

Ronald Francis Lowe, President of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1972 - 1973

Ronald Francis Lowe was born on 14 November 1913 and died on 26 March 1998, aged 84 years. He was married to Lois who died in 1985 and was the father of a gifted son. He is survived by his second wife, Zena Webster.

Ronald Lowe was born in East Caulfield, Victoria and was educated at Wesley College, then later at the University of Melbourne where he obtained a diploma in pharmacy in 1934. He then switched to a medical degree which he completed with distinction and graduated in 1939. He joined the Australian Army as a Medical Officer in the AIF where he was attached to the 2/11 Australian General Hospital in New Guinea and the 107 Australian General Hospital in Darwin. Towards the end of the war he was seconded to the then Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital in Melbourne where he trained as an Ophthalmologist. His career involved a life-time attachment to this hospital. In the 1940s when Ronald Lowe entered Ophthalmology, there were no courses of instruction, no appropriate qualification for ophthalmologists, no ophthalmological library or journal, no institutes of research in ophthalmology, and no University Departments of Ophthalmology. Some of the ophthalmologists in charge of hospital clinics had no academic postgraduate qualifications. But the senior ophthalmologists at the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital had trained in Great Britain and Australian Ophthalmology equalled that of most other countries. The Ophthalmological Society of Australia had been founded in 1939. After a period as resident medical officer Lowe was appointed assistant honorary ophthalmic surgeon in 1946, having obtained his Diploma of Ophthalmology in 1945. He became a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1947 and was awarded the Gordon Craig Travelling Scholarship which took him to England where he trained under Sir Stewart Duke-Elder and obtained Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons, the first fellowship in ophthalmology ever awarded by that institution, leading to his becoming a Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists in 1989.

Returning to Melbourne in 1948, he commenced a consulting practice in Collins Street and was appointed to the Honorary Staff of the Eye and Ear Hospital, then as Senior Honorary Ophthalmic Surgeon in 1955, a position he held until 1973. He was then appointed as Emeritus Honorary Ophthalmic Surgeon to the hospital from 1973 to the time of his death. He was a member of the Board of Management of the Hospital from 1955 to 1984; Dean of the Clinical School from 1962 to 1968; in charge of the Glaucoma Unit from 1963 to 1975; and Chairman of the Honorary Medical Staff from 1970 to 1973. He was also a member of the Library Committee; the Building Committee and many standing and ad hoc committees, and in recognition of his valuable contributions, the Library of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital was named the Ronald Lowe Library.

His contributions to ophthalmology were enormous. When he became President of the College it was mainly through his efforts that the Royal appellation was conferred on the Australian College of Ophthalmologists. He had served as a member of Council on the OSA; Court of Examiners of the RACS; Council Lecturer at the Annual Scientific Congress in 1971; held editorships of various ophthalmology journals including the American Journal of Ophthalmology; foundation member of the ORIA and Chairman of the ORIA Board from 1980 to 1986. In his Presidential Address in 1973 he spoke about "Acute Glaucoma and the Crystalline Lens".

In 1958 Ronald Lowe was a foundation member of the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology, culminating in becoming President from 1968 to 1972, the first Australian to hold that position. He was made a foundation professor and vice-president of the *Academia Ophthalmologica Internationalis* from 1991 to 1993. He was also a life-long member of the International Strabismological Association but his main contribution to scientific medicine was his research in angle closure glaucoma, having produced over 60 learned papers on this subject and he was awarded a Doctorate of Medicine from the Melbourne University. Although he published many scientific papers, in his later years he devoted his efforts to history of early medical scenes in Melbourne, many of which are published in College Journals. He was awarded the College's Gold Medal in 1996 for his distinguished service. Lowe had grand vision and undoubtedly helped develop the progress and future of ophthalmology and now Australian and New Zealand trained ophthalmologists are now among the best qualified ophthalmologists in the world. The RVEEH was his great love, although he had developed a large and successful private practice in Melbourne.

He was an energetic gardener, and member of the Liliun Society; keen photographer and had minor collections of ceramic pots, stamps and Persian Carpets; a member of the Athenaeum Club; and he loved travel, leading many groups overseas, particularly to Asia.

