

OBITUARY

DR GWENIFER ('GWEN') WILSON - 1916-1998

Dr Gwenifer Wilson, internationally known for her research and publications on anaesthesia history, passed away peacefully on 31 October 1998. 'Gwen' was born in Broken Hill on 12 October 1916, the daughter of two teachers. She was a brilliant student and gained an Exhibition to attend Sydney University and study medicine, graduating in 1939.

As a resident medical officer at Balmain Hospital in Sydney, she was soon involved in administering anaesthetics, encountering encouragement from some, and opposition from others, this being an era when women in medicine were subject to considerable discrimination from a male-dominated profession. The experience undoubtedly set the mould for a determined and forthright personality which, with her innate gentleness and humour, made her a household name in Australian anaesthesia.

Gwen was one of 35 to enrol in the second Diploma of Anaesthesia course held at the University of Sydney in 1945. Although only four completed the course, Gwen was not only the first woman to complete the course, she finished top of the year! In the following year, she joined the Australian Society of Anaesthetists which had been formed only 12 years before. She thus came to know and earn the respect of many of the pioneers of modern Australian anaesthesia.

Despite a busy practice and a young family, she became actively involved in Society affairs, becoming chairman of the New South Wales State Section from 1951 to 1954, and Secretary of the Society from 1954 to 1956. Concern over inadequately documented records at this time sowed the seed for her future passion, and a period of illness in 1961, when she was persuaded to tape some interviews with pioneers, provided the stimulus for the making of an amateur historian.

This was no amateur, though. Gwen pursued her quest for the knowledge and documentation of anaesthetic history with the same vigour and exactitude that she applied to everything else. Those who have read *One Grand Chain. The History of Anaesthesia in Australia 1846-1962, Volume 1, 1846-1934*, will agree with the critical acclaim the book has received. This is no dry historical text, it is a living example of Gwen's commitment to her chosen fields of endeavour - anaesthesia and history.

Of course, this was not Gwen's only publication. She also published *Fifty Years: The History of the Australian Society of Anaesthetists* in 1987 and *A Bibliography of References to Anaesthesia and Related Subjects in Australian Medical Publications 1846-1962*, published in 1988. The latter work, which entailed a detailed reading of every medical publication since 1846, is an invaluable aid to anyone researching early Australian anaesthesia. Gwen also published many papers and delivered countless lectures, always in her own inimitable style, sprinkled with anecdotes and humorous asides.

Gwen became Honorary Historian to the Faculty of Anaesthetists, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1966, and later to the newly formed Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists until 1992, when she was made Emeritus Historian. She was the Honorary

Archivist for the Australian Society of Anaesthetists, whose archives are named in her honour. Gwen was also an active participant on many committees in the College and the Society.

Gwen received many honours in recent years, including the highest awards bestowed by both Society and College, the Gilbert Brown Award (ASA) in 1987, the Faculty Medal in 1988, and the Robert Orton Medal (College) in 1990. In 1995, Gwen was awarded a Doctorate of Medicine by the University of Sydney, shortly before being internationally acclaimed as the first Laureate in the History of Anaesthesia by the Wood Library-Museum of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

Until her last illness, Gwen remained a passionate advocate for the specialty, for the rôle of women in medicine, and for the preservation of history. All who follow in her footsteps will be indebted to her dogged determination.

Rod Westhorpe

President, Australian Society of Anaesthetists

Honorary Curator, Geoffrey Kaye Museum, Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.

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A REMARKABLE CATALOGUE

In keeping with the European flavour of this volume, I direct attention to the splendid catalogue of the Exhibition held in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, on the occasion of the 1997 German Congress of Anaesthesia and the Fourth International Symposium on the History of Anaesthesia. The great range of items from private collectors and museums is presented in full colour in a chronology from Sertürner to servo-anaesthesia. The English text is edited by Jochen Schulte am Esch and Michael Goerig, who have provided a scholarly and coherent commentary on the developments in equipment and the personalities involved.

With a comprehensive bibliography, plus index of people and of topics, this is excellent value at DM50. Contact Michael Goerig at Universitäts-Krankenhaus Eppendorf, Martinistr.52, 20246 Hamburg.

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