

# Arthur Summerfield

by David Legge

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ON 10 September Professor Arthur Summerfield died in North Yorkshire after a short illness. A former President of The British Psychological Society, he was elected to Honorary Life Membership in 1993 in recognition of the sustained contribution that he had made to the Society.

As an academic for nearly 40 years, he moulded the lives of countless students instilling in them the virtues of clarity, accuracy and attention to detail. He published across a number of areas that would now be called cognitive psychology and was amongst the small group of researchers who pioneered psychopharmacology in Britain. He was the Scientific Editor of the three issues of the *British Medical Bulletin* on experimental psychology, cognitive psychology and psychobiology.

Arthur's early life was difficult, and he later felt that his triumph over adversity could help others overcome seemingly impossible obstacles and develop their full potential. His mother died when Arthur was seven and his father when he was 15, forcing him to drop out of school in order to earn a living. Two Manchester Grammar School teachers intervened after a year, and he eventually went back to school. Arthur then proceeded to Manchester University and graduated in electrical engineering.

Called up for military service during the Second World War, he was commissioned as an Electrical Officer in the Fleet Air Arm. His talents were spotted by Alec Rodger, who arranged his transfer to the Department of the Senior Psychologist in the Admiralty for the rest of the war. On demobilisation, his interest fired by his practical experience of psychology in the Navy, Arthur entered the Psychology Department of University College London and graduated in psychology in 1949. He was awarded the top first in London University that year.

Arthur Summerfield joined the British Psychological Society as a student in 1947. He became an Associate Fellow in 1951, a Fellow in 1957 and received chartered status as soon as it was available in 1988. He made an immediate mark on the Society and was elected Honorary General Secretary in 1954; a role which he performed assiduously for five years. After three years as Deputy President he became President Elect. He was President in 1963 and Vice President in 1964.

Between 1953 and 1984 he served on the BPS Council for a record total of 27 years, providing an unparalleled period of advice for the Society and an unrivalled long-term memory for the Council. Perhaps his two most significant contributions were to achieve the Royal Charter for the Society in 1965 and in 1973 to define the reorganisation of the Society, including the appointment of a full-time psychologist as General Secretary, and the establishment of the Scientific Affairs Board and the Professional Affairs Board with devolved powers. He later became the first chair of the newly defined Scientific Affairs Board.

Beyond the Society, Arthur was highly influential in determining the role of psychologists in education – through the Summerfield Report in 1968, and as chair of the DES Working Party on Psychologists in Education Services, which led to educational psychologists being granted legal status for the first time.

There was also a very strong internationalist dimension to Arthur's work. He was a member of the Assembly of the International Union of Psychological Science representing the UK for 27 years, serving as vice-president and then president from 1972 to 1980. He was a member of the American Psychological Association's Committee on International Relations, and was a director of the Vienna Centre. He served on the International Social Science Council and was its president from 1977 to 1981. From 1983 to 1987 he was a member of the International Council for Science (ICSU) study group on biological, medical and physical effects of large-scale use of nuclear weapons, which were matters of particular concern to him.

Arthur's life was one of service. He dedicated it to serving many organisations mostly at the highest level. After 15 years at University College London and 27 in the Chair at Birkbeck College he retired to set up a company of chartered psychologists providing psychological consultancy to British and European companies, with his wife Angela. He retired a second time from this successful activity in 2001 to spend a long-deserved and contented retirement supported by Angela, Arthur's two children Penny and Quentin and their families.