

Tribute: Harold Dallas Attwood

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ON 8 JUNE 2005 THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE (ASHM) lost its esteemed Honorary Member, Harold Dallas Attwood, MB ChB MD St Andrews MD Melbourne FRCPA FRCPATH FRACP, and Professor Emeritus of Pathology at the University of Melbourne from 1988 to 2005. A key figure in the preparatory work that led to the foundation of the ASHM in 1986, Harold also became the society's first secretary and later served as its second president from 1989–91. However, Harold had spent an even longer time nurturing interest in medical history within Australia, for shortly after his arrival in Victoria from the United Kingdom in 1961 he began to show keen support for the subject.

Harold was born in Dundee, Scotland, on 1 July 1928. His childhood was spent in modest circumstances not helped by the worldwide economic depression existing at the time, which was particularly marked in Scotland. At a personal level his health was handicapped by the presence of a congenital narrowing of the oesophagus, which meant frequent stays in hospital and a form of treatment that was by no means pleasant. This condition and its complications required him to have drastic surgery when still a young man. However, his early and painful encounter with medicine, far from having a negative effect, was positive and inspired him to pursue its study. Moreover, it gave him a lifelong empathy with patients.

Encouraged by the support given to him by his parents, Harold won his way to higher education. After a bursary to the Morgan Academy in Dundee for his secondary schooling, he secured a second bursary which in 1946 took him to the medical school of St Andrew's University. Graduating from there in 1951, he was recognised as the most distinguished graduate for the year. Subsequently, he was awarded a Fulbright Travel Grant, which allowed him to do his internship in the United States of America. He returned to Scotland in 1953 as house physician to the professorial unit of his alma mater, which had its clinical school in the Royal Infirmary of nearby Dundee. It was here that he met a young resident medical officer, Isobel Butters, whom he married the following year. It was also at this time that he decided to become a pathologist, and so took a position as Assistant Lecturer in Pathology at the clinical school where he remained until 1959. Near the end of his lec-



Emeritus Professor Harold Dallas Attwood: 1928–2005

tuership he spent another period in the USA at Yale University, and shortly after his return resigned to become Senior Pathologist at the Pharmacological Research Unit of Pfizer Ltd in Sandwich, England.

In 1961, Harold, Isobel and their three children, David, Alan and Isobel moved to Melbourne where Harold had been appointed Assistant Director of the Pathology Department at the Royal Women's

Hospital. In 1965 he took over as director and in 1966 was appointed Foundation Professor of Pathology at the clinical school of medicine created by the University of Melbourne at the Austin Hospital, Heidelberg. Here Harold built a department that speedily achieved an especially high regard for its teaching among medical undergraduates and at the same time developed with his staff a program of excellent research. In 1979, Harold returned to the main campus of the university at Parkville where he and his secretary, Edna Bird, joined the staff of the mother department. Harold had commenced his connection with this department in 1965 as a senior associate and tutor. He returned holding its second chair with part-time duties in the Medical History Unit, of which he was appointed curator in 1981.

This last appointment proved a boon for the future of medical history not only within the university but also within Australia. When Harold retired his Chair of Pathology in 1988, he remained at the university as curator of the unit (including its museum) for another eight years after which Dr Warwick Anderson, the newly appointed lecturer in medical history, assumed responsibility for it. Harold had also been made Professor Emeritus of Pathology after retiring from his chair.

My association with Harold had begun in 1962 when we were both relatively new members of the section of medical history of the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Victorian Branch, which after a change in name to the Medical History Society AMA (Victorian Branch) in 1982 has become the Medical History Society of Victoria. Harold was made president of the section in 1976 when I was its secretary (1975–77), and for a time our terms of office overlapped allowing us to become close colleagues. In 1977, together with section treasurer Dr Una Shergold (1965–77), we were able on behalf of the section to organise a Festschrift to mark the retirement of Professor Kenneth Fitzpatrick Russell from the personal chair he held in anatomy and medical history within the University of Melbourne, and to pay tribute to his achievements in medical history. Professor Russell was the doyen of medical historians in Australia and his work is commemorated biennially at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons by the presentation of the Kenneth F. Russell lecture, the first of which was given by Harold in 1991. The subsequent publication in 1978 of the papers given at the Festschrift, together with one written by Professor Russell's wife Jean Fogo Russell, presented the initial opportunity for us to work together as co-editors.

The next opportunity for editorial collaboration between us arose in 1986 when I joined Harold as co-editor of *Medical History Australia*. Dr Frank Forster, then president of the section, first proposed publishing this newsletter in 1980 shortly after his return from the First National Symposium on the History of Medicine and Health in

Australia (organised by John Pearn and Sister Catherine O’Carrigan). Frank had come back to Melbourne from the symposium in Sydney fired with enthusiasm to see the creation of an Australian Society of the History of Medicine. *Medical History Australia*, now the ASHM newsletter, was seen as an agent for bringing this about and its publication commenced in August 1981 with Frank and Harold as co-editors. However, in 1986 Frank had to relinquish his co-editorship due the weight of his other commitments. So it was that in May of that year I joined Harold as co-editor until the end of 1991, after which the editorship in its entirety passed to Ian Chapple who most successfully managed publication of the newsletter for the next eleven years. Meanwhile the ASHM had been established and in Australia’s bicentennial year 1988 had taken over as intended the publication of the newsletter and adopted its logo, which happily is still used.

The foregoing represents merely a part of Harold’s effort for the ASHM. In 1984 the first of a series entitled ‘Occasional Papers Medical History Australia’ (OPMHA 1) appeared, which was edited by Harold, Frank Forster and Bryan Gandevia. The second of the series, OPMHA 2, edited by Harold and Professor Rod Home was published the following year. Both of these publications were produced as part of a drive to promote interest in the formation of the ASHM. This was duly reported in 1987 in OPMHA 3, which constitutes in effect the proceedings of the Third National Conference on Medical History and Health in Australia held in Adelaide in 1986 at which the founding constitution of the society was adopted. This constitution had been drawn up in Oxford, England, earlier that year at a meeting between Harold, at the time on leave from the University of Melbourne, and Justice Susan Kenny, then a postgraduate student of constitutional law at Oxford University. Subsequently, Harold had the satisfaction of editing, with Richard Gillespie and Miles Lewis, the proceedings of the first national conference of the ASHM held at the University of Sydney in 1989 and published in 1990 (OPMHA 4). Throughout all this editorial work Harold had the assistance of his secretary Edna Bird, whose service was invaluable.

The above gives an indication of the magnitude of Harold’s service to two societies concerned with medical history—each recognised it by making him an honorary member. However, his contribution to the history of medicine extended beyond his involvement with these societies dedicated to its study. Apart from overseeing the expansion of the museum of his unit, giving lectures and supervising the projects of research students he delivered and published a number of research papers connected with it. One research project that gave him an especial pleasure was the production of a splendid facsimile edition of William Clift’s copy of the *Atlas* for Matthew Baillie’s *The Morbid*

Anatomy of Some of the Most Important Parts of the Human Body, the first book to treat pathology as an independent science. Baillie's book was published in 1793 and the *Atlas* issued in ten fascicules between 1799 and 1802. The particular copy of the *Atlas* providing the basis for the reproduction had been saved from flood waters by Professor Russell at the Parkville campus in 1953, and contained many of the original drawings made by William Clift for Baillie's *Atlas*.

Aside from his standing in medical history Harold was also regarded as an eminent general pathologist. After his retirement from the university's Pathology department he became a greatly appreciated pathologist at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. His early research work had been connected with the occurrence of pulmonary embolism in pregnant women, which led to a particular interest in respiratory conditions. He later became a sought-after authority in cases of mesothelioma resulting from asbestosis. His knowledge of respiratory pathology led him to doubt the widely accepted view that a lung of Dr Samuel Johnson had been used as material to illustrate the *Atlas* supporting Baillie's *Morbid Anatomy*, and he proved his case 'to the acceptance of the Editors of the *Lancet*'. The relevant papers reflected Harold's great interest in the life and works of Dr Johnson also expressed in his membership of the Johnson Society of Australia.

Harold was a modest, unpretentious, friendly and gentle man. A highly regarded teacher who taught to great effect, he was imbued with curiosity, which can be seen to practical effect in his personal participation in research and the encouragement he gave to others in it. A scholar attracted to cultural interests such as art and music, his reading was wide and he was keen to disseminate these aspects of life in conversation as well as through his writing and editing. He liked the life of the bush in Australia and researched the pathology of Australian mammals. Like many Scots he was fond of walking and became president of that well-known club for walkers, the Wallaby Club, whose book celebrating its centenary he compiled in 1993. Harold made a great contribution during the forty-four years he spent in Australia.

When his wife Isobel died in 1985, Harold felt the loss keenly. He was given great comfort and support by his children David, Alan and Isobel, who together with his six grandchildren survive him. The members of the Australian Society of the History of Medicine join them in remembering his life with gratitude.