

## William Alastair Buchanan SMELLIE

BA, Cantab 1954; MB BChir 1957; FRCS and MRCS 1962; M Chir 1966.

We are sorry to report that Alastair Smellie died suddenly but peacefully on 24 March 2010 at the age of 76. He was a much admired general surgeon in Cambridge and for many years organised the Cambridge B Chir and M Chir examinations. He was Honorary Secretary and Treasurer to the TSS from 1975-1981, the fifth St Thomas' graduate to occupy this post.

Alastair was born on 17 May 1933 in Woking, Surrey into a family with a long standing medical tradition. His father William Buchanan Smellie (FRCS Edinburgh) was a surgeon-practitioner. The medical provenance stretched back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century: an earlier William Smellie was a well known Master of British Midwifery (1697-1763) who was born in Lanark and practised north of the border, eventually settling in London in 1739 when the Hunters were in their heyday. There has been a continuous line of medical practitioners and surgeons in the 'Smellie' family right up to the present: William James Buchanan Smellie, Alastair and Anne's second child, had a distinguished undergraduate career, as well as completing the Cresta run. He is a Consultant Surgeon at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.

After schooling at Wellington College, Alastair went to Pembroke College, Cambridge, and then St. Thomas' Hospital. Having qualified in 1957, after house appointments Alastair entered the RAMC for two years in 1960 as a Captain and Surgical specialist, an interest he continued as an Honorary Colonel in the Territorial Army from 1985-90. He furthered his career in the USA in Virginia, eventually becoming Lecturer in Surgery to the University of Cambridge with Consultant status. He made a major impact in general and breast surgery, after his work with Sir Roy Calne in the transplantation field. As Senior Examiner to the University, he was responsible for organising the surgical side of the qualifying degree, and also the Mastership examination. Many surgeons - including those from East Anglia and 'The Club' - were privileged to take part in these examinations, for they enjoyed the 'Smellie' hospitality the evening before the start of the vivas in 'Gough Way' Cambridge. Those invited to stay, always had a cup of tea made by Alastair to awaken them! The Smellie hospitality was greatly appreciated, and included wines from a "French helical contraption" bored into the garden to conserve space! On one wintry occasion, snow lay heavily on the ground and the examiners' evening meal was interrupted by frequent calls from students who said they would never make the examination the next day. Alastair's answer was "Start walking now"!

As if these activities were not sufficient, Alastair also examined for the RCS (England) and was Regional Advisor for the College in East Anglia. Supportive of all hospital activities, and many colleagues in difficulty - even from other areas of the country- Alastair published widely in general, vascular and transplantation fields: he was on the Editorial Board of the British Journal of Surgery. He enjoyed playing tennis, particularly against his Oxford colleagues of whom Malcolm Gough was also a member of the 'Club'. Alastair was a good shot who enjoyed fishing and stalking in Scotland, where he was often found in retirement.

Alastair married Dr Anne Stephen Fraser. Their eldest daughter Claire (married name Don) became a teacher, and Thomas (Oliver Buchanan) is a Financial Consultant. Alastair and Anne were an ideal team when he was Secretary to 'The Club' from 1975-81. The documents, kept by subsequent Secretaries, were handed over in immaculate order to the Archivists. The

visit to Brussels involved travelling to Dover by train, by Hovercraft to Calais and finally by coach. For the visit to Bordeaux in 1980 the TSS was located at Arcachon some miles out of the main city, an international ENT conference having taken over the central hotels. Over this Alastair had no control, and in a preliminary notice he asked for volunteer 'chauffeurs'. The more adventurous offered to drive four hired Peugeot cars. Selwyn Taylor was the Chairman of the meeting (in addition to holding a post in the 'International Wine Society' he acquitted himself with honour in two languages) and had arranged a wine tasting at one Chateau and a visit to Chateau Leonville Barton for lunch at which a superb five course meal had wines to match. Three abstemious 'Peugeot' drivers were able to remember which side of the road was correct, but at least one went the wrong side of a roundabout- or was it straight through it? Alastair had 'arranged' for five Royal Navy minesweepers to be anchored within sight of the Grand Hotel, Richelieu, a point which did not escape the local newspaper 'Sud Ouest', which published the news under the headlines "*Quatorze scalpels et cinq drageures*".

The autumn visit to Edinburgh (1978) too will be remembered, not only for the scientific content arranged locally but for the 'Blue Moon' travel arrangements that included a meal en route and first class travel at reduced rates. For this members remained grateful, being comfortably housed in the George Hotel, though some had rooms overlooking the church whose clock chimed regularly.

After handing over as Secretary to James Thomson, Alastair and Anne Smellie held a well attended Autumn meeting in Cambridge in September 1986 at which the one guest was Lieutenant Colonel Peter Craig, later to become Secretary of 'The Club' and accompany us on almost all our subsequent visits down the years. A marquee was erected in the garden to supplement the space for which the Reporter noted 'the senior members of the Club were particularly appreciative as they were able to sit down for the meal allowing them to rest their weary arthritic joints.' No doubt all present admired the fine collection of the Barbazon school of paintings when sipping vintage champagne! The excellent scientific programme included the history of the Cambridge Medical School by Professor Tom Sherwood, followed by a talk by Alastair on Cambridge surgery from 1284 when monks came from Stamford to found Peterhouse College. He touched on the Caius connection and the foundation of Addenbrooke's Hospital by a student from St Catherine's who bequeathed £4,500. He pursued this through the years in a scholarly manner right up to the formation of the Medical School, together with that of the professorial and other surgical units.

Naturally at this Cambridge meeting there was also a symposium on transplantation which was opened by Professor Sir Roy Calne with a presentation on pancreatic transplantation, followed by one on heart and heart/lung transplantation by Mr John Wallwork, Mr Keith Rolles on that of the liver and finally Mr Neville Jamieson on the better known kidney replacement. Other papers were given by the late David Dunn on 'computers in surgical practice', Dr Terence Wheeler on breast cancer and one on malignant melanoma by our host. Several concise papers were delivered by medical students: there was one on hyperparathyroidism, others on carcinoma of the thyroid, intestinal obstruction after laparoscopic sterilisation needing bowel resection and parenteral nutrition, and yet another on massive haemorrhage in a patient needing 120 units of blood. A house surgeon, Dr. Guvenc Sayiner, presented 'An Unusual Seminoma' first evident as an abdominal mass that resolved, only to be readmitted with a painful testicle. The 'Club' Dinner was enjoyed in Queen's

College by over 54 members, wives and guests. After a tour of Cambridge on the Saturday, there was a final lunch at Pembroke College.

Alastair and Anne came to many meetings after handing over the busy post of secretary, and were seen at the 1999 seventy-fifth Anniversary meeting enjoying the social side of the TSS; the Dinner was held at the Royal College of Surgeons where the guest speaker was the PRCS Sir Barry Jackson. He recalls his own gratitude to Alastair Smellie who as Resident Assistant Surgeon gave patient guidance during Barry's early surgical training at St Thomas'.

Alastair Smellie was a man of many interests and the only member of 'The Club' known to have a racehorse named after him; trained initially by Michael Bell, it did not seem to get placed too often! Most of all, however, Alastair will fittingly be remembered by those who knew him well, for his humanity as someone who would do everything he could to support those in distress, particularly colleagues who found themselves ill or in professional difficulty. Our thoughts, prayers and sympathy go to Anne, their three children Claire, James and Thomas and to their eight grandchildren.

Alan Green  
Tim Williams