

OBITUARY

Dr Douglas D C Howat

Douglas Howat was born on the 10th January 1920 in the Scottish borders and brought up in London, where his father was a general practitioner. He studied medicine at King's College, London, qualifying in 1943. Here he met his future wife Joan who was also a student. After service in the RAF he eventually became consultant anaesthetist to St George's and the Royal Masonic Hospitals in London.

He served on the Council of the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (AAGBI) and when in 1969 a Treasurer was due to be elected, someone was inspired to say 'let's make Dr-and-Mrs-Howat our Treasurer'. He became Treasurer, with Joan's help for she was always as much a part of his professional and public life as of his family life. Both contributed together.

Later Douglas was elected to the Board of the Faculty of Anaesthetists where he served with competence on numerous committees, as examiner for the Fellowship, and delivering the Frederick Hewitt lecture in 1977. When Vice-Dean he breathed new life into what was then a rather vague post, whilst his contribution to surgical affairs was so effective that in 1984 the surgeons elected him FRCS. He was elected Honorary Member of AAGBI in 1986.

Douglas soon became involved in international affairs. He had an ability to establish rapport with all sorts of people and where diplomacy was needed, he was asked to go. As early as 1966 he was one of the UK representatives considering the implications for medicine of Britain joining the European Economic Community. Not only his linguistic skills but even more his wise counsel was immensely valuable. When the UK eventually joined in 1973 he continued to represent British anaesthesia on the Council of the UEMS and chaired its Anaesthetic Monospecialist Committee. From 1976-1980 he served as Chairman, and later Vice-President of the Executive Committee of the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists, and also chaired its European Section. He was involved too in the founding of the European Academy. During this period links with our overseas colleagues were notably strengthened and anaesthesia was established as one of the leaders amongst the medical specialties.

In his home country Douglas was President of the Royal Society of Medicine's Section of Anaesthesia and of the History of Anaesthesia Society. During his retirement he continued to pursue studies into the history of medicine, attending professional meetings and reporting his researches in a highly entertaining way.

St George's is the hospital where John Hunter worked as a surgeon over 200 years ago. It is tempting to suggest that they might have got on well together, John impatient, demanding and occasionally irascible, Douglas working in an unobtrusive yet effective way, never losing his sense of humour and always just as willing to carry out the mundane chores as the more prestigious ones. Although a national and international figure, he never forgot that the prime responsibility of a clinician is to serve his patients with skill and consideration, and to support his surgeons and his trainees.

Aileen K Adams