Dr Donald Albert Leigh
9th May 1935–17th March 2009

The Journal does not routinely include obituaries but does publish appreciations of those who have made outstanding contributions to the Journal, its parent society (the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy) or related branches of the professions. Donald Leigh, who died peacefully in his nursing home on 17 March 2009, did so in all three aspects.

Donald was Treasurer of the BSAC for 16 years (1976–92). He was largely responsible for the financial establishment of the Society and the Journal (being its business manager), the ability to purchase their own headquarters and, more recently, the funding of research awards. He was most appropriately described by David Speller (in his account of the first 21 years of the BSAC) as the ‘universally celebrated treasurer and personality’. Without Donald it is unlikely that the BSAC or Journal would be where they are today. He was also treasurer of the International Society of Chemotherapy.

Donald was born in Hunan, China, where his father was a Methodist missionary. The family caught one of the last boats returning to England before the outbreak of war in 1939. Soon after, Donald’s father was killed in a return visit. Donald went to a boarding school when 7 years old and another, Kingswood School (founded by John Wesley of Methodist fame), at 10. He played in the school rugby and hockey teams.

In 1953, he became a medical student at St Mary’s Hospital in London, where he played rugby and drank for the hospital, as was customary for the male students; he also played water polo for the hospital. He qualified in 1959, and in his first post (a ‘top’ one), spent 6 months as house surgeon to the fearsomely famous Mr Arthur Dixon Wright. He then went to Edgware General Hospital in North London as House Physician, followed by a Senior House Officer post in Accident & Emergency and orthopaedics. He did 4 months as a Medical Officer in the Canadian Air Force in France and 10 months as a Registrar in Pathology at Hemel Hempstead. Perhaps in need of rehabilitation, he returned to Edgware as a Registrar in Microbiology with Dr Bill Brumfitt (little did he know!). This was followed by a stint as a Senior Registrar, including 2 years back at St Mary’s and The Wright Fleming Institute (with Professor R. E. O. Williams). As others have found, these posts could not have been bettered as a foundation for a career in Medical Microbiology, as Donald was to prove after he became Consultant Microbiologist at Wycombe and Amersham District General Hospitals in 1969.

Donald was always very determined, efficient, thorough, well organized, thoughtful, creative, productive and utterly dependable, but never let any of that interfere with his good nature or sense of humour. As a single handed Consultant, he was directing the laboratory diagnostic services for the hospital and general practices, providing clinical advisory and on-call help. He was clinically much involved, for example running a weekly outpatient clinic and doing 200 domiciliary visits a year. In 24 years (1964–88) he was an author on 129 publications, with urinary tract infections and antimicrobials, particularly their therapeutic uses, his major interests. Others were wounds and anaerobic infections, peritoneal dialysis and other infections in renal transplant patients, skin infections, hospital cross-infections and disinfectants. He was a regularly invited speaker at national and international meetings and symposia. He was editor of eight supplements of the JAC.

In addition to hospital committees, Donald was a member of advisory committees on HIV, technical issues (HSE), design of pathology laboratories (DHSS) and infection control nursing courses (PHLS). All together, this is a remarkable record of activities and achievements.

In 1989, he had a subarachnoid haemorrhage in the brain, made a good recovery, but then suffered a stroke in 1992. This led to early retirement and a long period of incapacity. For 15 years, he was looked after at home by his wife Judy, whom he had met when she was a staff nurse at St Mary’s. They had two daughters, Jackie and Sam, and two grandchildren. Judy died in the summer of 2007 and, thereafter, Donald was cared for in a nursing home in Amersham.

Not surprisingly, Donald had a variety of interests and hobbies—playing the piano, bridge, conservation, philately, gardening, local history, golf and wine (though not necessarily in that order!). Donald will be remembered by us all with admiration for his achievements and contributions, and with affection for being one of the nicest of persons we ever knew.

Alan Percival