

Obituary

Sir Martin Roth, 1917–2006

Neuropsychopharmacology (2007) 32, 1429.
doi:10.1038/sj.npp.1301364



Martin Roth was the most respected and the most successful psychiatrist of his generation. He was born in an orthodox Jewish family in Budapest, Hungary, on 6 November 1917. In 1925 the family moved to London where his father, a cantor, had accepted a position.

Roth attended the famous Davenant Foundation School, where he soared, not only scholastically, but also musically; he showed, as a mere boy, his talent as a pianist, a talent he exhibited and enjoyed throughout his life.

Roth, too, opted for medicine and was given a place at St Mary's Medical School, Paddington, where he qualified MBBS (London) in 1942. Thereafter, with exemplary speed, he added to his name the MRCP (London) and MD (London).

By that time he had decided that neurology was to be his *métier*, but impressed by the teachings of one of his mentors, Lord Russell Brain, he felt compelled to change track and decided to become a psychiatrist, rather than a neurologist.

To achieve this, he went to the famous Maudsley Hospital. He was chosen as Senior Registrar to Professor Sir Aubrey Lewis, but sadly, both of the intellectual Titans proved to be incompatible and Roth quit prematurely.

His next stop was at the Crichton Hospital, Dumfries, Scotland, where Professor Mayer-Gross, an eminent refugee

from Nazi Germany, was the Director of Research. In the relaxed atmosphere of the Crichton, Roth found an opportunity to study, reflect, and write. But of most importance was the invitation to join Mayer-Gross and Eliot Slater in writing a new, comprehensive textbook of psychiatry, 'Textbook of Clinical Psychiatry'. It was a huge success and became the standard work worldwide. It was translated into five languages and ran to three editions, the last one written mainly by Roth himself.

Then he was appointed as the director of Clinical Research at Graylingwell, Sussex. Here, *inter alia*, he continued what had become his major preoccupation, namely, the differentiation and classification of mental diseases, mainly those associated with old age.

In the mid 1950s came recognition by the scientific and psychiatric community of the real worth of Roth as thinker, philosopher, and, particularly, as a researcher. Prestigious jobs and important invitations to speak at universities and institutions poured in from all over the globe. Glittering honors and prizes were showered on him; suddenly, the world was his oyster.

First in the academic queue was an invitation in 1956 to become Clinical Professor and Head of Psychiatry in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Under his leadership, the department blossomed and became recognized as one of the leaders in the field. It is no coincidence, incidentally, that during his tenure in Newcastle, Roth was created Knight of the British Empire. But, even so, the honor he cherished most was his election in 1996 to the Royal Society.

There was, yet another, even more distinguished academic honor. In 1976, he was appointed the first Professor of Psychiatry in the University of Cambridge. As he had done in the past, he succeeded in building up a highly successful centre for research, but on this occasion, from the scratch.

There is one other triumph to record, one totally unconnected with the intricacies of research: he was elected as the first President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He took up duties in 1972 that included administration, politics, and finance. The College is, and always will be, a monument to his skill.

Roth died, aged 88, at Cambridge on 26 September 2006.

Henry Rollin
*Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist, Horton Hospital,
Epsom, UK*