

Keith E. Cooper (1922-2011). Obituary

By Quentin J. Pittman

Keith Cooper, M.B., B.S., M.Sc., M.A., D.Sc. (Oxon), Professor Emeritus at the University of Calgary, inaugural Head of Medical Physiology at the then new University of Calgary Medical School and later Vice-President (Research) of the University of Calgary, passed away peacefully in Horton General Hospital, Banbury, UK, on October 19th, 2011. Keith, with his wife Eileen were residents of Calgary for 40 years, moving to Calgary in 1968 having been a Fellow of St. Peter's College (Oxford) and member of the Medical Research Council Body Temperature Unit there. Educated at Watford Grammar School, he entered St. Mary's Hospital Medical School London on a Kitchener Scholarship in 1940. In the postwar years he lectured in Physiology at St. Mary's and then served with the Royal Air Force at the Aviation Medicine Institute at Farnborough, before moving on to Oxford. He married Eileen in 1946, and they had two children, John and Peter, and five grandchildren, Kate, Richard, Ben, Emily and Joe. Although Keith and Eileen moved away to Calgary in 1968, the family were regular visitors to their home on Sifton Boulevard. Indeed the house was a regular place of entertainment for friends, colleagues and visitors throughout Keith and Eileen's time there.

As Head of Medical Physiology at the University of Calgary, Keith played an important role in the establishment of the Neuroscience Research Group; in the late 1960's the concept of a multidisciplinary research group and training program that crossed traditional department lines and encompassed both clinical and basic neuroscientists was highly innovative. Along with his colleague Dr. Warren Veale, Keith directed an active research laboratory that produced important papers on thermoregulation, hypothermia and fever. He co-authored "*Hypothermia for Surgical Practice*" in 1960 and authored "*Fever and Antipyresis: The role of the Nervous System*" in 1995. Keith's original work was with David Kerslake, studying skin vasomotor responses to heating and cooling in humans. Subsequently, while working with W. I. Cranston, he published some of the earliest (and now classic) papers on the site and mode of action of pyrogens in brain. After moving to Calgary, he and Warren Veale directed research on fever in newborns and during pregnancy that subsequently lead to the concept of endogenous antipyresis mediated by central vasopressin.

Keith was a role model, supervisor and mentor to numerous trainees who now occupy senior academic positions throughout Canada, Europe and the United States. He was President of the Canadian Physiological Society and of the Canadian Federation of Biological Societies and board member of numerous other organizations. Keith had many interests outside his academic life, including music (he was at one time on the Board of Directors of the Calgary Philharmonic and Chair of the 1995 Royal Canadian College of Organists Convention), skiing, fishing, walking in the mountains and bird watching, the latter one of Eileen's passions. Before immigrating to Canada he greatly enjoyed dinghy sailing and had been a flag officer of two UK sailing clubs. Quite apart from his academic prowess, Keith will be remembered by all who met him for his warmth, his interest in so much that went on around him and very much for his rich repertoire of stories and jokes. Keith was one of the last of a generation of classically trained people who were equally knowledgeable discussing science, music, religion or the environment; he brought insight and humour to every conversation.



Keith Cooper in action. A photo was taken in the lab in the late 70's or early 80's. Courtesy of Quentin J. Pittman

Eileen died in 2008, and Keith then returned to the UK where he was close to his family. Through those last few years, though failing in strength, he never lost his sense of humour, his unfailing courtesy to all around him, or his interest in the affairs of the world.

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