

Obituary

Editor: Henry R. Rollin

JOHN COLIN DIXON CAROTHERS, formerly Consultant Psychiatrist, St James' Hospital, Portsmouth

Colin Carothers, who was elected to the Fellowship of the College in 1973, died on 13 December 1989, aged 86.

He was born in Simonstown, South Africa and came to England at the age of 4. He was educated at Portsmouth Grammar School, and qualified MB, BS, at St Thomas' Hospital in 1926 where he held house posts. After a period in general practice, he was appointed in 1929 Medical Officer to the East African Medical Service and, in all, spent nine years in Kenya, before returning to England to study psychiatry. He obtained the DPM in 1946, after a period of training at the Maudsley. Dr Carothers returned to Africa to take up an appointment as Medical Officer in charge of the Mathari Mental Hospital, Nairobi. In this post he obtained quite unique experience of psychiatric problems in various racial communities. It was during the 12 years that he spent there that he became the Psychiatric Specialist to the East African Medical Service. In addition he assisted the East African Command with a vast number of psychiatric problems that arose within the Armed Services during World War II. For most of this period he was also in medical charge of HM Prison, Nairobi.

In 1951 Dr Carothers left Africa and returned to the United Kingdom, where he began work at St James' Hospital, Portsmouth. It was during these next few years that Dr Carothers started to crystallise his thoughts on the contrasting cultures in which he had worked. At the request of the World Health Organization, he published a monograph entitled *The African Mind in Health and Disease*, with a second paper, *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, appearing as a Government White Paper in 1955. He had, in fact, been invited to visit Kenya Colony in 1954 by the Kenyan Government, and in the following year was similarly requested to visit Nigeria so that he could report on the state of the psychiatric services there.

Dr Carothers was appointed a consultant at St James' Hospital, Portsmouth, in 1959, and in the same year, wrote a thought-provoking paper, 'Culture, Psychiatry and the Written Word'. Perhaps, however, the culmination of his thinking was expressed in *The Mind of Man in Africa*, a book which he prepared during the early years of his retirement, and which was published in 1972.

The core of Dr Carothers' thinking was that individual societies, like the developing human being, move through a phase where the power of the spoken word, of paramount importance in jungle conditions, gradually gives way to the authority of the written word. He saw that the rural Africans were still living in a more primitive world of sound, in which the dynamic, spoken word retained its magic, unlike Western society, which has changed from 'ear' to an 'eye' culture, where children move rapidly to a visual world as they learn to read. He linked this mental immaturity with the hysterical patterns seen more in women and the psychopathic traits more common in men – and he asked if the tenderness taboo might play a part in male aggression. These thoughts were expressed in his last publication *Hysteria, Psychopathy and the Magic Word*, which appeared in 1975. He had a wide-ranging international perspective on psychiatry generally, aided not a little by his experience in Africa and there is no doubt that many will regard him as one of the founders of cultural psychiatry.

Throughout his years of retirement, from 1964, Dr Carothers remained very much in touch with current psychiatric thinking, and not only read extensively, but was creatively active in many spheres. He was a prolific artist, and his oil paintings, mainly landscapes, were exhibited widely, both at the Royal Academy and locally in Hampshire.

It was a delight to be at his 80th birthday celebrations, when all his family and friends gathered. He was happily married to his wife Diana, for 56 years and it was she who nursed him in the final stages of his illness, during which he remained good humoured, patient and philosophical.

On 25 March a Thanksgiving Service for his life was held in St Thomas' Church Bedhampton, where his family and many friends joined together to celebrate a life that was enjoyed to the full, and one that enriched all those who knew him.

JLH

The deaths of the following have also been reported:

KONRAD LORENZ, Professor, Forschungsstelle für Ethologie, Konrad-Lorenz-Institute der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, A-3422 Altenberg, Austria.

HENRY ST JOHN MANSBRIDGE, formerly Senior Medical Officer, Prison Department, Home Office.