

## **Christopher Herbert Collins**

**OBE, MA, DSc, FBIOL, FIBM, FRCP.**

### **1919-2009**

Chris was often described as a gentleman and a rascal of the old school whose interest in biosafety was unwavering over many decades. Early career saw him as a trainee sanitary inspector and laboratory assistant to the Medical Officer of Health of the Borough of Luton where he worked on throat swabs for diphtheria. Progressing to full time laboratory assistant he enhanced his skills and knowledge by also attending the London County Council Pathology Laboratories at the Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, London.

Then the Second World War intervened and in 1939 he joined the Royal Air force (RAF) Volunteer Reserve and was sent to the RAF Institutes of Pathology, probably at Princess Mary's RAF Hospital, Halton (1927-1995) which later became the Institute of Pathology and Tropical Medicine. Chris tells that he was sent to Iceland to laboratories without equipment as this had been shipped in the opposite direction to Aden. He then spent time at the US Navy Hospital Laboratory.

After the war he returned to Municipal laboratories in Luton, Bedfordshire taking post as senior Technician. The Laboratory was soon to be taken over by the new Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) formerly the Emergency Public Health Service (1938-1943). A requirement at this time was for promotion one had to be a Fellow of the Institute of Biomedical Technology. Chris while employed fulltime submitted his thesis on the methods of culturing tuberculosis. Awarded the fellowship in 1951 and began work with the PHLS at County Hall, London. In this busy laboratory Chris maintained his interest in mycobacteria publishing a specialist report on the classification of environmental mycobacteria, he was promoted to Senior Technical Officer. In 1965 he attained membership of the Institute of Biology (now Society of Biology) and later a Fellow.

Chris Collins collaborated extensively with safety officers at MRE Porton Down on mycobacterium topics and produced a number of publications and appointment to Special Programme on Safety in Microbiology for World Health Organisation (WHO).

Retiring in 1985 did not diminish his enthusiastic activities in science and other interests. The same year he was awarded Fellowship of Royal College of Pathologists, a particular honour for one not medically qualified. The following year he was awarded Doctorate of Science and in 1972 made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to the health service. Characteristically he greatly impressed the Queen at the award ceremony at Buckingham Palace by wearing the Elizabeth of Glamis rose in his buttonhole.

Retirement was no rest being appointed Research Fellow at Kings' College Hospital and Senior visiting Research Fellow at the National Heart and Lung Institute now part of Imperial College School of Medicine. In 2002 he was awarded a Honorary membership of the European Biosafety Association as recognition for his services to biosafety. The Annual Conference presents a key presentation in his honour.

Throughout his impressive career he served on numerous national and international committees on laboratory safety, blood borne pathogens and microbiological disease of occupations.

Undaunted at the aged of 80 he enrolled at the University of Kent for a Masters of Art degree, submitting his thesis on Cholera and the Sanitary Revolution of the Nineteenth century England for the award in 2003.

The life time contribution to medical microbiology illustrated with over 50 papers and distinguished author of key text books known throughout the world. Numerous articles and publication including:

COLLINS C., P LYNE 1964 Microbiological Methods 2nd ed. 1970, 6th ed. 2004

COLLINS C.H. 1983 Laboratory acquired infections 4th ed. 1999

COLLINS C.H. 1985 Organisation and Practice in Tuberculosis Bacteriology 2nd ed.1997

COLLINS CH, KENNEDY DA 1999 Laboratory Acquired Infections 4th ed. Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann. ISBN 0 7506 4023 5

COLLINS CH, BEALE AJ (Eds) 1992 Safety in Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology. Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann.

COLLINS CH, GRANGE JM 1990 The Microbiological Hazards of Occupations. Leeds: Science Reviews. ISBN 0 905927 23 0

COLLINS CH, AW T-C, GRANGE JM 1996 Microbial Diseases of Occupations, Sports and Recreations. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann. ISBN 0 7506 2183 4

COLLINS CH, KENNEDY DA (Eds) 1997 Occupational Blood-borne Infections Risk and Management. Wallington: CAB International. ISBN 0 85198 629 9

In 1942 he married a cousin Elizabeth Anne and had two sons, John and Michael. Sadly Elizabeth died in 1966. He married three years later to Patricia Lynne with whom he shared an interest in microbiology, literature, art and music, the latter interest maybe from inheritance as his father was a professional violinist. They got a son, Laurence. Chris was blessed with five grandchildren.

Always good company he would share long tales with people of all ages and a source of witty anecdotes invariably with some deep significance. He declared himself fortunate to have met many distinguished microbiologists. He consistently encouraged and supported fledgling microbiologists. He embarrassed new technologies with ease but cautioned the need to stay grounded in the comparisons' with older techniques. Many microbiologist and biosafety professionals owe a great deal to his work and for those who met him hold him in high regard. In turn he paid tribute to the genuine leadership of the early Directors of the PHLS, Sir Graham Wilson and Sir James Howie, but had an intolerance for those in his words "who hid their incompetence behind a veil of self importance and status protection as they did no service to public health".

He believed the philosophy of life was brotherly love, relief of suffering and truth. Dedication and devotion brings its own rewards is well demonstrated in the life of Christopher Herbert Collins and earned him lasting respect and friendship.

He died suddenly and peacefully on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2009 in Hadlow, Kent aged 90. He is survived by his wife Patricia and three sons.