



Ian Pretyman Stevenson

Psychiatrist who researched reincarnation with scientific rigour

In a personal essay in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* in 2006 Ian Stevenson wrote: "We all die of some affliction. What determines the nature of that affliction? I believe the search for the answer may lead us to think that the nature of our illnesses may derive at least in part from previous lives. The cases of children who claim to remember previous lives and who have related birthmarks and birth defects suggest this; some such children have related internal diseases. My own physical condition, defects of my bronchial tubes (from early childhood on) of which I have written separately, has given me a personal interest in this important question. Let no one think I know the answer. I am still seeking."

Stevenson was born in Ottawa, Canada, in 1918. He died last month of a chronic lung infection. As a sickly child often bedridden with bronchitis, he was cared for by his devoted mother. He read widely in her library about oriental religions and theosophy.

Overcoming his childhood illnesses, he advanced scholastically, receiving a BSc degree in 1942 and an MD in 1943 from McGill University. He did

internships, residencies, and fellowships in Montreal; Phoenix, Arizona, where he was advised to go for his health; the Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation in New Orleans; Cornell University and New York Hospital, where he trained in psychosomatic medicine; and the New Orleans and Washington Psychoanalytic Institutes.

He trained as a Freudian analyst, but, "On the way up I acquired some reputation as a maverick," he wrote in his personal essay. One of his early papers argued that human personality was more plastic in childhood than the Freudians believed. It challenged doctrine and angered many colleagues.

His brother, Dr Kerr White, says that in New Orleans he began to look at the whole human being and switched to psychiatry. He had a personal psychoanalysis but found the Freudian method unsatisfactory. He met Aldous Huxley, read accounts of children recalling memories of past lives, and travelled widely to investigate these cases, which he carefully documented in his two volume book, *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects* (1997).

The vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation, Alan Gregg, told Stevenson, "The most important question is, 'Is there a life hereafter?'" but not many investigators were addressing the issue.

In 1957 Stevenson was appointed professor and chairman of the department of psychiatry at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. The university was founded by Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the US Declaration of Independence and became the second president of the United States. In founding the university, Jefferson wrote: "This institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth, wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it."

Stevenson was in contact with other parapsychology investigators such as Drs J B Rhine and Louisa Rhine at Duke University. That led him to investigate claimed memories of a past life by young

children. In 1960 he published an article in the *Journal of the American Society of Psychical Research* about these children. It was read by Chester F Carlson, inventor of xerography and father of the xerox machine. Carlson had trained as a scientist. He funded and followed Stevenson's research, even going on a field trip.

When Carlson died in 1968 he left a million dollars in his will to support Stevenson's work. That donation freed Stevenson from routine duties, and he stepped down as chairman, becoming head of the Division of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia.

Stevenson's colleagues say that his work has been denigrated even though he followed rigorous scientific studies, documented his findings, and published them.

Dr Jim Tucker, assistant professor of medicine at the university, told the *BMJ*, "His case reports are incredibly detailed. He put as much on the record as possible. It's often dismissed without looking at it."

He also added that, although cases are easiest to find in cultures with belief in reincarnation, Stevenson's group was finding cases in the United States and Europe, where interest was now higher, particularly among researchers at the University of Edinburgh.

The group is continuing to investigate children who claim to remember past lives, near-death experiences, out of body experiences, apparitions and after death communications, deathbed visions, and some other unusual experiences.

So, did Stevenson believe in reincarnation? His long time associate Dr Emily Kelly told the *BMJ*: "He believed the evidence was sufficient to permit a reasonable person to believe in reincarnation."

Stevenson is survived by his second wife, Margaret Pertzoff. His first wife, Octavia, died in 1984. He had no children. **Janice Hopkins Tanne**

Ian Stevenson, psychiatrist and former head of the department of psychiatry at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA (b 1918; q McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 1943; BSc), died from a chronic lung infection on 8 February 2007.

John Montgomery Bowen and Marjorie Ethel Bowen

Jack, former consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology Royal Gwent Hospital, Newport (b 1915; q Cardiff 1939; FRCOG), d 20 April 2006.

Marjorie (née Bright), former general practitioner (b 1915; q Cardiff 1939; BSc), d 13 December 2006.

Jack and Marjorie married in 1939 and shared many hobbies, excelling in golf, bridge, and gardening, and they were keen members of the Gynae Travel Club. From 1950 to 1980 Jack was consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology, initially covering the obstetric care for the whole of Monmouthshire. He was an examiner for the MRCOG and the assessor of maternal deaths in Wales.

After excelling at medical school in Cardiff, Marjorie worked in general practice. In latter years she was appointed to the medical assessment boards and as a justice of the peace.

They leave two sons and five grandchildren.

John Bowen



Margaret Anne Haigh (née Mitchell)

Former director medical department, British Council (b 1931; q Oxford/St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, 1955; MBE, MA), died from respiratory failure on 11 November 2006.

Margaret Haigh joined the London Ambulance Service in 1973, having been administrative medical director since 1969 of the British Heart Foundation. As the only doctor at the LAS she was responsible for "extended training" of ambulance crews in resuscitation, defibrillation, intubation, and intravenous infusion. She was awarded the MBE for gallantry in dealing with the Moorgate train crash of February 1975. By 1978 the extended training of ambulance staff was established and Margaret became director of the medical department of the British Council, retiring early in 1988 because of injuries in a car crash. Predeceased by her husband, Alan, in 2001, she leaves three children and four grandchildren.

Fiona Haigh

Macpherson Knowles

Former general practitioner Worcester (b 1918; q St Thomas' 1943; MRCGP), died from a stroke on 1 February 2007.

On qualifying, Macpherson Knowles worked at St Thomas', becoming senior casualty officer. In 1944 he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and was posted to the Grenadier Guards, serving mainly in Italy and Palestine. On demobilisation he returned to St Thomas' and then went to Roffey Park. In 1949 he went into general practice in Worcester, where he remained until his retirement in 1984. Macpherson was a foundation member of the Royal College of General Practitioners, receiving the gold foundation member medal in 2002. Always an active member of the BMA, he was representative, social secretary, and chairman of the local division, as well as chairman of the local medical committee in 1970. Predeceased by his wife, Joan, in 2006, he leaves two children and two grandchildren.

Polly Knowles

David MacLennan Piercy



Former consultant pathologist Hull (b 1930; q St Andrews 1960; FRCPath), died from oat cell cancer on 22 January 2007.

On leaving school David joined the Royal Air Force, where his career culminated in being deputy leader of the fly past for the Queen's coronation in 1953. Then the development of diabetes necessitated a change to his career. After graduation David became senior registrar and lecturer in pathology at Dundee Medical School. Later he was appointed consultant pathologist in Hull. He was president of Hull Medical Society in 1987, and elected an honorary member in September 2006. He leaves a wife, Gillian; four children; and nine grandchildren.

James M Dunlop

Frank Haddow Scadding



Former consultant physician Middlesex and Brompton Hospitals (b 1914; q Middlesex Hospital, London, 1937; MD, FRCP), died from bronchopneumonia on 29 April 2006. After five years' wartime service, partly in the Gambia, Frank Haddow Scadding left the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1946 as lieutenant colonel; he was later appointed honorary consultant to the army. Most of his clinical training was undertaken at the Middlesex and

Brompton Hospitals, and he was subsequently appointed consultant in general and respiratory medicine at both establishments until he retired at 65. In his early years he wrote extensively on tuberculosis and set up one of the first ward-based respiratory function laboratories at the Middlesex. In later life angina and asthma brought restrictions, which he bore without complaint. Frank's interests included sailing, model engineering, music and gardening. He leaves a wife, Helen; two children; and four grandchildren. **Patricia Chapman, Gabriel Laszlo, Angus Robson**

David Alexander James Williamson



Former consultant paediatrician Southampton (b 1917; q St Bartholomew's Hospital 1940; MD, FRCP, FRCPC), died from heart failure on 29 October 2006. Child health in Southampton owes much to David. Appointed consultant paediatrician at Southampton Children's Hospital in 1950, his broad vision, his determination, and his administrative ability were pivotal in modernising the work of the hospital and ensuring a smooth transfer to the new teaching hospital. He oversaw the successful integration of the academic unit into the service. He pioneered the use of combined and multidisciplinary clinics in the fields of disability, cardiology, and psychiatry. He opened a country branch of the hospital specialising in psychosomatic disorders; this work continues today at Bursledon House. He leaves a wife, Elspeth; four children; and nine grandchildren. **Leslie Bartlett**