

Obituaries

George Alwyn Balmer, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon – died 9 May 2012, aged 83 years



George was born on 28 March 1929. He was one of four siblings. His first school was Wallace High Grammar School, from where he gained entry to Queen's University, Belfast. He graduated in medicine and obtained his first posts in general practice, working in Ireland then in Jersey in the Channel Islands. He later worked as a ship's medical officer on the P & O cruise liner *Himalaya*. From there, he moved to a post as a casualty officer in Hillingdon Hospital, north London and it was there that he first met the lady who was eventually to become his wife. She was working in the same hospital as a theatre sister. This was in 1961. She was then Patricia Finnegan, sister of two famous boxers, who both won Lonsdale Belts and Gold Medals. Pat and George each then went their separate ways, going to the USA on different occasions to work there for one year, but they kept in touch and married in 1967.

When he returned to the UK, he worked in Park Hospital and then Manchester Royal Infirmary, where he studied for and gained his surgeon's degree of FRCS. He became a Senior Registrar in Orthopaedics. From there he was appointed to a consultant's post in his subject at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary in 1969, where he stayed until retirement in 1992. During his time in Lancaster, he was involved with pioneering hip surgery but did many other operations in his field of work.

George was a very affable person, liked by all who met him. Pat and he were very gracious hosts and George liked nothing better than to sit at his piano and accompany his guests in a good old singsong. His hobbies included listening to classical music, reading, cycling and playing golf. As he would be the first to confess, this wonderful and wretched game perplexed him more than most! This probably applies to all of us who attempt to conquer this addictive game.

He leaves behind a wife, two children, Christopher and Gillian, and three grandchildren.

An anecdote

It begins with a bad back my wife suffered for many years. This was so bad that in the early years of our marriage and despite four infant children and a husband working full time as a general practitioner, she was forced to go into the Garnett Clinic for a week on traction. We rallied a close friend of hers, who came to cope with the children, whilst I continued to work in the practice.

One of the newly arrived consultant orthopaedic surgeons and his family, namely the Balmers, registered with our practice. A few years later, one Saturday morning, when I was off-call, George called at our house speaking with a deep throaty voice. He coughed and spluttered and asked me if I would sound his chest in case he had a lung infection. He was apyrexial and there were no signs on auscultation of his chest. I reassured him it was no more than an 'upper respiratory tract infection' (URTI), requiring none other than symptomatic treatment.

He seemed happy with this advice, but before leaving our house he gave my wife a friendly hug and kiss, and then departed. Five days later, she had acquired George's head cold, had an enormous sneeze and suddenly her back felt better! She could hardly believe she could with ease pick up the soap she dropped in the shower. Her back, although never completely cured, has remained better since that episode.

So we now have a new orthopaedic treatment for bad backs, 'Be kissed by the orthopaedic specialist when he has a URTI'. Or does this only work if his name is George Balmer? Yet another reason he will be sorely missed!

John Carne
Retired general practitioner

Sandy Kilpatrick, Consultant Anaesthetist – died 23 June 2012, aged 85 years



Sandy Kilpatrick was one of the first cohort of doctors to qualify in the fledgling NHS in July 1948.

Sandy's account of his early days as an anaesthetist can be found in the *Journal*: 'The gasman cometh' (Spring 2008, Volume 5 Number 7, pages 192-4).

Sandy was an anaesthetist who hid enormous capability under a cloak of affable kindness that was perfectly genuine. When I arrived in the Department, with my wife and very young family miles from anywhere and anyone we knew, Sandy and Jean were welcoming kindness themselves. His expertise in dental chair anaesthesia and advice helped me to start that part of

my practice safely, when it was then done in the isolation of the dental surgery. He was a prime mover, along with Miles Rucklidge, in reorganising the way that my new colleagues and I did private practice, by setting up a Group in which the new boy was an immediate and full member. Few other doctors with an established private practice would have been as generous and far-thinking, for that Group Practice was an important factor that helped make the Lancaster Department of Anaesthesia the collegiate and cohesive group of consultants that it is, when Sandy's personal legacy of expertise and kindness was another.

John Davies
Consultant Anaesthetist