Professor John Kenyon (Ken) French Mason, died on 26th January 2017 at the age of 97. He was born in Lahore, India (as it then was) on 19th December 1919 while his father was serving in the Royal Air Force. After completing his education at Downside School, Somerset, he graduated BA in 1939 from Peterhouse College, Cambridge, continuing his medical training at St Bartholomew’s Hospital, London. He took the MB (Cambridge) in 1943. Thus began a journey along no fewer than three distinct career paths, along each of which he left his own distinct milestones.

Ken Mason’s interest in aviation matters stemmed from his wartime service, in his medical capacity, with the RAF during the Second World War. After the War he continued to serve, developing the RAF’s aviation pathology services during the ‘fifties and ‘sixties. This required him to confront a troubling issue that he was later to consider in his medico-legal writing: the legitimacy or otherwise of using research data that had been obtained unethically. Aviation medicine in the post-war period was faced with a real dilemma as to whether or not to use valuable data that had been obtained through the use of non-consenting subjects. Ken Mason’s handling of this issue was typical of his whole approach to medico-legal problems – he was firm in his principles, but understood the moral complexities of a situation. Over the years, he worked at the very forefront of important developments in aviation pathology. He investigated many aviation incidents, some of which could be harrowing even to the seasoned forensic pathologist. He recounted how investigating a civil aviation accident in West Africa he was required to carry out his investigations in a mass grave with a bulldozer ready and waiting to complete the burial. Sometimes this work could result in important improvement on aircraft safety.

In investigating an accident involving a Comet passenger aircraft, for example, he discovered a design fault in the seating that greatly increased mortality. This discovery resulted in changes in aircraft seat design to the now-standard A-frame. In one of the many ways in which he demonstrated his forte as a pioneer in publishing, his work JK Mason, Aviation Accident Pathology Study Fatalities (Royal Air Force Institute Pathology & Tropical Medicine Halton, Butterworths, 1962) broke new ground with its examination of prevention, effects, mode and cause of death, pre-existing disease in aircrews, environmental factors (such as anoxia and toxic engine products), and accident reconstruction (including, timing injuries, impact accidents, and unassisted escape). In particular, his work on the reconstruction of fatal ejection attempts – including potentials for injury, examination of seat, parachutes, ejection at low level, complicated ejections, positioning, misused controls, and failure harness - all led to re-design of the ejector seat. It was for this work that he was awarded Commander of the Order of the British Empire (Military Division) for services to forensic pathology of aircraft accidents, in 1973.

In that same year, he took up his appointment as Regius Professor of Forensic Medicine at Edinburgh – a chair with a distinguished reputation. In this new academic capacity, he had the opportunity to spread his wings professionally. He might have restricted himself to the routine tasks of the forensic pathologist – and these, of course, were a vital part of the criminal justice system – but even as he performed this role his intellectual curiosity led him to become increasingly involved with legal issues. He saw the opportunity and the need to bring professions together, as demonstrated by his textbooks: JK Mason, Forensic Medicine for Lawyers (originally published in 1978, and now in its sixth edition as Mason's Forensic Medicine for Lawyers with Bloomsbury, 2015); and with Basil Purdue, The Pathology of Trauma (first published in 1993, and ultimately in its third edition with Edward Arnold Publishers, 1999).

As a medic making contributions to the medico-legal world, Ken Mason was welcomed with open arms by the Faculty of Law in the University of Edinburgh, where he soon involved himself in collaborative projects with legal colleagues. It was at this stage of his career, that Ken Mason discovered that he took very well to legal debate. Indeed, within a very short time he mastered a wide range of legal issues in fields such as personal injury, criminal law, and family law. At the end of his career, it would probably not be an exaggeration that Ken Mason knew as much law as many judges. The breadth and depth of his command of the medico-legal field is revealed by his
textbook: *Law & Medical Ethics* (first published with Alexander McCall-Smith by Butterworths, 1983, and later with Graeme Laurie, until its ninth edition with Oxford University Press, 2013). While the 10th and latest edition in 2016 did not involve Ken Mason as an author, it includes a foreword by him in which, once again, he emphasised the crucial importance of concentrating efforts on the link between medical and other legal disciplines. The mantle of co-authorship has now been taken up by colleagues in Edinburgh Law School who were inspired by Ken Mason to pursue careers in the medico-legal field. However, the book will forever be known as *Mason and McCall-Smith’s Law & Medical Ethics*.

Any reader of this obituary who works in a British University might wonder why Ken Mason was so keen on the format of the textbook, certainly in today’s metric- and REF-driven world. His answer was characteristically astute and no-nonsense: what better way to support the life-long quest for learning and understanding? At base, this attitude revealed a resolute and unwavering commitment to his students. Ken Mason was a man driven by principle and duty. He saw it as a profound responsibility to pass on knowledge to younger generations, and to support them in their own free exploration of the paths to understanding.

Ken Mason’s final chosen career in medical law and ethics lasted 32 years – he was an Honorary Fellow in Edinburgh Law School from 1985 until his death. His approach to the many emerging issues of legal medicine was characteristically balanced. Although he was aware of professional claims, he was always willing to hear the voice of the outsider – of the patient surrounded by bewildering information, of those dependent on people with more power and a louder voice, of those who wanted to assert their rights in the face of indifference or hostility. He understood the delicate balance that is required to ensure that medical power is controlled while at the same time not subjecting medical practitioners to excessive or counter-productive restriction. In this task he was assisted by a strong sense of fairness and an innate sympathy. That sympathy might not always have been expressed volubly – he belonged to a generation that could be reticent – but it was clearly there. It led him to espouse the cause of people who had, in his view, been badly treated or who had suffered from a miscarriage of justice.

In those years as an Honorary Fellow in Law, Ken Mason’s contribution to the scholarly literature in the field of medical law was immense. He was involved at the very beginning of the flowering of medico-legal debate in this country and many regarded him as sharing with Sir Ian Kennedy the distinction of being a founder father of the discipline of medical law in the UK (the maternal side was well covered by his dear friends Margaret Brazier and Sheila McLean). The publication of his festschrift in 2006 stands as testament to the sheer range of intellectual contributions that he made over the years, as well as to the profound affection and respect that leading scholars in the field had for him, as shown by the 37 chapters that make up this volume (S.A.M McLean (ed), *First Do No Harm: Law Ethics and Healthcare*, Ashgate, 2006).

As a sole author in his own right, Ken Mason was probably most proud of his monograph, *The Troubled Pregnancy: Legal Wrongs and Rights in Reproduction*, published by his alma mater in 2007. With characteristic humility and openness of mind, he asked for the reader’s forgiveness where, at times, he appears to change his mind. But, as he also said: ‘I hope I have painted a fair picture of an area of jurisprudence in which decisions must be made that cannot, by their very nature, please everyone.’

As for legacy, it has been our privilege to establish the JK Mason Institute for Medicine, Life Sciences and the Law, in 2012, as a tribute to the inspiration that Ken Mason has given to so many of us. The Mason Institute aspires to reflect the openness of spirit that Ken Mason always demonstrated, intellectually, professionally, and personally. There is, however, one final matter that must never be forgotten in our memories of Ken Mason: his love of conviviality. Ken was able to attend the launch of the Mason Institute, and was manifestly proud and humbled to do so. And, when all the formalities and intellectual contributions were completed, he added his own unique contribution to the proceedings: “Now, let’s have a gin!” Always and forever - here’s a glass to you, Ken, our dear friend.

Alexander McCall-Smith FRSE, Graeme Laurie FRSE