

RICHARD HANCOCK ELLIS, MB,BS, FRCA, DRCOG.
11 September 1937 - 10 May 1995

An Appreciation

Richard (Dick) Ellis died unexpectedly on 10 May 1995 aged 57 years, in the postoperative period following an operation. It is a privilege to be asked to record some of his achievements and to examine some of the important and interesting influences which made him what he was, a Christian gentleman, a devoted family man, an outstanding physician anaesthetist, a meticulous investigative medical historian, and a master of the written and spoken word.

Dick Ellis was born in 1937 into a family with a medical tradition. He was the grandson of a highly respected general practitioner in Anglesey, and the son of another much loved family doctor. His mother was a State Registered Nurse. His father's single-handed practice was in rural Essex on the fringe of Greater London, and Dick grew up in an atmosphere in which both parents were dedicated to the patients of the practice, whether rich or poor, by day and by night, and year in and year out.

Dick was a premature baby weighing only 4 lbs (1.8kg) which was quite a challenge for those who cared for him in infancy in the 1930s. He and his mother were attended at the birth and in the postnatal period by a London Hospital nurse who later, by a happy coincidence, became his mother-in-law.

He was educated at Chigwell School in Essex. This is an historic institution founded in 1629, of which Dick later became a Governor, and which numbers amongst its former pupils the Quaker William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania. It has turned out to be fortunate for us all, that Dick's interests, and those of the School at that time, were centred around the humanities. He was taught history and English by two very able and inspiring masters, and this turned him into a voracious reader as well as giving him both an abiding interest in history and the ability to communicate in excellent prose.

When he left school, Dick decided to follow the family tradition and study medicine, but a grounding in the humanities was scarcely regarded as the ideal passport to a medical career even in the mid fifties; however, after hard work studying with a crammer, he secured the necessary scientific A-levels. Then, to the surprise of his family and friends, he took part in a trawling expedition around Bear Island (Bjornoya), within the Arctic Circle some 200km south of the Spitzbergen archipelago, before entering the London Hospital Medical College. Dick had always had a romantic love of the sea from childhood and he hankered to go to sea again, a wish which sadly remained unfulfilled. This desire was recalled at Dick's Memorial service by an impeccable recitation of Masefield's poem 'Sea Fever' by his son Thomas.

Various junior medical appointments followed his qualification in 1961. These included one in dermatology as house physician to his future father-in-law some considerable time before he became acquainted with his chief's daughter! Other posts were in medicine, surgery and obstetrics, and the latter resulted in his passing the examination for the Diploma of the Royal College of Obstetricians. One cannot be certain when Dick chose a career in hospital medicine rather than general practice, but it is not surprising that he did. Conditions in general practice in the British National Health Service were not easy in the early sixties, before the reforms of the 'General Practitioners' Charter' came into effect in 1965. It is not surprising either that one so steeped in the ethos of general practice, should choose the speciality of anaesthesia, which was also developing its expertise in intensive care at that time. Anaesthesia, like general practice, is a speciality which requires an interest in, and a basic knowledge of, many other disciplines.

Dick Ellis rose steadily through the registrar ranks of the Department of Anaesthesia at the London Hospital and was awarded his Fellowship in 1967; then, as a Senior Registrar, he met Elizabeth (Liz) Price, then a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit at the London Hospital in September 1967, and with whose family he had already been involved. He wisely followed another family tradition by marrying her in May 1968. Thus began a partnership which he frequently described as having been 'made in heaven' - and justly so.

His next move was in 1970 to an exchange appointment as a Consultant with special interest in cardiac anaesthesia at the Groote Schuur Hospital in Capetown. This exchange was arranged by the Professorial Anaesthetic Department at the London Hospital less than 3 years after the first cardiac transplant in the world had been carried out at the Groote Schuur. The appointment was highly successful; Dick is remembered to this day as a very capable clinician and a gifted teacher.

Dick Ellis was appointed to the staff of St Bartholomew's Hospital (Barts) in 1971 on his return from South Africa, and he and I then worked happily together as cardiac anaesthetists for the next 3 years; indeed it was partly the certainty that I could justifiably leave the emergent subspecialty of cardiac anaesthesia at Barts in his capable hands, that gave me the confidence to move on to an appointment elsewhere. For this I am personally very grateful to him.

Dick Ellis led an active professional life both inside and outside the operating theatre and the intensive care unit. He served St Bartholomew's, not only as a clinician, but also as Honorary Secretary to the Hospital Medical Council and as a member of the Medical Advisory Committee. It is, however no secret that his independent spirit and his belief in the primacy of professionalism made him unhappy with the later reorganisations of the National Health Service. He was in addition an active member of the councils of both the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland and the Anaesthetic Section of the Royal Society of Medicine, and he was an examiner for the Fellowship of the Royal College of Anaesthetists.

Dick and Liz showed a somewhat unexpected flair as impresarios when they organised the highly successful social programmes for the Sixth European Congress of Anaesthesiology in 1982 and for the Second International Symposium on the History of Anaesthesia in 1987. Dick's charm persuaded the pyrotechnic technicians to mount a celebratory firework display in 1982 the like of which the Thames is unlikely to see again!

Dick Ellis contributed several important papers to the clinical scientific literature early in his career, but from 1980 onwards, his considerable output was almost entirely devoted to historical subjects. His special, but certainly not exclusive, interest was in the events surrounding the introduction of anaesthesia into the United Kingdom in the 1840s, and the subsequent career of the first professional anaesthetist John Snow (1813-1858). His careful research exploded several myths and brought to light much new material. The publication shortly before he died of transcriptions of the 3 surviving *Case Books of Doctor John Snow* (July 1848 to June 1858) with a detailed and scholarly critique, was the result of nine years of part-time research. This volume would be no disgrace as the output of a professional historian working full-time over the same period. Dick was much in demand as a speaker; in 1985, he undertook a successful lecture tour in the United States during which he delivered the prestigious Lewis Wright Memorial Lecture to the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

He was to have presented an important paper to a joint meeting of the History of Medicine and Cardiothoracic Sections of the Royal Society of Medicine on 16 June 1995, to mark the 70th anniversary of the first trans-auricular mitral valvotomy by the London Hospital surgeon Henry Souttar. The script of the lecture and its slide were fortunately and typically already prepared before Dick's death. Sadly, in the event, the lecture had to be read posthumously. This was done by Dr Aileen Adams CBE (President of the History Section and former Dean of the Faculty of Anaesthetists), with Sir Terence English (President of the Cardiothoracic Section and former President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England) in the Chair.

The size of the congregation at the Memorial Service for Dick Ellis at the Church of St Lawrence-Jewry-next-Guildhall in the City of London on 5 January 1996 bore moving testimony to the esteem in which he was held. The Lord Mayor of London, who for 1995/1996 happens to be John Chalstrey, a St Bartholomew's surgeon, and the Presidents of the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland, the Royal College of Anaesthetists, and of the History of Anaesthesia Society were all present. The surgeon Lord Robert Winston paid tribute to Dick as a friend and as an anaesthetist, and specifically for his part in furthering the surgical treatment of infertility.

The loss of Richard Ellis is both serious and sad. He will be greatly missed by his clinical colleagues, by all those who study the history of medicine, as well as by his many friends, but most of all by his loving wife Liz, their children Charlotte, Nicolette and Thomas, and the other

members of his family. We must, however, be ever thankful for the contribution which he made to the general wellbeing during his lifetime, and for the literary legacy he has left behind for us to study and appreciate.

TB Boulton

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