Leonard Abrahamson

Born: 1896

President: 1949-1952

Died: 1961

Leonard Eliezer Abrahamson was born in April 1896 in Semiatich, then a part of Tsarist Russia, and now in Belarus. His family left Russia in 1899 as the Jewish community were subject to frequent pogroms during that period. They settled in Newry, County Down, where his early education was provided by the Christian brothers and with whom he excelled. He obtained the highest grades in the country in Irish and Greek in 1910. Subsequently, in 1914, he wrote an article in Irish praising the Christian Brothers contribution to both his education and that of the poor. Later he was appointed Vice President of the Christian Brother's Society Past Pupils' Union.

Abrahamson was admitted to Trinity College in 1914 with a double sizarship in Irish and Hebrew. He won the Hutchinson Stewart Scholarship, further prizes in Irish and Hebrew and obtained first class honours in French and German. However, he abandoned linguistics and entered the medical school, obtaining first place in the second, third and final professional examinations. He also won the Fitzpatrick Prize, the Medical Travelling Prize and the Banks Medal.

During his undergraduate period, he held the office of Librarian to the University Gaelic Society and regularly debated in Irish. He was responsible for an invitation sent to Patrick Pearse to speak at a society meeting in 1915. The Provost of the day objected; consequently, Pearse did not speak, the society was suspended and Abrahamson was censured.

He graduated MB in 1918, and having studied in London and Paris advanced to Membership of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland in 1921, and then to MD and Fellowship in 1922.

Abrahamson was appointed as a physician to Mercer's Hospital Dublin in 1922 remaining there until 1931. During this time, his reputation as a diagnostician and clinical teacher was established. Having been appointed Professor of Pharmacology at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in 1922, he developed an interest in cardiac disorders and published several papers on aspects of the subject. He was a founder member of the Cardiac Society of Great Britain & Ireland and introduced the first electrocardiograph to Ireland, which was installed at Mercer's Hospital. In 1927, he made the first report of coronary thrombosis diagnosed during life and verified at post-mortem to the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland. He and a colleague also described a condition that they named as thrombophlebitis migrans.

Abrahamson transferred to the Richmond Hospital in 1931, and became Professor of Medicine in RCSI in 1934. He held offices in many learned and professional associations; including Chair of

the Irish Medical Association, and President of The Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland (1939). He was also a member of the Association of Physicians of Great Britain and Ireland, the Biological Societies of Trinity and RCSI, and the cardiology section of the BMA.

Leonard Abrahamson was one of the best-known physicians in Ireland at a time when practitioners were the subject of discussion and analysis amongst the tightly knit medical fraternity. He is described as having a magnetic personality, tinged with flamboyance. He continually smoked cigars (Partagas from Foxes of Grafton Street) carried in, an often misplaced, cigar case. His bedside teaching was renowned for its clarity and insight, and was attended by students from all Dublin medical schools. He was particularly noted for the consideration he afforded the patients whose illnesses he demonstrated. He was a master of the clinical signs on which so much of diagnosis depended at that time. His demonstrations were accompanied by an acerbic wit, which even those targeted delighted in retelling. His patients held him in high esteem and his colleagues always referred to him approvingly as 'The Abe'.

He was active in Jewish community affairs and helped found the Jewish Representative Council, which advised the government on Jewish concerns. He was Honorary President of the Jewish National Fund and chairman of the Jewish Refugee Aid Committee. His work for the state of Israel lead to a forest being dedicated in his name in 1951.

He married, in 1920, Tillie Nurock; they had one daughter and four sons. Mervyn Abrahamson served as physician at the Richmond Hospital and as Professor of Pharmacology and Therapeutics at RCSI. Maurice Abrahamson, stockbroker, was the first Jew to be elected President of the Irish Stock Exchange in 1961. Max Abrahamson, a solicitor, lectured in law in the School of Social Studies in Trinity. David Abrahamson specialised in Psychiatry.

Leonard Abrahamson died on 29 October 1961 and was buried at the Jewish Cemetery, Dolphins Barn, Dublin. He is commemorated by a bust presented by his son, Max, to the College; and in RCSI with the Leonard Abrahamson memorial lecture, gold medal and prize endowed by the Dublin Jewish community.

JH