

OBITUARY

William Fowler (1913–2008)

William (Willie) Fowler was born in Renfrew on 4 June 1913. He was the son of James and Kate Fowler whose home was Calderbank, then a village near to Airdrie in Lanarkshire. James, from being a boy soldier, now worked for his grandfather in the local steelworks.

Willie's early years were during the First World War. While his father was fighting in the trenches, Willie stayed for a time on a relation's farm in West Calder. His schooling was at Airdrie Academy, where he developed a lifelong love of literature fostered by his use of his grandfather's extensive library. Sportswise, he became highly proficient at football, acquired notoriety for the ferocity of his tackles, felling much larger men than his own diminutive five feet two inches!

He was awarded a Carnegie Scholarship to study medicine at Glasgow University, graduating in 1935. From there, he spent his residential year at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, where his wicked sense of humour was often allowed full sway!

He worked then at the Blackpool Victoria Hospital as a registrar. It was here he met and soon married Connie Corris, a striking and determined redhead from the Isle of Man. She was to be his wife for the next 69 years.

Following a very short time together, he was appointed a district medical officer in the then Rhodesia. Connie was to join him, but in 1939 realising that war was imminent he returned to the United Kingdom to join the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Their first son James was born in June 1940 at the height of the Glasgow blitz. Willie served for a short time as an MO at Rosyth Docks and Spurn Point enduring daily German aerial attack.

He was then posted abroad to Iraq and India. Husband and wife were not to see each other for 5 years.

During the war Connie and James spent time at the same Scottish farm as Willie had done during the First World War.

Serving in India he was involved with treating skin diseases, eventually heading his own unit with the rank of Major.

On his return home in 1945 he was appointed an honorary consultant at the Leeds General Infirmary and York Hospital.

At the inception of the NHS he became one of its first consultants.

In 1951 he and his family, now increased by two other sons, Donald born in 1946 and Ian in 1948, moved to Wolverhampton in the west Midlands. A daughter, Catherine, was born in 1955.

At the Wolverhampton Royal Hospital he took up the post of consultant in venereal diseases. Within a relatively short period of time, he became the consultant responsible for both Wolverhampton and Birmingham centres for the treatment of these diseases. (In common with many other unfashionable terms "venereal disease" is now subsumed in genitourinary medicine!)

In Wolverhampton he developed the Venereal Diseases Research Laboratory which became the Reference Laboratory for Syphilis Serology in the West Midlands until the mid-nineties.

He remained in this post until his retirement in 1977. During his time the units became centres of international excellence, with Willie in much demand as an adviser to government, international conference delegate and as senior lecturer at Birmingham University. In recognition of his service to his speciality, in 1972–4 he was elected president of the Medical Society for the Study of Venereal Diseases.

Indeed, in 1998, over 22 years after his retirement, the genitourinary medicine department, now at New Cross in Wolverhampton, was named the Fowler Centre in his honour.

In common with many highly intelligent men, Willie had numerous other interests with which he was passionately concerned. In the 1950s he was a very keen vegetable and fruit grower, not only producing record crops, but in scientific style, developing propagation techniques years ahead of their widespread use.

Golf was to become very important to him and he joined South Staffs Golf Club in 1951. He was to remain an active playing member until the late 1990s. He was helped in this by moving into a house adjoining the golf course with its own private gate onto one of the tees!

Willie and Connie were both excellent ballroom dancers; on many occasions their foxtrot clearing the dance floor as others looked on. In addition, his Scottish roots were maintained by their membership of the Wolverhampton Caledonian Society, which they joined in 1958. He became president in

1979–81. His wit and good humour produced many fond memories. The present president recalls how in 1988, at the 50th anniversary dinner, Willie and another medical man complained they could not hear the speaker. The MC informed them that they couldn't hear the speaker because of the noise they themselves were making!

It was in freemasonry that Willie found expression for his natural generosity to others and helping those in need. His father and grandfather had both been masons, the latter being initiated in 1895, his father in 1950 and Willie himself in 1958. He was installed Master of Faith and Works Lodge in 1972. He presented one of his own sons for initiation in 1976. Willie's oratory contained much wry humour, one visiting Grand Lodge Officer proclaiming that Brother Fowler's delivery was superb, it was just a pity that the rest of them couldn't speak Scottish!

Willie Fowler was in many ways an anomaly. Victorian in outlook and with a strict self-imposed moral code he demanded the best of himself and the others who worked or lived with him. In return he gave unflinching support, advice and friendship. Friendships that in many instances lasted his lifetime.

In 1999, due to increasing frailty, Willie and Connie moved to Cornwall to be cared for by one of their sons and his wife.

Willie died peacefully surrounded by his family on 4 January 2008. He leaves his wife Connie, their four children, seven grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren.

He is deeply missed.

T M Wanas

Correspondence to: T M Wanas, Sabrina Road, Wightwick, Wolverhampton WV6 8BP, UK; wanas123@btinternet.com

CORRECTION

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There was an error in the competing interests section of an article published in the June issue of the journal (Woodhall S, Ramsey T, Cai C, *et al.* Estimation of the impact of genital warts on health-related quality of life. *Sex Transm Infect* 2008;**84**:161–6). The statement should read: "CJNL has in the past acted as a consultant for Merck, Sanofi Pasteur MSD, GSK, 3M Pharmaceuticals and Stiefel."