

# Dr. Anthony Adamson: Obituary

Professor Malcolm McIlmurray



Photo courtesy of Meg Disberry

Anthony Adamson died peacefully in the Royal Lancaster Infirmary on 18 December 2022 at the age of 89. He was a friend and colleague, someone I only got to know well in recent years during his long and slowly incapacitating illness when we would talk often about many things, sport (mainly rugby), sailing, opera and family but almost always drifting back to the Health Service and the way things used to be.

We first met in 1978 when I came to Lancaster to join him and two other physicians, Allan Brown and Geoffrey Barrett, and together we provided a secondary care medical service 'for the people of North Lancashire and South Cumbria' as specified in our uncomplicated contracts of employment. Time sensitive contracts and shift working had not been invented.

We remembered together the days of Garnett Clinic, Beaumont Hospital and Westmorland County Hospital, all long since gone to housing development; the days of pin-striped suits, starched white coats and colour-coded nurses' uniforms; the days when matron and ward sisters ruled, when ward rounds with your own team of junior doctors were quiet, respectful, orderly and unhurried and patients were addressed by title and surname. Medical and nurse training was an apprenticeship. Patient ownership and continuity of care were taken for granted. The working week was spent either in clinic or on the wards or doing endoscopy lists or other practical procedures often followed by domiciliary visits that would only begin at the end of the normal working day. General practitioners became friends, referrals were personal by letter or telephone and patients were admitted or seen in clinic by mutual agreement without administrative interference. There was great satisfaction in knowing we were part of an integrated and efficient service, and that enterprise was encouraged and rewarded. There were other perks too, our own personal assistant and secretary, a parking slot outside the front door of the hospital and a consultant dining room for

morning coffee, lunch and afternoon tea with colleagues of all disciplines. The hospital was our family, our second home. This was the health service of yesteryear and some including Anthony and myself, deeply regretted its passing. We talked about it often.

In this setting Anthony was supreme. He was one of the last great general physicians, a reputation that stayed with him until he retired in 1998. He came to Lancaster with a special interest in renal medicine and hypertension but was able to adapt to whatever gap there was in the service, notably neurology and gastroenterology at that time. So, for example, his clinics would fill with faints, fits and funny turns and he taught himself to use a flexible endoscope, later introducing an upper GI endoscopy service which he provided singlehandedly for several years. He was a regular attendee at the Advanced Medicine Conference which takes place at the Royal College of Medicine every year. He and his good friend Justin Kelly were quick to recognise new developments in clinical medicine and introduce them into clinical practice, so that Lancaster had an enviable reputation in the northwest region as a place of innovation and became a popular placement for students from Manchester and elsewhere.

Thank goodness he wasn't seduced into time consuming management roles. Not that there was the same opportunity then as there is now, no Responsible Officers, Safeguarding Officers, Guardians of Safe Working, Specialty Leads, the list goes on. Even the medical director role was absorbed into a normal clinical workload in those days. He played his part of course and was chairman of the all-important Drugs and Therapeutics Committee for 14 years but it was with his patients that he felt most at home.

Born in October 1933 in Bromley, Kent, Anthony lived there with his parents and elder brother until the outbreak of WW2 when he was evacuated to Hamilton in Canada with his mother and brother, returning to England in 1944. He was schooled at Epsom College where he met Trevor Matthews who became a lifelong friend. Together they went to Caius College in Cambridge to study medicine in 1952. His clinical training was completed at St Mary's Hospital in London. He married Islay in 1960 and his only daughter Meg was born in 1962. He came to Lancaster in 1969, later to be joined by Trevor who was appointed here as a consultant paediatrician. He moved from Morecambe to Gressingham in 1973 where he lived until he died, fully involved in the life of the village and of the church.

A wonderful astute, compassionate, all-round general physician, always kind and considerate; a wonderful teacher; a wonderful colleague and friend. He is remembered with great respect and great affection.

He is survived by Meg, his daughter, Tony, his son-in-law, his grandchildren, Sarah and Alison and his great-grandchildren, Noah, Arthur and Helena.