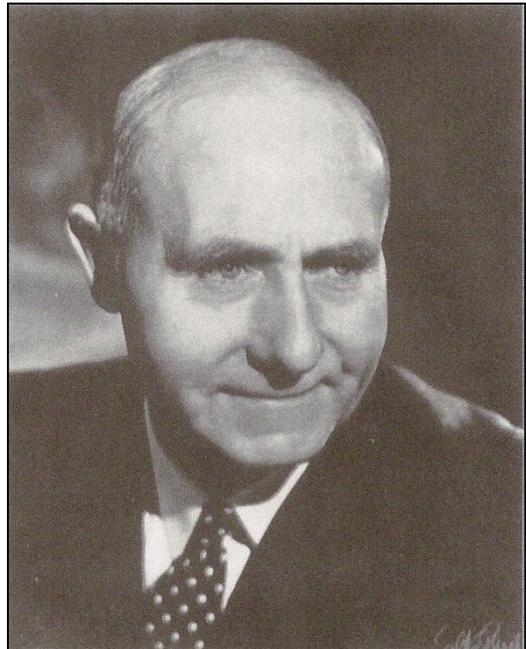


**SIR GRAHAM SELBY WILSON (1895-1987). F.R.S., M.D. (Lond.), D.P.H. (Eng.), F.R.C.P. (Lond.), Hon.F.R.C.Path., Hon. LL.D. (Glasgow), K.H.P. - Pioneer of Medical Microbiology.**

*“His admirers, friends, and critics – he had all those – sometimes compared him to a schoolmaster or even a bishop. He was a bit of both at different times....he was an expert gardener and a splendid maker of sloe gin.”*

*British Medical Journal (1987).*

Sir Graham Selby Wilson (1895-1987) [Epsom College 1911-1912. Jenks Memorial Scholarship] has two memorials; his period as Director of the Public Health Laboratory Service of England and Wales (1941-1963), and the famous four volume textbook, *The Principles of Bacteriology and Immunity*, written jointly with Professor W. C. Topley. This textbook is known and respected around the world, and for most microbiologists it is the first word on any subject on which they seek information. It is said that if any book can claim to be the ‘bacteriologists’ bible,’ this was it.



Graham Wilson was the son of R. G. W. Wilson, a miller of Sutton, Surrey. He came from a non-medical family and after Epsom College, where he was a prominent batsman in the Cricket XI, he entered King’s College, London and Charing Cross Hospital, where he won the Governor’s Clinical Gold Medal, the University of London Gold Medal, and the Travers, Pereira, and Green Prizes. He qualified M.B., B.S. in 1916, and proceeded M.D. (Lond.) in 1919. His medical training was shortened on account of the onset of the First World War and during the period 1916-1918 he joined the R.A.M.C., serving first in the Enteric Laboratory at Kasauli, India, and then at the Royal Army Medical College, London. In 1920 he returned to Charing Cross Hospital where he joined Dr W. H. Topley in his studies of the genesis of epidemics. In 1927, he was appointed Professor of Bacteriology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and, in 1940 he was appointed Director of the Public Health Laboratory Service based in Oxford. Wilson then persuaded the health authorities in the Oxford Region to accept active laboratory collaboration in the investigation of epidemics, notably but not exclusively diphtheria. Although the great epidemics expected to sweep the country after the Second World War had not materialised, the Oxford laboratory was designated the P.H.L.S. Centre for epidemiological intelligence.

Graham Wilson was instrumental in developing the phage-typing system for the diagnosis of *Staphylococcus aureus* infections while he was at Oxford and this system was still in use forty years later. The P.H.L.S. became a permanent feature of the National Health Service in 1948 with Wilson as its Director for the next fifteen years. During that period he presided over a considerable expansion in its size, an even larger increase in its work-load, and a remarkable growth in its scientific activities and prestige. In 1946 the P.H.L.S. comprised some 20 laboratories, most of them small, but under Graham Wilson this number trebled and the scientific value of the Service was unchallenged. Wilson read in manuscript nearly all the scientific papers written by members of the Service and extensively rewrote the worst of these. It was said that his intellectual dominance of the P.H.L.S. could be attributed to his phenomenal knowledge of microbiology and his outstanding ability to formulate logical, clear solutions to the problems of communicable disease. These characters became apparent to all because he was a superb communicator, both orally and in print. The original purpose of the Service was to make possible the detection of bacteriological warfare if it was ever used by providing

reliable information about bacterial infections in different parts of the country, and the detection of unusual patterns of infection. The job was made for Wilson and he for it.

Throughout his life Graham Wilson received innumerable honours. He was a Member of Council of the Royal College of Physicians (1938-1940), Reader in Bacteriology, University of London (1927-1930), holder of the William Julius Mickle Fellowship, University of London (1939), Weber-Parkes Prize, Royal College of Physicians (1942), Milroy Lecturer, Royal College of Physicians (1948) Honorary Fellow of the American Public Health Association (1953), Honorary Fellow, Royal Society of Health (1960), Bisset Hawkins Medal, Royal College of Physicians (1956), Marjorie Stephenson Memorial Prize (1959), Stewart Prize (1960), Buchanan Medal, Royal Society (1967), Harben Gold Medal (1970), Jenner Memorial Medal (1975). He was knighted in 1962, received an honorary LL.D from Glasgow University and, in 1978 he was honoured by election as a Fellow of the Royal Society. In his obituary notice Sir Graham Wilson was described as probably the most influential British microbiologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His career extended over 70 years, from his first scientific paper published as a medical student in 1917, to a study of early bacteriologists completed a few weeks before his death. In addition, he was a pioneer in the postgraduate education of medical microbiologists, an exemplar of good scientific writing and the main architect of the Public Health Laboratory Service.