



Norman R Barrett, CBE, MA, MChir, FRCS

Norman Barrett, the first surgical editor of *Thorax*, died on 8 January 1979, aged 75. He was elected Editor in 1945 by the founder members of the Thoracic Society, and served in this office, with a succession of medical co-editors, until 1971. He served as President of the Society in 1963, while still Editor, a combination of concurrent offices that must be rare indeed. Twenty-five years in the demanding role of editor is in itself a remarkable record. But it is the intellectual, professional, and personal qualities that he brought to this role by which his outstanding contribution to the journal, and to the Thoracic Society, will be remembered. A widely experienced, thoughtful, and inquiring surgeon, he had a love for and extensive acquaintance with literature and history, which were combined in the interest in medical history evident in much of his own writing. And in his dealings with contributors, whether juniors submitting their first papers or senior colleagues, his natural courtesy and his ability to be critical without pomposity were cardinal assets.

His principal appointments were as surgeon to St Thomas's and the Brompton Hospitals and King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst, and consulting thoracic surgeon to the Royal Navy. He was President of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons in 1962 and of the Thoracic Society in the following year, and Vice-President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1972. His surgical interests encompassed the whole of thoracic surgery, with original contributions to disorders of the oesophagus, especially the problems of gastro-oesophageal reflux, to the surgery of hydatid cysts of the lung, and to diseases of the chest wall. He contributed a paper on spontaneous rupture of the oesophagus to the first number of *Thorax* in 1946; it provides a model for a paper combining a relevant and stimulating historical review with an account of personal clinical experience and the conclusions to be drawn from it. His last contribution to the journal was the publication of his Tudor Edwards lecture of 1970, for which his chosen subject was the pleura; it shows his capacity for looking afresh at old problems, exposing deficiencies in accepted views, and suggesting directions for future research.

He outlined his philosophy of editorship in a characteristically challenging but unassuming way in an address to the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, entitled "Publish or perish," and published in their journal in 1962. He emphasised that editors have two sorts of responsibility. On the one hand, an editor has duties "to assess the scientific merit of the paper he has been asked to publish, and to make certain the author has expressed himself clearly." On the other hand, it is the duty of editors "to publish as much as they can of the material submitted to them." During the 25 years of his editorship, he steered the difficult course between these often conflicting objectives with skill and with imperturbable good humour; and in so doing, earned the gratitude of the Thoracic Society, readers of and contributors to *Thorax*, and, not least, his medical co-editors.