

Southby, Robert (1897- 1990)

Robert Southby OBE OSTJ, MD FRACP FACST FAMA was born on 16th November 1897, son of Richard Southby, a dentist and pharmacist, and Francis Emily Young. His early education was at Scotch College, Melbourne, then at The University of Melbourne, whence he graduated MB.BS. in 1921. After a year as a Resident Medical Officer, he became assistant pathologist at the Royal Children's Hospital in 1923, medical superintendent 1924–25, and clinical assistant 1926. He then started in general practice in North Melbourne but continued his association with the Children's Hospital as honorary assistant to outpatients and then physician in charge of the venereal diseases clinic from 1926 to 1933 (treating infections contracted during childbirth). He gained his MD at The University of Melbourne in 1923, and MRACP in 1938. He was elected to Fellowship of the RACP in 1948.

Dr Southby became an honorary attending physician at the RCH 1934–57. From 1950 he was the first lecturer in paediatrics at the University of Melbourne (part-time), which entailed giving 15 lectures a year to medical students. Following that, he ran the first survey of abused children seen in the Casualty Department of RCH. It led to the implementation of the formal reporting system by the State Government. After retiring from private practice, he was a consultant paediatrician to the Department of Health, Victoria, in the Maternal and Child Welfare Branch in which he acted as the secretary to the perinatal mortality committee. His quiet efficiency and wisdom derived from experience greatly assisted the committee's deliberations and enhanced their reports. He was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1975.

He was active in medical and community affairs, serving in senior positions with the Medical Board of Victoria, the Hospitals and Charities Commission and the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Council of Victoria. He was also a member of the Paediatric Society of Victoria and Australian Paediatric Association. He joined the Victorian Branch of the British Medical Association and the Medical Society of Victoria immediately after graduation and became President in 1950.

He was a volunteer with St John Ambulance Brigade in Victoria, becoming District Surgeon (a role now named State Medical Officer) 1966-69, and a member of St John Council 1964-69. He was admitted as a Member of the Order of St John in 1962 and promoted to Officer (OSTJ) in 1967.

Dr Harold Attwood, a fellow paediatrician recalled, "He was an active member of the Wallaby Club, a Victorian walking and talking club founded in 1894. An honour he greatly prized was his honorary life membership of that club. Bob married twice. In 1928 he married Marie HF Whyte with whom he had two sons and two daughters. After Marie died and late in life (1971) he married JA Irene Baker who died not so very long before he did. Both marriages were very happy. Robert Southby, gentle, modest and dependable, will long be remembered by all who had the good fortune to meet him."

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Source: Notes by Prof. Richard Southby; *Paediatr Child Health*, 1991, **27**, 322.

