

OBITUARIES

David Richard Thomas

Ken Callum

Former consultant general surgeon Derbyshire Royal Infirmary and Children's Hospital (b 1937; q St George's Hospital, London, 1961; FRCS), died from ischaemic heart disease on 8 August 2013.

David Richard Thomas descended from four generations of Welsh coalminers. His father left Wales in the depression to look for work. This he found in Watford, where he met and married David's mother. Although the young family struggled financially, David passed his scholarship to Watford Grammar School, and was subsequently awarded a scholarship to St George's Hospital, then at Hyde Park Corner. He thoroughly enjoyed his time at St George's. There were many stories to tell of his exploits, and the behaviour of some of the more eccentric consultants.

He did medical, surgical, and obstetric house jobs at St George's Hospital. He then joined Union Castle Line as a ship's surgeon and, again, had many entertaining stories to tell. After three trips, worried he might develop an alcohol problem, he returned to England and became an assistant in general practice. Surprisingly he found time to study for the primary fellowship exams for the Royal College of Surgeons, which he passed first time. He then got the job of casualty registrar at St Thomas' Hospital where he met Jo, a night sister, who subsequently became his first wife. They eventually moved to Leamington Spa, where he was a surgical registrar, passed his FRCS, and later became senior registrar in Sheffield.

Part of his rotation from Sheffield was to Derby. While there the senior surgeon developed a detached retina, and David did his locum work for three months. On the surgeon's retirement, David was appointed as his replacement in 1973. During his training he had developed an interest in paediatric surgery. He was appointed to the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary, Derby City Hospital, and also the Children's Hospital, doing a one in two rota for paediatric emergencies for many years.

He was extremely hard working and conscientious in his NHS work and giving time to teaching his juniors. Yet he developed a very busy private practice. He was told as a trainee that to have a good private practice, a surgeon must have a smart suit and a smart car. Within a few years, David was the proud owner of a Rolls Royce.

When he was appointed to Derby there was no formal private hospital. Some operations were carried out at the Catholic nursing home. He was the driving force in helping to raise the initial money and generally pushing through the development of the Nuffield Hospital in Derby, which opened in October 1981. There is a plaque just outside the Nuffield Hospital operating theatre which states:

"Without his foresight and energy the hospital would never have been built."

After the success of the Nuffield appeal, it was suggested he set up an appeal for a computed tomography scanner. He set to with his usual characteristic energy and enthusiasm. The appeal was so successful that only 14 months later sufficient money had been raised. The scanner was in service at the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary in 1985.

His three daughters attended Derby High School. He was elected as a parent governor and subsequently chairman of governors. He brought about many improvements in the running of the school and continued as chairman for a further eight years.

In June 1986 he had his first heart attack, which occurred during an operation on a 3 month old baby with an inguinal hernia. Despite having chest pain and feeling unwell, he finished the operation, returned to the coffee room and lit what he had decided would be his last cigarette, which he really enjoyed. He was then admitted as an inpatient to coronary care.

After this he was advised to slow down from his previously frenetic rate of work. He reduced his emergency commitment and cut back on very major and complex operations. All this happened as Margaret Cohen, consultant radiologist, became director of the Derby screening unit. They worked together, with David on the surgical side. With his fundraising experience he helped set up the breast test appeal, under the umbrella of the previous scanner appeal. This was called the SAME appeal (scanner and medical equipment). In 1993 a state of the art breast unit was set up in Derby, which continues to this day as a centre of excellence.

At this time, David took an interest in Apple Mac computers and set up an excellent surgical audit programme.

David and Jo divorced in 1992. He subsequently met Dorothy, and they were married in 1995.

After further heart problems in 1992, he was advised to take early retirement.

A friend encouraged him to go fly fishing. He fished with great enthusiasm. An American friend invited him for deep sea fishing in Florida, where David and Dorothy bought a holiday apartment. A Boston Whaler boat and a powerful Mustang convertible followed. These were happy days. David enrolled in a night school for Italian and took a real estate course for the experience. When he turned 65, the apartment was sold and David bought a property in the South of France. An improvement in his French was quickly added.

He was a larger than life character, who was fun to be with. His extremely active professional life was cut short by health problems, but he still achieved far more in his career than many who go the whole distance.

He developed deteriorating heart failure, and when he became terminally ill he asked to be admitted to the Nuffield, for which he had done so much.

The day before he died, as breakfast orders were taken, he ordered a bottle of Bollinger. He partook through a straw—with his wife and daughters, and Dr Millar-Craig, the cardiologist

who had looked after him so well for the last 27 years. The event was recorded in the nursing records of that day.

He leaves Dorothy; daughters Charlotte, Emily, and Amanda; and granddaughter Ruby.

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