James Spence Medallist, 1977

Ronald Stanley Illingworth

Ronald Illingworth was educated at Bradford Grammar School and took his medical training at Leeds University. After house appointments and a period in general practice he worked as a clinical pathologist at The Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London. During the 5 years of World War II he served in the RAMC with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. After the war he was able to take up a Rockefeller Research Fellowship to which he had been nominated just before the war, spending 6 months with Dr. Arnold Gesell at New Haven, USA. There he acquired an enthusiasm for the subject of developmental paediatrics, which he was later to be largely responsible for introducing to paediatricians in his own country. In 1947 he was appointed to the newly constituted Chair of Child Health in the University of Sheffield, which he held for 28 years until his retirement in 1975. During this time the Sheffield Children's Hospital was partly rebuilt and became a centre for teaching and research.

In presenting the James Spence medal to Professor Illingworth at the Annual General Meeting of the British Paediatric Association at York on 24 March 1977, the President, Professor Otto Wolff, spoke the following citation:

'The highest award our Association can give is the James Spence Medal and this year we take pride in giving it to Ronald Illingworth, and I am allowed to say a few words before presenting it.

'All of us know Ronald as a superb lecturer to undergraduate and postgraduate students, and when I say "all of us" I include not only the members of our Association but also the many students who have listened to Ronald over the years, at home, and in most countries of the globe. I find lecturing exhausting, physically and emotionally, and find one lecture a day as much as I like to give. Ronald can deliver 3 or 4 outstanding lectures in a day, and by the end he is as fresh physically and as lively intellectually as always. He is such an attractive teacher and lecturer because his enjoyment of the subject and of the company of young people is so obvious to everyone in the audience. As a broadcaster he is equally persuasive.

'He is a keen but invariably constructive critic. To have to speak publicly in front of Ronald, as I have to do for these few minutes, is like playing the piano to Artur Rubinstein—not a pleasant experience, and I know that in a day or two I shall receive a charming note from Ronald advising me on how to improve my performance.

'The quality of his writing is equally attractive; crisp, clear, simple in phrase, and not a word to spare. Through his many books—13 at my last count—he has done more than anyone else I know to educate doctors and parents in all matters con-
cerned with children—medical, social, educational, historical. And if you have difficulty with the English language, you can read them in the Greek or Japanese translation. He is in no way a narrow man.

'I can only mention in passing how in Sheffield he built up the Department from nothing in 1947, when he was appointed to the Chair, to its present position of world-wide renown.

'Let me mention one or two facets of the man which may not be so well known to those of us who have not had the privilege of working closely with him. He is a professional photographer of renown, a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, and a frequent lecturer to photographic societies. My informant, who must remain anonymous, tells me that as a medical student he made sufficient money by selling photographs to the Press to allow him to take a holiday abroad each year. I am not allowed to tell you the subjects of these expensive and exciting photographs, nor the names of the newspapers in which they appeared. His collection of teaching slides is unique and now numbers nearly 4000. His teaching films—I believe he has made 10—are known to all of us; they deal with child development and paediatric neurology, and are fine educational aids.

'I have mentioned his travels abroad; these have continued since his student days. There are few countries, and few lecture halls, untouched by Ronald and Cynthia’s feet and though they may not have done all their travelling by foot they are inveterate walkers and climbers. I remember once setting out on a walk with them in the Lake District; their speed and agility was such that after a short distance I realized that I had met my betters and decided to return to the hotel, under the pretext of an imaginary disability.

'I suggest to you that the photography and the many travels have helped to keep Ronald the young man we know, with wide open eyes and an open heart, always ready to receive new visions.

'It is customary on such an occasion to say a word about the man after whom the medal is named. To James Spence the consultation between the doctor, the parents, and the child was of the essence of paediatrics. I believe the same applies to Ronald and that he gets the greatest satisfaction and the deepest happiness from talking with parents about their children. I suspect that it is in this situation that we come nearest to the secret of Ronald’s greatness.

'Before I give you the medal, Ronald, I wish to say a word about Cynthia. We all know, and I hope my words have implied, what a wonderful companion she is to him. To all Ronald’s achievements she has made an essential contribution. More than that she has made her own remarkable contribution to paediatrics. Where would our country’s casualty services for children be were it not for Cynthia? Our Association lacks a double medal for an illustrious husband and his illustrious wife. In place of such a medal, Cynthia, will you accept from me these words as a token of our Association’s deep gratitude to you for your contribution to Ronald’s work for children and for your own contribution.

‘And now, Ronald, on behalf of our Association may I present to you the James Spence Medal.’

James Spence Medallists

1960 Professor A. A. Moncrieff
1961 Professor R. A. McCance
1963 Sir F. Macfarlane Burnet
1964 Professor L. S. Penrose
1965 Dr. Cicely D. Williams
1967 Professor R. R. A. Coombs
1968 Dr. Mary D. Sheridant
   Dr. D. W. Winnicott
1969 Dr. G. S. Dawes
1970 Professor D. V. Hubble
1971 Dr. W. W. Payne
1972 Dr. R. C. Mac Keith
1973 Professor C. A. Clarke
1974 Dr. J. Bowlby
1976 Dr. D. M. T. Gairdner