

OBITUARIES**Doreen Vermeulen-Cranch**

On November 8th 2011 emeritus professor Doreen Vermeulen-Cranch passed away after a long and very active life. The international anaesthetic community, especially the Dutch, suffers the loss of one of its great pioneers.

Directly after the end of the Second World War Doreen Cranch, Welsh born and trained in anaesthesiology by among others Professor R MacIntosh, met professor Willem Noordenbos sr., surgeon at the Wilhelminagasthuis academic hospital in Amsterdam, who had come to London to receive honorary membership of the Royal College of Surgeons. The meeting led to her visiting Amsterdam several times in 1946 and the subsequent request to come and build up a modern anaesthetic department.



In memoriam Professor DME Vermeulen-Cranch, FFARCS
30/12/1915 – 8/11/2011
Professor of Anaesthesiology University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

In the mean time she married the Dutch merchant marine officer G. Vermeulen, who had survived two torpedoed ships during the war and was later to become director of the Royal Dutch Steamboat Company (KNSM) in Amsterdam.

At that time, contrary to the situation in the United Kingdom, there were no specialist anaesthetists in The Netherlands. Surgeons let their most junior assistant or a nurse apply very basic anaesthetics. Dutch professors of surgery who visited the UK after the war saw the advantages that more advanced professional anaesthesia provided.

The barely thirty year old young doctor (to look older she pinned up her hair) made “the jump to the continent” to enter the strongly conservative, masculine and hierarchal world of Dutch surgery. She was accompanied by her great lead in knowledge and a famous small case with modern equipment.

With her knowledge, but especially her gift for tactical communication, a great deal of modesty mixed with professional determination and feeling for existing relationships she managed to modernize the anaesthetic departments of her own and several other hospitals in Amsterdam and even in Utrecht. Where before open ether masks and unprotected airways led to limited possibilities and sometimes dangerous situations, she introduced endotracheal intubation making intrathoracic surgery possible. She also introduced the routine application of an intravenous drip in all operation patients, intravenous hypnotics, brand new curare and analgesics; the concept of mono-anaesthesia went overboard. The introduction of routine pre-operative evaluation, recovery room facilities and intensive care department, including one for neonates, were also of her doing. Exceptional was her initiative to train nurses as specialised anaesthetic assistants, and the institution of a departmental technical instrument maker. Before long the surgeons, who formerly claimed not to need anaesthetists, were rolling out the red carpet for the charming Welsh newcomer. Later in her career she championed sedation techniques for dental surgery and for the mentally handicapped.

Professor I. Boerema, head of the Surgical Academic Unit in the Wilhelminagasthuis asked her to implement an anaesthesia specialist training program in 1947. Her first pupils Boéré and Mauve were general practitioners in their thirties, later to lead academic departments of their own. She was appointed lecturer in 1951, and in 1958 her installation as professor made her the first in the field of anaesthesia on the European continent. Many future heads of Dutch academic departments were to be trained by her. She stimulated the institution of the Dutch Anaesthetists Society (NVA) in 1948 and of the

World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists during its first congress in The Hague in 1955. Up to her retirement in 1984 she was the educator of countless trainees and trusted advisor to many surgical colleagues dealing with difficult problems. Under her supervision the specialty of anaesthesia in the Netherlands grew and developed into what it has now become. Her valedictory

lecture was titled “Emancipation process”. Herself a fully emancipated woman, who inspired many female professionals, she was responsible for the emancipation of anaesthesia in the Dutch academic world.

Up to the summer of 2011 she retained an active interest in the profession, being guest of honour at the European Society of Anaesthesia congress in Amsterdam in June. She continued to visit the annual meetings of the Dutch Society to attend the opening lecture which is named in her honour. Always she had a relevant remark to make. As travelling abroad became more troublesome she regretfully could not visit professional meetings, especially those of the History of Anaesthesia Society.

In honour of her many achievements she was awarded Commander of the British Empire and Knight of the Order of the Dutch Lion. The anaesthetic societies of both the UK and the Netherlands made her honorary member.

Her famous case, painting and many other attributes remain in honour of her memory in the Historic museum of the Anaesthesia Department of the Amsterdam Academic Medical Centre.

We remember her as an exceptional person and especially a warm personality.

Jan Eshuis, anaesthesiologist Amsterdam