

## Contributor to Systematic Bacteriology

SAMUEL TERTIUS COWAN

1905-1976

Samuel Tertius Cowan was one of the leading bacterial taxonomists of his day. He was born in 1905 at Eccles, Lancashire, and studied medicine at Manchester University where he graduated M.B., Ch.B. in 1930. During the next few years, he undertook research in bacteriology at Manchester and London, and in 1933 he was awarded the degree of M.D. with commendation for his thesis "Observations on the haemolysis of the Pneumococcus." In later years he obtained his D.Sc. from Manchester University and the Fellowship of the Royal College of Pathologists.

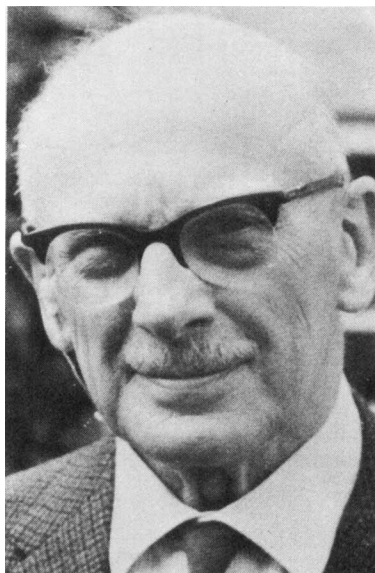
In World War II, Dr. Cowan served in the British Army in the medical corps, where he had the rank of major. Much of this service was in the Middle East, where he gained wide experience of tropical microbiology. In 1947 he succeeded R. St. John-Brooks as Curator of the National Collection of Type Cultures (NCTC) in London.

As Curator, Dr. Cowan reorganized the NCTC and coordinated the distribution of microorganisms to the various national collections. The NCTC became responsible primarily for human and animal pathogens. The records were greatly improved, and freeze-drying was organized on a large scale so that freeze-dried specimens in ampoules became the main form in which cultures were both preserved and distributed.

His efforts in reorganizing the British culture collections were coordinated with the efforts of others in organizing the system of Commonwealth culture collections. These endeavors, in which he played a prominent part, were precursors of those that have led in recent years to the World Federation of Culture Collections.

Dr. Cowan was very active in the affairs of the International Committee of Systematic Bacteriology. In 1950 he became Permanent Secretary for Medical Bacteriology of that committee (then the International Committee on Bacteriological Nomenclature), and in association with W. A. Clark, the other Permanent Secretary, and the late R. E. Buchanan he was a major contributor to the *Bacteriological Code of Nomenclature* and its various revisions. From 1962 to 1965 he was Chairman of the Committee and a member of the Judicial Commission, and in 1966 he was elected a life member of the Committee. As a member of the Editorial Board of the *International Bulletin of Bacteriological Nomenclature and Taxonomy*, he worked to broaden its scope, and he supported the change in the title of the Bulletin to its present title, *International Journal of Systematic Bacteriology*.

He was invited to join the Board of Trustees of *Bergey's Manual of Determinative Bacteriology* in



1958, and he contributed a great deal toward the latest edition, the eighth. He was also active in the Society for General Microbiology, which made him an honorary member.

Dr. Cowan worked on systematic and diagnostic bacteriology. He had a world-wide reputation for his book with K. J. Steel, the *Manual for the Identification of Medical Bacteria*, and he wrote a unique volume called *A Dictionary of Microbial Taxonomic Usage*. These briefly summarize many of his contributions to the philosophy of bacterial systematics, contributions which will ensure him a place in the history of bacterial taxonomy. He did systematic work on several groups of bacteria, particularly micrococci and enterobacteria.

In 1967 he retired to a quiet country village. He was an able teacher and a loyal friend and was always ready to give advice to even inexperienced students. He will be remembered by all who knew him for his courtesy and reasonableness. He had the knack of making bacterial classification interesting, and he encouraged many young workers to take up such studies. He is remembered with affection by all.

P. H. A. Sneath, Chairman,  
International Committee on  
Systematic Bacteriology