

Miss May Davidson

British psychology lost one of its most eminent practitioners and most-loved personalities when May Davidson died on 5 January 1982. She was born in South Africa on 14 November 1914, and graduated from the University of Cape Town in chemistry, psychology and education before coming to Britain in 1938 to take up a research fellowship in psychology at University College London. During the war she was an experimental officer in the Operational Research Unit of the Admiralty. In 1946 she was appointed psychologist by the City of Oxford Education Committee, but with the inception of the National Health Service, May migrated from educational to clinical psychology, remaining in the Oxford region for 30 years until her retirement in 1980. In that time she not only built from scratch the psychological services of the Oxford region, but also had a major influence on the development of clinical psychology in this country. She was the first official advisor to the Department of Health and Social Security on professional matters relating to psychology, was an adviser on Top Grade posts and appoint-

ments in clinical psychology in the Health Service, and was a member of several influential committees, including the Standing Mental Health Advisory Committee, its sub-committee on the Training of Staff for Work with Mentally Handicapped (the Scott Committee) and the Trethowan Committee on the Role of Psychologists in the Health Services which has had such a crucial influence on the development of clinical psychology as a profession. In recognition of her contribution to public life, May was made CBE in the New Year's Honours List of 1980.

May Davidson's contribution to the British Psychological Society can scarcely be catalogued, let alone appraised. She became a Fellow in 1951, and was our President in 1976/77, a difficult year of great significance to the Society when it moved from London to Leicester and a time when May's imperturbable leadership was quite indispensable. She chaired numerous bodies within the Society, including the Division of Clinical Psychology (1969—71) and the Board of Examiners for the Diploma in Clinical Psychology (1971—72). She was the natural person to whom the Society would turn first to chair its new Professional Affairs Board in 1974, and she was appointed to a second term in this role, from which she was forced to resign through ill health in 1981. The structure and the functioning of much of the Society's activities owe much to May Davidson's vision, her intellectual force, her energy, and no less to the warmth of her personality.

A secular meeting of thanksgiving for May Davidson's life was held in the University Church of *St. Mary the Virgin* Oxford on 26 February 1982. This meeting provided a fitting occasion on which the many participants could think on May's life with thanks. The meeting had dignity and empathy, but was in no sense sombre. Dr Ralph Hetherington spoke with affection as the past Scientific and Professional Secretary of the Society about May's prodigious professional energies and expertise, both within and beyond our Society. Dr S. J. Spencer, consultant psychiatrist at the Warneford Hospital spoke with engaging warmth about May's role as a clinician in the Oxford region. He spoke of the way in which May offered special sympathy and professional assistance to a succession of troubled Oxford undergraduates, with such success that the University of Oxford awarded her an Honorary MA in 1969, a rare distinction indeed. May seemed almost to have established a new college of the University, 'Warneford College', one which produced its excellent academic results by supporting undergraduates so that their academic potential could be achieved without being trampled by their turmoils or lack of confidence. Finally, Professor Gwynne Jones spoke sympathetically about May Davidson as a person. He reflected on her keen intelligence, her administrative skills and above all her devotion to her colleagues and patients, particularly the undergraduates for whom she had such special sympathy and understanding. Professor Gwynne Jones chose to illustrate the courage and wit of May Davidson by talking of how she coped with the knowledge that she was dying of a progressive disease. May spoke frankly about her feelings concerning death and dying, but to the end she expressed her involvement in and enjoyment of the world, finding new interests and marvels right to the end of her life.

As the current President of the Society, I spoke briefly at the meeting of our sadness that May is no longer here to guide and support us. However, with respect to May's life, none know better than members of this Society how much there is to be thankful for. It is a comfort for us to know that our feelings for May and our appreciation of her personal and professional qualities are shared by people of all ages,

drawn from many professions, and distributed throughout the country. In talking of her own condition very shortly before she died, May provided a characteristic reflection of her own qualities and one example of what we should all learn from her life:

The technique I'm sure with this sort of illness is to be very flexible, to know that you've got to have an over-riding plan. But you've got to adapt to the situation as it is at any given moment and, you know, change your interests, change what you do to match up with the physical position that you've actually reached. And I think that if you don't accept that you've got to adapt in that way it would be very difficult indeed.

DEREK BLACKMAN