

## Obituary

James Maurice Harrison, DSC, MRCS, LRCP  
(1892-1971)

James Harrison was born in the reign of Queen Victoria in the year of Gladstone's fourth ministry. He died nearly eighty years later, having lived through a period of great scientific and industrial developments, two major world wars and extensive social changes. One of his most endearing characteristics was his ability to adapt to the times; though he may not always have agreed with the changes around him, his disagreements were tempered by unfailing courtesy and good humour.

Educated at Malvern College and Felstead, he opted to enter St Thomas's Hospital as a medical student rather than join the family shipping business. His choice of career was probably influenced by his father, who was a governor of St Thomas's. At the outbreak of the 1914-18 war, when he was a senior student, he joined the Royal Navy as a surgeon probationer serving on destroyers in the Dover patrol. He returned to St Thomas's in order to qualify and rejoined the Navy as a surgeon-lieutenant. He served mainly in the eastern Mediterranean and was the sole officer to survive the sinking of H.M. *Monitor 28*. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery in towing through the water for over a mile a marine whose leg had been blown off, and for his attention to the wounded on land.

At the end of the war he married Rita Graham Sorley and in 1920 settled as a general practitioner in Sevenoaks. He served the community well, for he retired from general practice only in 1969 and until 1954 was also a general practitioner surgeon on the staff of the Sevenoaks Hospital.

Devoted to his profession and painstakingly careful, he still found time for a number of hobbies, including water-colour painting, playing the drums and, above all, ornithology. One of the main taxonomic features of the Harrison family is their undiminishing capacity for work, and this basic characteristic of James Harrison has been passed on to his sons. He pursued his ornithological interests with enthusiasm and energy, as is exemplified by his astonishing output of papers. His first was published in 1918, appropriately enough in *British Birds*, on 'Bird notes from Macedonia'. From then on he was author or co-author of some 330 publications. His major works include *The Birds of Kent* (two volumes, 1953), *A Hand-List of the Birds of the Sevenoaks or Western District of Kent* (1942), *Bird Taxidermy* (1964) and *Bristow and the Hastings Rarities Affair* (1968). He contributed to *The Ornithologists' Guide* (1956), *A New Dictionary of Birds* (1964) and *The New Wildfowler in the 1970's* (1970). His ornithological interests ranged widely: 'Colour of the iris in the Hoatzin' (1925, *Ibis*, ser. 12, 1: 528), 'Golden-eye—Smew hybrid' (1944, *Bull. B.O.C.*, 64: 57),

'Sun-bathing by birds' (1946, *Brit. Birds*, 39: 276), 'Medicine and ornithology' (1947, *The Medical Press*, 217: 158-163), 'Fish and other aquatic fauna as predators of birds' (1955, *Bull. B.O.C.*, 75: 110-113).

He will be remembered particularly for his work on the birds of Kent, for his studies of geographical races, aberrant plumages, bird pathology and hybrids, and for his spirited defence of George Bristow concerning the Hastings Rarities saga. He wrote a book in defence of Bristow and of the rarities, and he wrote it because he felt it was his duty to write it. This is not the place to judge the issues involved, but we should record our admiration for his tenacity, sincerity and gentle, though insistent, arguments which he skilfully and patiently put together.

He travelled widely, especially in Greece, Bulgaria, Israel, North Africa and Lapland, and published a number of useful papers on the results of his trips. He was elected Vice-President of the British Ornithologists' Union in 1953 and served on its Council from 1937 to 1940. He was Chairman of the British Ornithologists' Club from 1946 to 1949, Vice-Chairman during 1945-46 and a member of the Committee from 1933 to 1936. He was a Scientific Fellow of the Zoological Society, a Fellow of the Linnean Society, Vice-President of the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, of the Kent Wildfowlers' Association and of the Kent Naturalists' Trust, and an honorary life Vice-President of the Kent Ornithological Society.

A lasting memorial to James Harrison will be his collection of bird skins and library which now form the basis of the Harrison Zoological Museum Trust. (Plate 32 shows a photograph taken of him in 1970 at the museum.) My own memories will be of a good friend and mentor, an integral part of a happy and closely knit family. I admired his fidelity and efficiency. I appreciated his enthusiasm and good humour. I was privileged to know him.

P. J. S. OLNEY



PLATE 32. James Maurice Harrison, DSC, MRCS, LRCP (1892-1971) at the Harrison Zoological Museum, Sevenoaks, in 1970 (pages 164-166) (*photo: Pamela Harrison*)