

OBITUARY

Prof. Dr. med. Dipl.-Phys. Karl Sellier 1924–1997



University Professor Dr. med. Dipl.-Phys. Karl Sellier died suddenly and unexpectedly on the 15th April 1997 at the age of 72. He was closely associated with the Institute of Legal Medicine of the University of Bonn over a period of 45 years.

Karl Sellier was fascinated by the extreme and was stimulated by the unexplored. His vocation was the application of physics to legal medicine which he continued after retiring. His un-

timely death also occurred while he was working on a complete revision of his publication "Schußwaffen und Schußwirkungen" (Firearms and wound ballistics). It is hoped that this can be realised by his co-author Beat P. Kneubuehl.

Karl Sellier was born in Chemnitz on the 14th November 1924. He attended school in Leipzig and then Magdeburg where in 1943 he passed the emergency examinations ("Notabitur") in order to join the "Wehrmacht". He was wounded twice. When he was released from the military hospital at the end of 1945 he was able to complete his final examinations which he passed in the middle of 1946. In 1946 and 1947 he worked in the mining industry in order to begin his studies at the Bergakademie Clausthal/Zellerfeld in the summer semester of 1947. It was here that he discovered this penchant for physics. From 1947 to 1952 he studied physics in Bonn. He became acquainted with Otto Prokop in the "Poppelsdorfer Bunker" who recognised his capability and aptitude for legal medicine.

During his studies he sporadically advised the Institute of Legal Medicine in Bonn on questions of physics. At the end of 1952 he obtained a position as voluntary assistant

and later as assistant at this Institute. From 1953 he studied medicine which he completed in 1961 and was promoted to doctor of medicine with the dissertation "Über die Todeszeitbestimmung durch Extrapolation der Temperaturabfallkurve einer Leiche" (Time of death estimation by extrapolation of the decrease in body temperature of a corpse).

The academic career of Karl Sellier rapidly progressed and in 1963 he was promoted to "Dozent", in 1968 to extraordinary Professor and to full University Professor in 1970. Karl Sellier officially retired in 1968 but continued his scientific activities until his death.

Earlier works from Karl Sellier included spectrometric, photometric and electrophoretic investigations which were all new areas of study in the field of legal medicine. This was followed by epochial studies partly with F. Unterharnscheid on the mechanics of trauma to the skull, the physics of cranio-cerebral injury, the mechanics of fractures, central nervous system injuries in boxers, death due to electricity, paternity investigation, alcohol-related blindness and electronystagmography.

However, Karl Sellier's greatest achievements were his studies and monographies on ballistics. These demonstrate the scientific energy, thoroughness and clarity which he possessed. "Shot range determination", "firearms and effects of shooting I and II", "wound ballistics" are testimony to the highest competence and authority of the theorist, experimenter and author who for decades was recognised internationally as a leading scientific expert. Furthermore, he acquired the reputation of a highly respected and incorruptible forensic expert substantiated by many complicated criminal cases.

Legal medicine in Germany has lost a very proficient person and science has lost an internationally respected researcher: in Bonn we have lost a great friend.

Ulrich Heifer, Bonn