small Hampshire town of Odiham, but soon moved with his family to Bristol, where he spent all his schooldays and almost the whole of his professional life.

After education at Bristol Grammar School he entered the medical school of Bristol University where he qualified in 1924 – not just qualified but

qualified with First Class Honours; and in the same year he gained a similar qualification in the University of London, again with Honours and with Distinction in Medicine.

A notable athlete in his student days, he played hockey for both university and county.

Three years after qualifying, Jack became a Doctor of Medicine in the University of London and a Member of the Royal College of Physicians, followed a year later by Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Armed with this rare combination of higher postgraduate qualifications in both Medicine and Surgery, he then decided to specialize in Otolaryngology, that branch of surgery devoted to affections of the ears, nose and throat; and at the astonishingly early age of 27 he was appointed as Honorary Ear, Nose and Throat Surgeon to the Bristol Royal Hospital for Children, and in the

following year to the Bristol Royal Infirmary – this at a time when all consultant hospital appointments were voluntary, that is to say, unpaid.

Ten years later came the Second World War and he served in the rank of lieutenant-colonel in North Africa and Italy, becoming consultant adviser in Otolaryngology to our Middle East Forces in 1945. Soon after the end of hostilities Jack returned to the Bristol General Hospital, where I had the great privilege of working as his Registrar from January 1947 to January 1949, a period which saw the inception of the National Health Service. During that time he became one of the first British surgeons to use the binocular operating microscope which is now used almost universally in the most sophisticated surgical procedures. Head of his department from 1955, he retired from the National Health Service in 1966 but continued with private practice and research into his 80s.

He treated all his patients and all his staff with the utmost courtesy and kindness, and he was known to all his nurses and all of us junior doctors simply and appropriately as ‘The Angell’.

There was nothing within the burgeoning surgical repertory of our specialty which Jack did not perform with great skill, but it was in the 1960s that he established the international reputation which he was to enjoy for the rest of his life – a reputation based largely on his pioneering work in two highly specialized fields. One of these was in the removal, by way of the nasal sinuses, of the pituitary gland at the base of the skull, either for tumours of the gland itself or as a palliative form of treatment for patients with certain types of cancer; and he performed these operations with instruments of his own design which are still in use today. His other special contribution was in the destruction by ultrasound of that part of the inner ear responsible for balance, and used in patients suffering from crippling attacks of vertigo in the condition known as Ménière’s disease. This latter procedure was developed in association with senior members of the departments of Physics and Veterinary Science in the University of Bristol, and it was often carried out in the presence of one of these basic scientists.

His work on these subjects resulted, not only in the award of numerous prizes but also in visiting lectureships throughout the British Isles and in Africa, Australasia, Canada, Europe and India; and many honours followed, including Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians in 1965, the CBE in 1967, Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1971 and in 1975 the one which he valued perhaps above all others, Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Society of Medicine.

Without superior in the *surgical* field, John Angell-James also achieved great distinction in the *scientific* branch of our specialty, not least as a member of the international Collegium Oto-Rhino-Laryngologicum Amicitiae Sacrum, in which he served as a Councillor from 1966 to 1974 and its President in the latter year: and in 1978 he was

elected the first President of the Otolaryngological Research Society, which annually awards an eponymous prize in the name of Angell-James for the best piece of research presented at its autumn meeting.

In the *educational* field he was a founder-member of our Specialist Advisory Committee, the body responsible for quality control in postgraduate specialist training; and in 1975 he was Master of the Fourth British Conference in Otolaryngology in London.

Finally, in the realm of medical *politics* he was President of the British Association of Otolaryngologists from 1966 to 1969.

Hence, in every aspect of our specialty – surgical, scientific, educational and political – he held the very highest office; in short, he was the undisputed doyen of British otolaryngology.

All this no doubt sounds very serious, and Medicine is a serious profession, but Jack also had a lot of fun in his day-to-day contacts with friends and colleagues. I had the good fortune to belong to the same travelling club as he, the Visiting Association of Throat and Ear Surgeons of Great Britain, of which (inevitably) he became president, for 1965 and 1966; and I was also lucky enough to share many happy times with him at conferences and congresses. Let me give you one example.

On the way home from a world congress in Mexico, we stopped off for a few days in Jamaica, and we hired a car. I don’t think that Jack and his lovely wife Eve knew quite what they were letting themselves in for when they entrusted their lives to me and another colleague of my own vintage who competed every year in the Monte Carlo Rally, always came in last, but never failed to finish; and one day we had what could only be described as a rather ‘hairy’ drive between Kingston in the south and Ocho Rios in the north; and between outward and return journeys a most enjoyable hour or so shooting the rapids, in two small boats navigated by two young Jamaicans. It was an exciting day which still lingers vividly in the memory, but it was only one of many joyful days which Jack must have had in his extensive travels.

The announcement of his death in the newspaper columns referred to him as ‘Surgeon and Farmer’, and as one who was his assistant and subsequently colleague for more than half his life, I have concentrated so far on his career as a surgeon; so what about John Angell-James the farmer?

Let me quote from an article which appeared in a national newspaper not long after he began to take up farming in a big way in the early 1950s.

‘SURGEON-FARMER gives experts a shock’.

‘A Surgeon who took up farming as a hobby startled the cattle world yesterday on the first day of the Bath and West Agricultural show at Taunton. Tall Mr John Angell-James and his stately Guernsey Holmbush Hollyhock Romeo won the breed’s supreme championship in brilliant sunshine’.

'It was clearly a shock win by a small farmer who was up against the leading Guernsey breeders'.

It may have been a shock to the leading breeders, but it would have come as no surprise to those who knew him because he did nothing by halves.

As in surgery, so in farming, Jack won many prizes and awards, not least important being a silver medal at the International Dairy Event at Stoneleigh Park in 1974, for the best new equipment, a resuscitator for newborn calves.

He was also a keen horseman who hunted regularly with the Berkeley Hunt, and he derived much pleasure from his Wessex saddleback pigs; but again, as in his professional life so in his farming, it was not without its hazards – as on the occasion when one of his pigs earned its name of saddle-back as it rushed between his long, wide open legs, sweeping him off his feet and carrying him, back-to-front, halfway across a field before he was able to dismount.

In addition to all these activities, he was a pillar of his parish church and for many years church warden.

The greatest sadness in Jack's life was the loss, four years ago, of his beloved Eve with whom he shared an exceptionally happy marriage for close on 70 years; and now that he himself has left us, we offer our condolences to his children – Roger, Rosemary and Jenny – and to their children and their children's children.

John Angell-James was a big man in every way, and he lived his long life to the full. Fortunately, despite the progressive blindness which clouded his later years, he was able to commit much of his life to posterity, and only days before he died he dictated his last contribution to an autobiography; and that, surely, will tell us much more about the life and times of John Angell-James, Surgeon and Farmer Extraordinary.

JOHN BALLANTYNE

The *JLO* is pleased to reproduce the following papers by Jack Angell-James and his co-workers which have been previously published in the Journal.

All the papers were ahead of their time, '*Gun blast and the use of moulded ear defenders*' recognized the need for ear protection at a time when none was available. '*The ultrasonic treatment of Ménière's*

*disease*' whilst not original in method was in technique. Angell-James's contribution was to carefully regulate the dosage of ultrasound sufficient to destroy the balance mechanism without disturbing the hearing. The Semon Lecture 1965, published in December 1967, brings together Angell-James's pioneering work on transthemoidal/transsphenoidal hypophysectomy.

EDITORS