

Private beneficence for public profit — the Cecil John Adams Travelling Fellowship

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This historical and biographical note marks the 50th anniversary of the creation, on 1 February 1945, of a trust to provide, in perpetuity, an annual award to enable South African health workers to travel overseas in order to further their professional training and experience.

The benefactor

Arthur Edward Adams was born, probably at Monk Hampton, Shropshire, England, on 4 March 1869, and was raised on the family farm, Aston Ayres.



Arthur Edward Adams who, with an initial settlement of £25 000, founded the Cecil John Adams Travelling Fellowship Trust in 1945 (photograph taken *circa* 1930).

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Two of Arthur's older brothers took over the running of the farm after their father's death in 1883. Arthur left school in order to assist them but soon realised that he had made a poor decision, so he devoted what little spare time he had to studying, and was often seen guiding the plough-horses in the field with a book in one hand.

He passed his School Leaving Certificate exams and left Shropshire to apprentice himself to a London pharmacist. By 1890 he had completed his apprenticeship and gained the necessary certification, and was able to take his next step. He sought further advancement in the colonies, and soon found employment in the Transvaal republic.

There Johannesburg, promulgated as a township in 1886, was developing in a steeply exponential fashion. Even in 1886 it boasted a coffee-shop, two chemists and a branch of the Standard Bank.¹ It may have been with one of those two original pharmacists that Arthur settled into his new life. However, by 1897 he had entered into partnership with a Mr Macdonald and this entrepreneurial move quickly prospered. Macdonald-Adams were dealers in chemicals and their principal stock-in-trade was dynamite.

By this time Arthur had married Florence Forby, the sister of a business friend. One of seven children himself, he would, in due course, father seven of his own. Florence bore him a son in 1898 but the infant died at the age of 6 months. By 1900 Florence was pregnant again, but the second South African War had begun and she returned to her parents' home in Norfolk where their daughter, Doris Florence, was born.

After May 1902, the Adams family returned to Johannesburg and there, in 1903, their third child (and second son) was stillborn. His mother survived that loss by only a few days.

This double tragedy left Arthur to raise a 3-year-old girl alone in post-war Johannesburg. Fortunately the child's maternal aunt and grandmother in Norfolk were willing to look after her and she was taken there by her father.

With a thriving business to attend to in Johannesburg, Arthur slowly took up the threads of his life again. During a visit to England in 1905 to see his 5-year-old daughter and his Shropshire relatives, he met and courted the sister of an old friend. Mary Emma Jones, despite parental disapproval, accepted his proposal of marriage and the following year sailed to Cape Town. On the day her ship arrived she and Arthur were married.

The first issue of this second marriage, Muriel Edith, was born in 1907. In 1911, Arthur's third daughter, Florence Mary, was born. This was a difficult pregnancy for Mrs Adams. She had contracted typhoid during its course and the baby failed to thrive. (The same cannot be said of her as this is written.) Mrs Adams and her two small daughters were sent to the Jones farm in Shropshire to convalesce.

Arthur was alone in Johannesburg again. But by now (1912) he felt that he had acquired enough capital to retire. He sold his share of the business, settled his South African affairs and followed his family to England. There, in 1913, another daughter, Marjorie Alice, was born. Finally, during World War I, Arthur and Mary were granted a healthy boy.

Arthur had been a contemporary and admirer of Cecil John Rhodes and this motivated him to baptise his only son Cecil John.



Cecil John Adams in service uniform (photograph taken circa 1940).

At 45 years of age, Arthur was too old to enlist but was accepted into the munitions industry, surviving an explosion in one of his several jobs. Perhaps shaken by this experience, perhaps because the sun had 'gotten into his bones', he returned to Cape Town in 1919. The next year his family, with the exception of Doris Florence, who had her own life, followed him.

They stayed in Sea Point before moving to the handsome double-storeyed Victorian house 'Dunedin', which still stands at 12 Silwood Road, Rondebosch. Old pupils of Rustenburg Girls' High School can remember the Adams girls, Florence and Marjorie, but Cecil John was destined to be educated in the English manner. Aged only 11 years, he was packed off to study at Dulwich College and only returned to South Africa when his education had been completed.

In memoriam

Cecil John Adams had two passions: one was flying, the other farming. His father forbade the former but was happy to indulge the latter. He purchased a farm in the eastern Orange Free State, settling Cecil John on it with his older sister Florence to act as his housekeeper. It was while farming that Cecil John was finally able to assuage his urge to learn to fly. On the outbreak of World War II, he joined the South African Armed Forces. Since he had been born and largely educated in England, once enlisted he had little difficulty in being seconded to the Royal Air Force.

By this time, he had married Laura Green. She was carrying their first child when Cecil John was killed in July 1941. This son, also named Cecil John, was born 7 months after his father's death. It was in memory of his son that Arthur Edward Adams established the Travelling Fellowship Trust.

The trust

It is a frequent criticism of Rhodes scholars that they too often abandon their country of origin and seek advancement in the new world to which their scholarship has introduced them. Arthur Adams sought to avoid this shortcoming. Adams Fellows, after completing the period of their appointment, are required to return to South Africa for at least 3 years '... in order that the benefit of (their) study research and experience may be made available to (their) fellow South African countrymen ...' (Adams EA. Deed of Trust, 1 February 1945).

The qualifications required from applicants for a Fellowship are brief: 'THREE YEARS residence in South Africa immediately prior to ... application ... unimpeachability of character outstanding ability and aptitude and desire to profit from further study research and experience in other Countries.'

No mention is made in the Deed of Trust of gender, religious or cultural qualifications, but the awards are restricted to '... graduates in Medicine and/or Medical Science within the Union of South Africa ...'. In 1945 this meant that applicants were most likely to be graduates or employees of the Universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand or of the South African Institute for Medical Research. The principals (or their nominees) of these institutions constitute the selection committee. Graduates of other institutions or countries are not specifically excluded. They merely have to satisfy the requirement of 3 years of residence in South Africa immediately prior to application.

The trustee

The Deed of Trust nominates the South African Association as trustee. In 1968 this institution was taken over by Syfrets. One aspect of this takeover appears to relate to the files and archives of the Adams Trust.

The duties laid upon the trustee included the annual advertisement 'in the *South African Medical Journal* or other suitable medium' of the availability of Fellowships, the keeping of a register of the addresses and qualifications of all applicants and, in the case of successful applicants, the approximate date of return to South Africa. The trustee was also required to keep a record of the receipt of each successful candidate's report on his or her experiences while holding a fellowship. Copies of these reports were to be sent to the selection committee and their comments, to 'guide (the Trustee) in regard to future awards', were to '... be recorded in the said Register for future reference historical or otherwise'.

Not unnaturally, the absorption by Syfrets of such of this information as had been accumulated over the intervening 23 years, coupled with the absorption of all the other details of the business they had taken over, seems to have led to some archival indigestion. So far only the register of the names of applicants has remained readily available.

The Fellows

In the preamble to the Deed of Trust, Arthur Edward Adams declares that he '... has reason to be grateful for many benefits derived during a long and interesting life in the Union of South Africa, the land of his adoption, and is desirous of expressing his gratitude therefor ...'. That he succeeded beyond expectation is evident in the fruits of his creation.

According to the register held by the trustee, in the 50 years that have now elapsed since 1 February 1945, 148 awards have been made to 137 people. One Fellow received the award three times and 10 Fellows received the award twice. To trace and describe the achievements of such a large number of Fellows is a formidable task. Many no longer appear in the *Register of the South African Medical and Dental Council*. Some have died, others have retired.

Many have moved elsewhere in the world, not always of their own choice. One of these is Sir Raymond Hoffenberg. Banished by the government of the day, he became William Withering Professor of Medicine at the University of Birmingham, England. A world-renowned endocrinologist, his 6-year term as President of the Royal College of Physicians overlapped with his appointment as President of Wolfson College, Oxford. But he contributed to the health and welfare of South Africans for 10 years after holding his Adams Fellowship and before being forced to move abroad.

Others moved because the fruits of their Fellowship prepared them for promotion which restricted opportunities in South Africa denied them. Professor Robert Forman, a Fellow in 1968, spent 7 years as lecturer and senior lecturer in cardiology at the University of Cape Town before taking advantage of a professorial opening at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, USA.

The majority remained in South Africa. One of these, Professor Andries Jacob Brink, received the award twice (1951, 1952). Also a cardiologist, he became Foundation Professor of Medicine at the University of Stellenbosch, serving on the Council of that university, on the Medical and Dental Council and on the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, among others.

Another, Dr Stuart Saunders, a Fellow in 1959, known for his interest in liver metabolism, was Professor of Medicine and head of that department at the University of Cape Town. He was promoted in 1981 to the position of vice-chancellor and principal of his *alma mater* and has served the wider community with distinction in that rôle.

These Adams Fellows are just four of the very many who have contributed to the health and welfare of their fellow South Africans.

The future

On 19 March 1948, Arthur Adams executed a second deed, thereby doubling the capital sum of the Cecil John Adams Travelling Fellowship Trust.

This act was probably due in part to the report by Dr Alexander (Sandy) A. Brown. He and Dr T. Gillman were the first of the Fellows (in 1947). He noted that post-war inflation in Great Britain was already making it difficult for any Fellow to comply with all the requirements of the award.

At that time the South African pound was on a par with sterling and purchased 4 US dollars. A full-time hospital

medical officer at Addington Hospital in Durban received a salary (marriage and living-out allowances included) of £300 p.a.

After Arthur died on 24 January 1952, and when his estate had been settled, it became apparent that he had contributed almost one-fifth of his total assets to the creation of the Fellowship. This was generosity of the first order.

He had suggested in the original trust deed that the trustee should invest this capital sum in 'securities of a short-term nature until such time at any rate as the value of money shall appreciate and interest rates improve'. It is not given to any one to be able to see into the future, and Adams could not possibly have foreseen the rampant inflation which thereafter steadily depreciated the value of money.

At present the Fellowship has an annual value of approximately R9 000.² Given that R9 000 buys US\$2 492,45 or £1 577,39 (excluding bank commission!) (*The Argus*, 14 March 1995), it is immediately apparent that Fellows cannot abide by the requirement that 'the Grantee . . . shall not necessarily be precluded from accepting any remuneratory appointment whilst holding (a Fellowship) . . . PROVIDED ALWAYS that if the Grantee should accept any such remuneratory appointment the remuneration received by him . . . shall be handed over by him to the trustee and the amount so handed over shall be deemed to form part of the income of the Trust'.

In waiving this requirement the trustee has taken advantage of an escape clause. Acceptance of remuneration is governed by the wording ' . . . if by so doing he has better facilities or opportunities for research. . . ' It is rare indeed for any one to be accepted as a Fellow unless he or she has ' . . . shown promise of being likely to profit from further study research and experience in other Countries'. This is a major requirement which the trustee must fulfil in accepting any recommendation from the selection committee. Moreover, in today's academic world, very few Fellows would be able to find a niche for themselves overseas that did not *require* them to take part in such research, almost all of which is funded under strict supervision and carries with it suitable remuneration for the participants.

The Deed does not require the trustee to police the refund of such remuneration by Fellows. Adams placed his trust in the Fellows by requiring them to be of unimpeachable character.

Arthur Edward Adams was a man who had made his own way in the world. He knew very well that in the early years of their careers the Fellows would, for the most part, have to struggle financially and could not be expected to refund immediately any additional monies they might have received during their tenure. But he also knew the value of investing in one's own abilities. The tremendous financial advantage of such an investment would lie in the future. It is not by chance alone that doctors are in the top 10% of income tax payers.

Given these facts, it was not unreasonable for Arthur Adams to hope that as their earning power increased, in part as a result of the additional advantages gained from an Adams Travelling Fellowship, Fellows would be guided by that 'unimpeachability of character' to honour, albeit belatedly, the spirit as well as the word of the agreement they had entered into with the trustee.

Sadly, the present value of the Fellowship suggests that few have thought to do this. However, the trustee has indicated that past Fellows who feel motivated to do so can rest assured that their contributions will be added to the trust funds. This is the only way in which the value of the annual award can hope to keep pace with modern financial realities. If it must continue to rely solely upon the interest on the original capital, the applications will inevitably meet with insignificant funding and the purpose of the Trust will be defeated.

The Cecil John Adams Travelling Fellowship is at risk and may cease to exist. The proud contribution of Arthur Edward Adams to the support of health workers and, through them, to South African society, would also vanish.

This would be a very great pity indeed. Shortly before his death Arthur discussed with his daughter, Florence Newton, his desire ' . . . to do something for the black people of South Africa' but confessed that he had not been able to think of a suitable means of achieving this. Circumstances have changed to the extent that his trust can now be shared equally by all the people of ' . . . the land of his adoption'.

It is directly within the power of past Fellows to rejuvenate the trust and expand it to that point where Adams Fellows will be looked upon as the medical equivalents of those scholars who have benefited from the foresight of Arthur Adams' model, Cecil John Rhodes.

I am grateful to the trustee, Syfrets, for permission to undertake this study and for assistance in pursuing it, especially from their Senior Trust Officer, Mrs L. A. Prosser.

I am indebted to Mrs Esme Bull for referring me to Miss Jean Blanckenberg. The latter's knowledge of, and experience in, archival research enabled me to trace the descendants of Arthur Edward Adams. Without her help, nothing would have come of this project.

The most senior descendant, Mrs Florence Mary (Tommy) Newton, is acknowledged by other family members to be the historian of the family and I am deeply grateful for the wealth of fascinating detail she has provided. Above all, I wish to thank her for entrusting to my care (for copying purposes) her treasured photographs of her father and her brother.

REFERENCES

1. Rosenthal E. *Gold! Gold! Gold! The Johannesburg Gold Rush*. New York: Macmillan, 1970: 150.
2. SAMJ News Flashes. Cecil John Adams Travelling Fellowship, 1993. CME 1993; 11(Jun): Insert.

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