

Noel Stephen Cracroft Rice KStJ MD (Cantab) FRCS FRCOphth.

Born Norwich, 26th December 1931, Qualified Cambridge/St Bartholomew's Hospital 1956.

Died from Motor Neurone Disease 5th November 2017

Consultant Ophthalmologist who pioneered surgical techniques in corneal and glaucoma surgery, which continue to influence clinical practice today.

Noel Rice, one of the pioneers of ophthalmic microsurgery, passed away from complications of motor neurone disease on the 5th of November 2017. His parents were a nurse and doctor and, as a grandson of a vicar, he had a strong ethos of duty and doing the right thing. Because of his medical background, he had knowledge of life before the NHS from his parents and was a passionate supporter of the NHS principle. He went up to Clare College in Cambridge where he met his first wife Brita and developed a life-long passion for Scandinavia. He followed in the family tradition of qualifying from Bart's, where he was House Physician to Sir Ronald Bodley-Scott and House Surgeon to Alec Badenoch. In 1957, he started his career in ophthalmology under Hyla (Henry) Stallard and continued his training as a surgical Flight Lieutenant at RAF Halton. After the RAF, he started his training at Moorfields Eye Hospital, where he remained for the rest of his career. He was appointed Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Ophthalmology in 1965, and in 1969 to the Consultant staff at Moorfields. He became one of the first corneal specialists in Europe as ophthalmology moved towards specialist areas.

He was one of the pioneers of microscope assisted surgery, which is now a key part of ophthalmic surgery, but which had previously been done with head mounted clinical magnification. He helped open the era of highly advanced micro-surgery for eye conditions. He had a life-long passion for corneal diseases and has recently had a corneal dystrophy named after him.

He also specialised in the care of children with the relatively rare but devastating condition of congenital glaucoma. He helped establish the corneal service at Moorfields and also the congenital glaucoma service, which is one of the largest in the world, treating children from all over the UK and the world. The outcomes for these children has now been transformed, in part because of microsurgery to the drainage angle, which he helped establish, and which has had a recent resurgence internationally. He pioneered the use of anti-scarring therapy in the form of a focal dose of beta radiation, which doubled the success rate of fistulising and was a precursor of modern anti-scarring regimens, which are now used worldwide to completely change the outcome of glaucoma surgery. Interestingly, new design beta radiation probes that can last decades and treat huge numbers of people have been proposed, which may provide practical adjunctive anti-scarring treatment to ensure successful glaucoma surgery, particularly in the developing world

Noel was Medical Director at Moorfields Eye Hospital, the largest eye hospital in Europe and the US, and also Dean of the Institute of Ophthalmology during a time of growth which helped lead to the joint site being the most productive ophthalmology research site in the world. Following his retirement from clinical practice, leaving a greatly expanded national childhood glaucoma and corneal service, he took on a new role as the Hospitaller of the Order of St John, where he helped the eye hospital in Jerusalem to thrive. He was subsequently made a Knight of the Order of St John for his dedicated service to the hospital, which still provides a free service to a huge number of patients in the area. In 1989, he was admitted to the Academia Ophthalmologica Internationalis and he was made a Fellow of the Institute of Ophthalmology in 1996.

Noel was also a passionate and highly skilled fly fisherman, his favourite rivers being the Itchen in Hampshire and Langa in Iceland. He contributed regularly to the development of

ophthalmology in Iceland and was awarded the Order of the Falcon by the Icelandic Government for his services. Perhaps less well known, he was also a music lover, an excellent tenor and he sang in various choirs.

He was also very active in helping to develop ophthalmology in several parts of the globe, notably with Professor Arthur Lim in Singapore. Ironically, for someone so gifted in the finest microsurgery, he developed motor neurone disease later in life but he bore this terrible disease with great dignity and courage. He was always positive, even when severely disabled by this disorder. He was married twice. Brita died in 1992 and he is survived by his second wife Ulla, 3 children Andrew, Karin and David and seven grandchildren. Both his sons followed in his footsteps and are Professors at Imperial College and at Helsinki University, respectively. His granddaughter Kate Harnden recently qualified in Medicine from the University of Leeds.

Professor Sir Peng Tee Khaw
Professor and Consultant
Moorfields Eye Hospital and UCL Institute of Ophthalmology

With great help from Arthur Steele, Andrew Rice, David Rice, Karin Hamden and our many colleagues who knew Noel.

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