

Robert Robins

Orthopaedic surgeon who was instrumental in developing hand surgery

Robert Henry Cradock Robins (b 1923; q University of Cambridge 1947; FRCS Eng), died from metastasised cancer of the prostate on 23 February 2015.

Robert Robins was one of the five founder members of the Second Hand Club, a group of young plastic and orthopaedic surgeons who were instrumental in the development and professionalisation of hand surgery in the UK. Robins and his contemporaries were unable to join the original Hand Club, whose 12 more senior members were keen to retain its exclusivity. The original group, which met at the Athenaeum Club in central London, was described as a “dining club with hand surgery as gossip.”

Second Hand Club

The young upstarts of the Second Hand Club had more lofty ideals, however, opening up their club to other members and launching their own journal, the *Proceedings of the Second Hand Club*. This became the *Journal of Hand Surgery*, the first journal devoted to the specialty. The two clubs eventually merged in 1964, and four years later became the British Society for Surgery of the Hand.

For most of his life Robins continued his interest in the society. He served as president and attended meetings right up until he died. He designed the journal's cover (a design used for many years) and was on the management committee for 10 years. Robins was also instrumental in negotiating a joint subscription between the British and American Societies for Surgery of the Hand, travelling to the US at his own expense to persuade his counterparts of the virtues of the deal.

Robins read medicine at the University of Cambridge before training at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London and the Royal United Hospital in Bath. He was awarded the Luccock medical research fellowship and worked in Newcastle, where he claimed to be the first surgeon in the UK to focus solely on surgery of the hand.

He then moved to Exeter, to the Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic Hospital, where he worked for Norman Capener, a forward thinking surgeon who helped establish orthopaedic surgery as a distinct specialty in the UK. After Capener's death, Robins, along with a few other admirers, established a travelling fellowship in his name. It was also at Exeter that he



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met his wife, Shirley, a physiotherapist. They married in 1953.

In 1961 Robins was appointed consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the Royal Cornwall Hospital in Truro, where he continued his interest in hand surgery as well as doing general orthopaedic work. That same year he published a compendium on hand surgery, *Injuries and Infections of the Hand*. One reviewer commended Robins on his extensive experience of hand trauma.

Robins, known as Robbie to his friends and grandchildren, was a hardworking and ambitious doctor who, as one of only three consultant orthopaedic surgeons in Cornwall at the beginning of his career, was much in demand. He served on the regional and area health authorities, as well as being appointed a British Council fellow and travelling to Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the 1970s.

Ship's doctor

Robins was born in 1923 to Ethel and Hugh, a bank manager in High Wycombe. His hospital visits to his older brother, Geoffrey, who had polio, are said to have inspired him to pursue a medical career. After Aldenham School in Hertfordshire he went up to Queens' College,

Cambridge, to read medicine. He then did several trainee posts before being called up for national service as a ship's doctor on the merchant navy route to South America.

Despite his busy professional career, Robins was a man with many interests and lived a rich life outside medicine. He loved his life in Cornwall, was proud of his garden—which he would open up to visitors occasionally—and knew many of the county's key intellectual figures, including *Poldark* author Winston Graham and the historian A L Rowse. Described by one of his sons as a consummate networker, he also befriended local artists, such as Patrick Heron, Terry Frost, and Barbara Hepworth. He agreed to smuggle some marble out of Greece for Hepworth on the condition that she made a piece for him. She was true to her word, and the object still sits on the sitting room table in the family home.

He played a key part in the establishment of the Duchy Hospital, Cornwall's first private hospital, and became chair of the council. When it was sold the £3.5m proceeds were used to set up a charitable trust, which gives grants to local charities and organisations. Robins served as its president up until last year.

Morris dancing

Much to the bemusement of his children he enjoyed Morris dancing, setting up three Morris rings throughout his life. He was also a keen fisherman and sailor, although his seafaring abilities were often questioned. On one occasion, while he was out with one of his sons, the halyard holding up the mainsail broke, the notoriously unreliable engine failed, and the anchor chain gave way. The boat was dangerously close to some rocks in a strong swell, and after they had sent up three flares—the first two of which failed—the local lifeboat came to rescue them. Robins told his son not to tell his mother about the mishap, but the local press got hold of the story and it became front page news.

Robert Robins leaves his wife, three sons, and one daughter.

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Donald Walker Barritt



Former consultant physician Bristol Royal Infirmary (b 1921; q Charing Cross Hospital 1945; MD, FRCP), died from pneumonia on 10 February 2015.

Donald Walker ("Bill") Barritt was appointed as consultant physician and cardiologist in 1956 and gave unstinting support to the development of cardiac surgery in Bristol. He eventually led a department serving the west of England and beyond. In 1957 he supervised a controlled trial of anticoagulant therapy in pulmonary embolism, a treatment then regarded as hazardous and of doubtful benefit by its detractors. The resulting paper showed that treatment with heparin and coumarin anticoagulants was both effective and safe. It was still being cited 40 years later. In 1945 Bill married Doris, a sister at Charing Cross Hospital, and they had a happy family, with five children and 13 grandchildren. Bill retired in 1982. Doris died suddenly in 1990, and two years later Bill married Rosalind, who survives him.

Gerald Keen, Stephen Jordan
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Elizabeth Marion Innes



Former paediatric haematologist (b 1921; q Edinburgh 1943; FRCP), d 10 April 2015.

Elizabeth Marion Innes ("Elma") qualified from medical school as the most distinguished woman medical graduate. After marrying James in 1946 she spent a year as a research fellow in St Louis, USA. In the early 1960s she developed the new paediatric

haematology unit at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh. She served on the Medical Research Council's working party on leukaemia in childhood and participated in several groundbreaking multicentre trials of intensive chemotherapy with radiotherapy. In 1976 she was appointed senior lecturer in child life and health at Edinburgh University, where she continued to lead paediatric haematology until she retired in 1981. In later life she enjoyed her garden, reading, piano, extensive travels with James, and the company of her three children, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

J Alastair Innis
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Paul R Kettle

General practitioner Hoy, Orkney (b 1949; q Cambridge/Guy's Hospital 1975; DRCOG, MRCP, DGM RCP Lond), d 14 March 2015.

Paul Kettle met his wife to be, Sue (a midwife), while working in obstetrics at St Paul's Hospital and in paediatrics at Battledown Hospital, both in Cheltenham. They were married at Prestbury in 1977. In 1978 he joined Yorkleigh Surgery in Cheltenham, where he practised for 21 years. In 1991 Paul was diagnosed with myasthenia gravis. After a year off he returned to work, managing to lead a relatively normal life through sheer determination. In 2000 he moved to Orkney with his whole family and worked as a singlehanded general practitioner in Hoy for 12 years. When his health began to deteriorate again in 2006 he did not allow this to stop him enjoying his work or his immersion in island life. He leaves his wife, Sue; two children; and four grandchildren.

C J Kettle
Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;350:h2606

Eric Buchanan Ross

General practitioner Cambois, Northumberland (b 1920; q Edinburgh 1943), died from cancer of the prostate, aortic valve repair, and atrial fibrillation on 25 April 2015.

Eric Buchanan Ross was a house surgeon at Perth Royal Infirmary and served in the Royal Army Medical Corps



in India and Burma. In 1949 he took part in the rescue of three trapped miners at Cambois colliery and was awarded the King's Commendation for Brave Conduct. He was the first GP in Northumberland to introduce an appointment system. Outside medicine he was a keen golfer all his life. Ross married Marjory (née Robertson) in 1946. They were happily married for 69 years. He leaves Marjory, four children, six grandchildren, and five great grandchildren.

John Ross
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Mair Eleri Morgan Thomas



Consultant microbiologist and honorary senior lecturer University College London (b 1919; q 1942; FRCPPath, MFCM RCP (UK), MFPHM RCP (UK), MRI (UK)), d 11 December 2014.

Having decided on a career in bacteriology Mair Eleri Morgan Thomas (Mair Livingstone) joined what became the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) in London's Colindale. She later became consultant epidemiologist at the Central Public Health Laboratory as well as consultant microbiologist at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Women, where she had a whole system approach to hospital infection. When she retired she had well over a hundred publications and continued to be engaged, particularly through the Royal Society of Medicine. Her alter ego, Mair Livingstone, studied DIY magazines along with the medical journals. She built walls and wrote poems, painted, sculpted, and carved. Predeceased by her husband,

James Livingstone, and their two sons, she leaves a sister, a daughter, and a granddaughter.

Anna Eleri Livingstone
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Kenneth Geoffrey Wormsley



Consultant physician and gastroenterologist Ninewells Hospital, Dundee (b 1928; q Guy's Hospital Medical School, London, 1951; DSci, FRCP), died from Parkinson's disease on 18 January 2015.

Kenneth Geoffrey Wormsley ("Ken") emigrated from Westphalia to England when he was 9. In 1945 he went to Guy's Hospital, where he became a prize winning student. After national service in Germany, he held various positions in clinical and academic gastroenterology in London, Cambridge, Los Angeles, Manchester, and Sheffield before being appointed as consultant in Dundee in 1970. His wide-ranging interests in research—including gastric and pancreatic physiology, peptic ulcer disease, and cancer—led to his becoming a major figure in British and European gastroenterology. He will, perhaps, be best remembered as an innovative and highly productive researcher. Predeceased by his second wife, Sigrid, he leaves his two adopted children and five grandchildren.

Eric Boyd, James Penston
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