Robert Blowers, an outstanding Medical Microbiologist and pioneer of hospital infection control, died on 17 December 2004, aged 89 years. He came from two old East Anglian families. After schooling in the ancient St Albans School, he studied medicine and qualified soon after the Second World War began at the Middlesex Hospital, London, where he completed his house jobs before military service. He trained in blood transfusion under Brigadier L. E. H. Whitby before taking command of No. 4 Field Transfusion Unit. On D-Day he landed on the beach only a few minutes after the initial assault to treat the wounded in that first wave. He served through the European campaign and was one of the first medical officers to enter the horrific concentration camps after their liberation.

After the war he returned to London to train in pathology, including 2 years as an Assistant Bacteriologist with the legendary Dr Joan Stokes at University College Hospital. He was then appointed to the Staphylococcus Reference Laboratory at the Central Public Health Laboratory, Colindale, where he developed his life-long interest in *Staphylococcus aureus* and hospital infection. In 1951 he became Director of the Public Health Laboratory in Middlesbrough and Consultant Microbiologist to the Teesside Hospital Group and the Newcastle Regional Hospital Board.

From the mid-1950s he produced a succession of publications on the prevention of hospital infections, particularly those following surgery. These ranged across the design of operating theatres, isolation rooms and surgical clothing, the prevention of airborne spread of infection and clinical protocols for wound management. He produced the seminal textbook ‘Hospital Infection: Causes and Prevention’ with R. E. O. Williams, L. P. Garrod and R. A. Shooter, which became the ‘bible’ on infection control for microbiology and infection control practitioners and trainees for nearly 20 years. In 1959 he was a key member of the Ministry of Health working group that produced the report on Staphylococcal Infections in Hospitals. This work remains as highly relevant in 2005 with the control of healthcare associated infections caused by methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA) one of the highest priorities for today’s NHS. At a Department of Health workshop on 10 December 2004, just a week before his death, his major contribution was recalled by the Department’s Inspector of Microbiology and Infection Control (Brian Duerden), who had that week sent him a Christmas card with the message ‘you will be pleased to know that we are at last trying to implement your 1959 recommendations!’.

In 1967 he was appointed Professor of Medical Microbiology at Makerere University College, Uganda. It was a time there of great activity and enthusiasm and he was heavily involved in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and clinical practice. He was particularly committed to the development of training programmes for medical laboratory technicians throughout East Africa, so crucial to the provision of medical laboratory services there. He often remarked that he enjoyed his work in Uganda more than any other in his career.

He returned to Britain in 1970 as Head of the Division of Hospital Infection in the Medical Research Council’s newly established Clinical Research Centre at Northwick Park Hospital, London, where he continued his studies on the prevention and control of hospital infection. He was secretary of the MRC Committee on Hospital Infection and a member of its various subcommittees that impinged on his research fields. During 1973–1977 he served as Registrar of the Royal College of Pathologists, overseeing the training programmes and qualifying examinations for all branches of pathology. He was also Visiting Professor and external examiner at several overseas universities.

When he retired from clinical practice in 1977 he maintained a very active involvement as ‘sureditor’ of the *Journal of Medical Microbiology* until 1982. He had been a member of the Pathological Society of Great Britain and Ireland and, in 1970, soon after the *Journal of Pathology and Bacteriology* split into its distinct specialties as the *Journal of Pathology* and *Journal of Medical Microbiology*, both under the editorial direction of C. L. Oakley, he became one of the six editors of *J Med Microbiol* with J. G. Collee, S. D. Elek, J. P. Duguid, M. T. Parker and H. Stern. They set the highest standards of scientific publication. The ‘sureditor’ was responsible for
producing the Journal. Accepted papers were sent from the editorial board members to the sureditor for final editing (in impeccable scientific English), sorting of figures for redrawing and labelling (no computer graphics then) and gathering the manuscripts for each issue for typesetting (hot metal!!). When the galley proofs arrived, Robert not only read each one line by line and sent copies to the author and the assigned editor, but also sent one to another editor as ‘collateral proof-reader’. This eclectic quality assurance system amongst the editorial board survived well into the 1990s as did his simple system of filing. Each paper had an envelope and the old cabinet had three drawers – top for accepted papers being processed, second for papers ready for the printers, third for proof-read papers ready for publication. Simple as it was, it provided a status report at a glance and stood the test of time until J Med Microbiol moved to the Society for General Microbiology and electronic handling at Marlborough House in the 21st century. His successor (Brian Duerden) benefited hugely from his guidance and friendship for two decades, which included regular exchanges about the activities of their respective garden birds, as well as the correct use of the hyphen.

In retirement, he and his wife Geth, whom he had met at the Middlesex Hospital, returned to their long established home on the North Yorkshire moors. There, as well as providing a home for J Med Microbiol, they had developed a superb garden and he enthusiastically studied the wild grasses of that area. However, his last few years had to be spent in a retirement community in York caring for Geth after a severe stroke which left her severely disabled. She died in 2002 after more than 60 years of marriage to Robert.

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