

IN MEMORY OF CHRISTOPHER GARDNER-THORPE

1941–2026

A tribute to a neurologist, medical historian, editor,
teacher and friend

Christopher Gardner-Thorpe, consultant neurologist, medical historian, editor and teacher, died on 1 July 2026. He was a much-loved father to Catherine, Damian, James, Anne and Helen, and grandfather to Rebecca, Amelia, Jessica, Katia, Ned, Ella and Lily.

Christopher combined a distinguished clinical career with an exceptional commitment to scholarship, teaching, medical publishing and the preservation of medical heritage. To his many colleagues and friends, he was also a generous mentor, an encouraging teacher and a warm and valued companion.



A life in medicine and medical history

Born in Cosham, Hampshire, on 22 August 1941, Christopher was the only child of Ronald and Hazel (née Dees) Gardner-Thorpe. He attended St Philip's School and Beaumont College before entering St Thomas' Hospital Medical School in 1959, qualifying in 1964. Following postgraduate training in medicine and neurology, with appointments in Southampton, Watford, Leeds and Newcastle upon Tyne, Christopher became Consultant Neurologist at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in March 1974. He subsequently continued his neurological practice as an independent consultant. Based in Devon for more than half his life, he developed particular interests in epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and the neurological manifestations of systemic lupus erythematosus. He also taught at the University of Exeter Medical School, covering medical history, medicine and the law, and medical writing.

Alongside his clinical career, Christopher cultivated a lifelong passion for medical history. He published extensively on neurological and historical subjects, including Charles Bell, James Parkinson, Jules Cotard and Cotard syndrome. He was one of more than 140 contributors to The Osler Encyclopedia, edited by Professor Charles S. Bryan and published in 2019, an international reference work on the life and legacy of Sir William Osler.



Christopher devoted many years to the Society of Apothecaries, where he became an examiner for the Diploma in the History of Medicine and later served as Deputy Convenor of Examiners, Course Director and President of the Faculty of the History and Philosophy of Medicine. In 2013, he was instrumental in establishing the Society's Fellows programme for DHMSA graduates, which he co-ran until late 2018. He was President of the History of Medicine Society at the Royal Society of Medicine from 2022 to 2023 and delivered the Osler Oration to the Osler Club of London in 2023.

As the second Editor and subsequently the first Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Medical Biography, Christopher helped build its international reputation among historians, clinicians and medical writers. He was admired for the care with which he reviewed manuscripts and for the thoughtful, constructive guidance he gave authors, enabling many to develop their work into stronger publications. When he stepped down as Editor-in-Chief, he left the journal in a strong position for his successor, Professor Hilary Morris, who continued its development.

Christopher was also a strong supporter of the British Society for the History of Medicine (BSHM) and all its activities. He chaired the steering committee for the BSHM's online journal, Topics in the History of Medicine, and subsequently presided over its Editorial Board as Editor-in-Chief. His unstinting enthusiasm, commitment, practical expertise and support were instrumental in establishing the journal and helping it develop professionally. He also chaired a session at the BSHM conference in Sheffield in 2021, the first to be held after the COVID-19 pandemic.



Christopher maintained enduring friendships and collaborations across neurology and medical history. A medical writing course in the early 1970s led to a lifelong friendship with Sir Terence English. He remained close to Professor John Pearn in Australia and collaborated with colleagues including Professor Sean Hughes in England. His links with the history of neuroscience community included Frank Clifford Rose, whose contribution to neurological history he later helped commemorate.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, Christopher remained actively engaged in medical scholarship, making a significant contribution to a 2020 Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine paper that promoted evidence-based discussion and challenged misinformation during the pandemic.

His commitment to preserving medical heritage extended beyond his own publications. In 2000, he published *Stones Unturned: Memorials of Medical Significance in Exeter Cathedral*. He later donated his rare medical books to Exeter Cathedral Library, establishing the Christopher Gardner-Thorpe Collection and ensuring that these works remain available to students, researchers and the wider public.

Christopher Gardner-Thorpe brought together the skills of a clinician, the curiosity of a historian, the discernment of an editor and the generosity of an exceptional teacher and mentor. Through his work in neurology, medical history, publishing and education, he influenced generations of doctors, historians and medical writers. His legacy encompasses not only his intellectual achievements, but also the many people he encouraged, taught and inspired.



Memories of Christopher

A friend, colleague and inspiring teacher

Professor Hilary Morris

Christopher and I succeeded one another, or served together, in several roles on numerous committees at the Royal Society of Medicine, the Osler Club and the Society of Apothecaries. Of all my memories, the most enduring is watching and listening to him engaging with students in a way that was truly unique.

Christopher inspired those he taught not just through his incredible depth of knowledge, but also through the way he presented his subject and the respect he had for the learning process. His natural warmth and generosity of spirit defined a truly wonderful man, who will be desperately missed by all who had the honour to know him.

A champion of the history of medicine

Edward Wawrzynczak

I remember clearly the day when, as a recent convert to the history of medicine, I first met Christopher. He was characteristically warm, engaging and full of encouragement, which left an indelible impression and made our future interactions a delight. Christopher was a strong supporter of the BSHM and all its activities. He chaired the steering committee and subsequently presided over the Editorial Board as Editor-in-Chief of the BSHM's online journal, Topics in the History of Medicine. Without his unstinting belief, commitment and support, the journal would not have launched so effectively and developed so professionally. As journal editor, I relied upon and benefited from his extensive know-how, intelligent analysis and sound advice. It was an honour to have known Christopher and worked closely with him over several years.



A valued colleague and fellow champion of medical history

Professor Tilli Tansey

Christopher and I succeeded one another in several roles and worked together on numerous committees at the Royal Society of Medicine, the Osler Club and the Society of Apothecaries. One particularly important shared initiative was the establishment, in 2013, of the Society of Apothecaries' Fellows programme for graduates of the Diploma in the History of Medicine (DHMSA). We co-ran the programme until late 2018, after which Christopher continued to contribute for a further couple of years, with Lee Coppack taking over from me. Lee now runs the programme independently.

Just full of kindness

Dr David Wright

Christopher was a thoughtful and kind friend, who was always helpful and good humoured, setting standards in life and work which were such an example for anyone who met him.

A valued mentor, collaborator and friend

Dr Anjna Harrar

I first met Christopher when he was directing the Diploma in the History of Medicine course at the Society of Apothecaries. He guided me throughout the year in my studies and research into Croydon Airport, and we soon became good friends, sharing many stimulating conversations about medical history. Christopher was instrumental in helping me write my paper on COVID-19 and air travel. Alongside Professor Sean Hughes, I also worked with him on reviews of numerous medical biographies. During my presidency of the Osler Club of London, he was my first choice to deliver the Osler Oration. We also jointly delivered a lecture in Devon entitled "The Tale of Two Physicians", connecting our mutual ancestry to a town in India. Unknown to many, he had taken care of a patient with myasthenia gravis, who owned a very famous teddy bear. I shall remember Christopher with great affection as a valued mentor, colleague and friend, whose knowledge, generosity and enthusiasm for medical history enriched the lives of many.



A unique personality, the most reasonable of reasonable men
Dr Mike Collins

Christopher endeared himself to all who were fortunate to meet him. I knew him for about twenty years through our association with the BSHM, the John Blair Trust and the Society of apothecaries. Like so many, I greatly treasured his friendship, courtesy, good humour, encouragement and not least his unique personality. He was a very generous host when Diane and I visited him at his cottage at Dartmoor and in Exeter.

Christopher's ability to sum up a situation allied to his superb diplomatic skills allowed him to make significant contributions to many organisations. His understanding of human nature, wisdom, moderation and unique subtlety of expression allowed him to deal with a wide range of personalities and challenging situations. He encouraged others to make significant contributions and he encouraged change. He had a happy knack of disagreeing with other's opinions in a respectful way without the other person feeling slighted. His empathic nature was particularly evident when assessing incomplete applications from undergraduate students for John Blair Trust grants.

Christopher was a patient and understanding reviewer, always respecting the efforts of authors even when recommending revision of submitted manuscripts.



A lasting legacy

Christopher Gardner-Thorpe will be remembered with affection and gratitude by his family, friends, colleagues, students and the wider community of medical historians whose lives he enriched. His work strengthened professional institutions, supported authors, preserved medical heritage and fostered friendships across generations and continents.

His influence lives on in the scholarship he produced, the journals and programmes he helped establish, the books he preserved for future generations and, above all, the many people he taught, encouraged and inspired. He will be greatly missed, but his contribution to medicine and its history will endure.

