

## The History of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons from 1935 to 1960

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THE late Julian Ormond Smith brought his first chapter of this history to the year 1935, when the College became established in its new building. This as it stands today, with its simple classical front, won for its architect Mr Leighton-Irwin, the Sulman Prize for Architecture of that year. It is a commentary on the changing values of our times that this fine building cost £15,000.

Sir Henry Simpson Newland was the President of the day, an office which he had held since 1929, establishing a record which is unlikely to be broken. Robert Wade, a Sydney pædiatric surgeon, succeeded him for two years, a period which henceforth became the voluntarily recognized limit of tenure of that office.

In 1937 Sir Louis Barnett of New Zealand succeeded him. Because of slowness of communication, New Zealand was so remote that the problems of day-to-day College management devolved on the Vice-President, Hugh Devine, and Alan Newton. In those days Devine and Newton certainly recognized their influence as being most important to the College development, and they were willing to give unlimited service to its ideals and to espouse a common policy. They felt that it was in the interests of the College for them to maintain control and restrain any undue outside influences.

In 1936, in response to their wishes and because they needed more help, the Fellows had approved a new Article to increase the number of Council members to 12, and had at the same time ruled that the Executive Committee consist of office-bearers and all members of Council

resident in Victoria. At this time the Council made as much use as possible of the Article which required them to fill casual vacancies as they occurred. The new seats on the Council were filled by Sir John McKelvey of Sydney and Sir Victor Hurley of Melbourne. At the same time Barnett, while remaining President, retired from the Council and created a new vacancy which was filled by Sir Hugh Ackland of New Zealand.

### COLLEGE ACTIVITIES

In these years the Council was concerned mainly with standards and methods of admission for its Fellowship. During the first five years the procedure had been for applications to be submitted to State or Dominion Committees and from them to the Director-General (later called the Censor-in-Chief) and through him to Council. Council might require additional evidence of competence, such as a number of case reports or personal references, before admitting a candidate to Fellowship.

In 1933 this method was changed, and each applicant was required to submit an account of his training and experience to the Censor-in-Chief who, if satisfied, would allow him to appear personally before a newly constituted Board of Censors. The prerequisite to this examination was that the applicant should hold some other senior surgical qualification, and have served a period of surgical apprenticeship in an approved hospital. This examination was held in general surgery, ophthalmology and laryngo-otology only. In the first such examination, conducted in 1934, 15 out of 24 candidates were approved. The standard was

obviously high, but the assessment was rather arbitrary.

The Royal College of Surgeons of England had assisted the young College in its aim for high standards by holding a Primary examination in Australia in 1931, and again in Australia and New Zealand in 1934 and 1937. The Australasian College had been willing to share the financial deficit which was suffered by the first of these Primary examinations. For the Primary in 1937 Cecil Wakeley (later Sir Cecil and President of the Royal College of Surgeons) came as Examiner in Anatomy, and in 1934 Gordon Gordon-Taylor made his first acquaintance with Australians and New Zealanders and started an association with our College which was to prove a great benefit to many young Fellows.

Other important educational activities of the College were the annual scientific meeting and occasional scientific meetings convened by State Committees.

Alan Newton was responsible for working out the strict ritual of the inaugural session of general meetings, when the Syme Oration, founded in memory of the first President, was delivered. Newton was greatly helped in these matters of administration by Mr H. G. Wheeler, who had been appointed by Council as Secretary in 1934. He was a chartered accountant and held this office until 1961. He was well schooled by Newton in the proper functions and responsibilities of his job, lessons he never forgot and principles which he never compromised.

### *The Journal*

Another important development of the young College was the foundation in 1928 of its journal, called, in keeping with the name of the College, "The Journal of the College of Surgeons of Australasia". This important activity was conceived and undertaken solely by H. B. Devine, who following the first general meeting of the College in Canberra that year had collected enough material to fill a number. He persuaded the President, Sir George Syme, to approve the project for "a limited time". The project, with this reservation, was confirmed by Council during the same year.

The first number had already been published by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company in July. Devine was Chairman of the

Editorial Committee of 20 members (though for many years he did most of the work himself), Mervyn Archdall was Editor, and they must have moved fast to get this number out between March and July. It contained 170 pages and numerous illustrations. The second number was published in November the same year and contained 197 pages. The College having changed its name, the Journal in 1931 became the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Surgery.

It was not without its teething troubles and uncertainties. In 1938 Butterworths offered the College a 10-year contract to which it agreed, Devine remaining Chairman and Mervyn Archdall Editor. In 1949 Council decided to place publication in the hands of Massina & Co. of Melbourne. Henry Searby was now Chairman, Devine having resigned from his appointment the preceding year, Associate Professor K. F. Russell was appointed Editor, and in August, 1949 the first Massina number appeared. In 1950 Henry Searby resigned from the Chairmanship, his place being filled by Professor E. S. J. King. On his resignation in 1958, the vacancy was filled by Douglas Miller, at that time President of the College.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to reflect that at the present time the cost of printing a number of the Journal of 197 pages (cf. the number of November, 1928), would be a little under \$8,000,<sup>2</sup> excluding costs of illustrations and postage. Although Council initially approved the publication of its Journal for "a limited time", the limited time still goes on, and the Journal continues to be a most important part of College activity.

### *The Gordon Craig Library*

The library was started in 1938, and was so named in honour of Robert Gordon Craig, a distinguished Sydney surgeon and a pioneer of urology. He had died in 1931, and had nomin-

<sup>1</sup>With the resignation in 1967 from his appointment as Editor, after an 18-year tenure, by Associate Professor Russell, publication of the Journal again reverted to the Australasian Medical Publishing Company, in Sydney, as the only obvious means of ensuring that continuity of publication would under all except the most abnormal circumstances be assured.

<sup>2</sup>In 1947 the total annual outgoings of the College were about £3000, while the annual subscription was £5.50.

ated the College as the residuary legatee of his considerable estate. This led ultimately to a benefaction of about £60,000, the largest sum ever bequeathed to the College. Complete discretion was given to Council in respect of its use. The nucleus of his own collection and help from this bequest allowed the library to be developed into an important College service. Despite the munificence of this bequest, financial considerations and those of space, which were also most pertinent, rendered the establishment and maintenance of a complete surgical library impracticable. Council therefore decided that it should be a "journal" library, as complete as possible, and that any books or monographs that might find their way on to its shelves should not be acquired by purchase.

The single deviation that was made from this principle was the purchase of the Cowlshaw collection during the latter War years. Dr

Cowlshaw, a Sydney physician, was also a medical historian and antiquarian, and after his death the College was indeed fortunate in acquiring his library of some 3,000 books, probably now almost priceless, which otherwise might well have been dissipated by public sale.

#### DEVINE AND NEWTON

In 1939 Sir Hugh Devine succeeded Sir Louis Barnett as President of the College. He was probably the most important figure in the founding and every aspect of the early development of the College. Unfortunately his term as President coincided with the early years of the Second World War, when national turmoil made College affairs of small moment, and even the building was handed over to become the headquarters of the Red Cross Society. For years after the war it was known to the public as "The Red Cross Building".



Conferring of Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England on Sir Hugh Devine by the Duke of Gloucester, Governor-General of Australia, at Government House, Melbourne, February, 1945 (back row) Sir Henry Newland, Balcombe Quick, W. A. Hailes; (foreground) Sir Alan Newton (President, R.A.C.S.), Sir Hugh Devine, H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester, Brigadier D. Schreiber (A.D.C. to H.R.H.). (Published by permission of *The Herald*, Melbourne.)

During the war years Council met only twice a year, and there were no general scientific meetings, while the matter of admissions was of no great moment. In 1941 Devine was succeeded by E. D. Ahern of Brisbane. It is of interest to note that the latter did not attend any Council meeting during the two years of his presidency. At the time of his appointment, Council approved a regulation which limited the term of the presidency to two years. During this period Sir Alan Newton was Senior Vice President and conducted most College affairs, becoming President in 1943.

Newton was one of the most active, conservative and forceful characters in the early history of the College. He shares the honours with Devine. They were complementary characters—Devine, the tactician, the negotiator, the friendly envoy; Newton, the aloof ruler, the elder statesman; the one brimful of ideas often struggling for expression, and the other articulate and pedantic to the last syllable. The one had a whimsical gaiety, the other was authoritarian and uncompromising.

#### POST-WAR PROBLEMS

The war over, H. R. G. Poate of Sydney became President from 1945 to 1947. This was a very important period in College development because of the return to civilian life of many young surgeons who sought further education, qualification and appointments.

In 1943 Brigadier W. A. Hailes had succeeded Sir Alan Newton as Censor-in-Chief, and on his recommendation Council had passed new regulations requiring candidates for Fellowship to have passed a primary examination either of a Royal College or one of the M.S. degrees of an Australian university. Following this they were required to pass a full formal final examination conducted by the Australasian College in general surgery, gynaecology and operative obstetrics, orthopaedics, ophthalmology, or laryngo-otology. The first such formal examination was conducted in 1946. The introduction of this system as the only means of entering the College met with a lot of criticism and opposition from men who already had degrees and experience and had been away on active service. As a gesture to them Council resuscitated the old Board of Censors examination 1947 for a limited period, and rather against the wishes of Hailes, who

felt that there should be only one method of entry. However, this ideal did not seem possible if the College were to embrace in its fold the well-qualified surgeons of the country. To this end in succeeding years there had to be several changes and modifications.

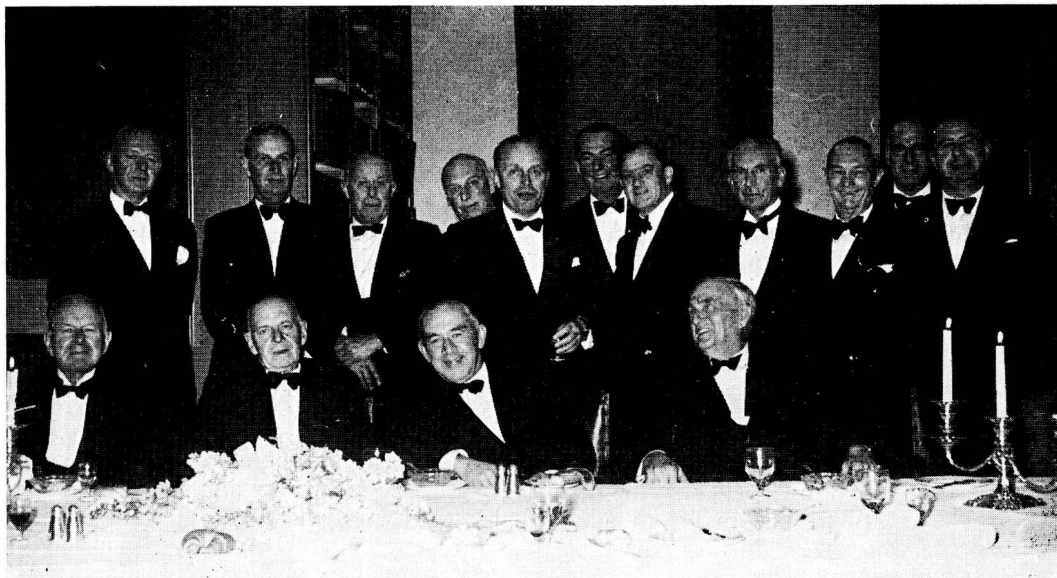
In 1946 the English College conducted a Primary for the last time in Australia, and in 1949 for the first time the Australasian College conducted its own examination, having first obtained an assurance of reciprocity with the English College. Similar reciprocity was agreed upon with the Royal Colleges or Faculties of Ireland, Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1952. In 1953 Council, believing that a general surgical Fellowship was desirable for everybody, sought to limit the examination to general surgery and ophthalmology only. This immediately roused criticism on behalf of those who had already held a senior qualification and had become immersed in specialist practice. The threat that such specialities might develop their own qualifications and associations became obvious, and Council altered this regulation the following year in order to allow any holder of another Fellowship with a reciprocal primary examination to present for examination in orthopaedics, gynaecology and operative obstetrics, thoracic surgery, neurosurgery and urology. At a later date paediatrics and plastic surgery were added. However, the problem was still unsolved, for there were many well-established surgeons who while occupying teaching posts were not prepared to submit to formal examination. To help such people who held another Fellowship prior to 1950, Council in 1956 again introduced for a limited period a Board of Censors examination. This had the desired effect of giving admission to a considerable number of Fellows to the College. It was a rather unpleasant and unsatisfactory procedure, in which the candidate confronted the whole Court across a table and could be bombarded with questions which were not always appropriate, and were at times unsympathetic.

Though these various measures were in their several ways a great help, there still remained the problem posed by increasing numbers of young men returning home with senior surgical qualifications obtained elsewhere. Many of them gained appointments to teaching hospitals and were unwilling to face up to a further full-scale examination with the considerable

risks of failure. In spite of anomalies and apparent injustices, Council had to face this problem, as for a large number of well-qualified influential men to be excluded from the College was an obvious threat to its meaning and basic philosophy in Australasia.

Therefore, after much recurring discussion, Council decided in 1958 to exempt from the full written examination Fellows from other Colleges with whom the Australasian College

always been an Article, No. 24, which allowed election by Council each year of two practitioners of 20 years' standing to be made after proper nomination. In 1954 a second clause, known as 24(b), was added to this and allowed election of men of 12 years' standing who possessed some senior surgical qualification. These men had to be properly nominated, either by two members of Council, or by one member of Council and five Fellows. The election had to



Dinner in the College Library, June, 1958, of members of Council and Past Presidents: (back row) E. L. Button, A. H. Lendon, C. H. Osborne, J. Officer Brown, H. C. Barry, J. Orm Smith, B. K. Rank, H. H. Stewart, N. G. Sutton, R. Officer, S. F. Reid; (seated) Sir Benjamin Edye, Sir Harold Dew, Douglas Miller (President), Sir Hugh Devine.

had reciprocity. This concession was generally acceptable and led to a large increase in the rate of Fellowship. The concession still operates and in 1964 the College was accorded reciprocity by the English College. In 1962 Council went further, and allowed a final examination to be taken in special subjects without the prerequisite of another general Fellowship.

In spite of the many efforts to bring apparently well-qualified surgeons into the College by some form of examination, there still remained a number of senior surgeons occupying teaching and responsible positions who would not and perhaps could not be expected to submit to any examination. There had

gain a three-fourths' majority of Council, and entrants were limited to six a year. These provisions allowed many respected and responsible surgeons to be admitted to the College. As a result of all these concessions, there could no longer be any valid reason for a surgeon not belonging to his own national institution. As a result the College gained greatly in numbers and prestige.

#### THE GOVERNMENT OF THE COLLEGE

As in these various ways the numbers of Fellows increased, modification of methods of government was called for. After the war there was a growing feeling that the affairs of the College had been controlled long enough by a

small, though important and self-perpetuating, section of Fellows. Strong moves developed to increase the number of Council members, and in response to this feeling Council resolved in 1947 to increase its numbers from 12 to 14. When this was put to a general meeting of Fellows in September it was, surprisingly, defeated, as the result of very forceful opposition by Sir Alan Newton, himself no longer a member of Council, but still exercising the great authority of his personality. He was most opposed to increasing the number of Council members or any loosening of the reins of government. Not until 1952 was another attempt made, when Council was increased to 16 members, who were to be elected in rotation for a period of three years. Sir Alan Newton had died in 1949.

In 1950 at a general meeting of Fellows a great deal of criticism was aimed at the term of service on the Council being without limit. Four years later Council took action in this matter by limiting the term of service to 12 consecutive years. This was subsequently passed without comment by a general meeting of Fellows.

The practice of filling casual vacancies by Council, which was made obligatory by an Article of Association, was also subjected to great criticism. Council had cherished this privilege because it gave it the power of controlling its personnel, and as far as possible retiring members arranged to create their vacancy between elections. The choice of new Council members was very often delegated to the Executive Committee and later ratified by Council. It was customary, though not obligatory, for Presidents to retire at the end of their term, and this would be done so as to create a casual vacancy. For instance in January, 1947 E. D. Ahern retired, and the writer was appointed in his place. In 1948 Devine gave notice of his intention to retire and recommended that the Executive Committee should fill his vacancy. Balcombe Quick, the Treasurer, also retired at the same time. F. J. Colahan of Melbourne and E. L. Button of Wellington were appointed to these casual vacancies. In June, 1947 Sir Alan Newton had announced his intention to retire, but stated that he had not yet decided on a suitable successor! Council gave permission for the Executive Committee to fill this vacancy when Sir

Alan had nominated his successor. His choice was Henry Searby, who was appointed the following month. Newton, having resigned, was then appointed as adviser on postgraduate surgical education.

Sir Alan Newton had doubtless chosen Henry Searby because he was largely the product of his own training and ideas. He was extremely dedicated, hard-working and inflexibly conservative. Within a short time he acquired considerable power in the College, for Sir Victor Hurley, the Vice-President, who presided at executive meetings in place of Sir Gordon Bell of New Zealand, asked Searby to become Chairman of the Executive Committee. In 1949 W. A. Hailes, the Censor-in-Chief, unfortunately died, and Searby took his place as well. He also succeeded Sir Hugh Devine as Chairman of the Editorial Committee of the Journal. He thus carried a great weight of responsibility and did a tremendous amount of routine detailed work which brought him to the College constantly. He found it difficult to delegate any of his duties.

In 1948 at a general meeting of Fellows in South Australia a general recommendation was made that casual vacancies be filled at the next regular elections. This proposal was rejected by Council. In 1949, after the death of Hailes, the casual vacancy was filled by L. C. E. Lindon, a subsequent President. In 1950 George Bell resigned as President, and the casual vacancy was filled by Professor E. S. J. King. This was the last time, however, that the casual vacancy Article was used, though it was not officially repealed until 1955. This casual vacancy clause had certainly served a purpose, and though not democratic, had ensured a well-balanced representation on Council and had maintained the Executive Committee at adequate strength.

Since election became a matter for general ballot, disproportionate representation has at times occurred, and has prompted thought as to ways in which this might be avoided.

#### THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In spite of enlargements to Council, the day-to-day affairs and much of the College policy had always been managed by the Executive Committee, which in virtue of the Articles consisted of office-bearers and those members

of Council resident in Melbourne. In the early days of difficult travel and slow communication this was a very practical system, though it threw a lot of work and responsibility on the Victorian Fellows. The day came, however, when the criticism was frequently heard in other States that the College was too much a Victorian organization. Starting in 1951, some moves were made to remove this source of criticism, and the first modification allowed Council to elect other members to serve on the Executive.

It was always considered by the Executive that it should meet frequently, and as the time taken by meetings was limited by the old custom of the alarm clock ringing to end the meeting at 2 o'clock, and as no fares were paid for visits by members of Council, any effective attendance was not practicable.

Towards the end of this decade many duties of the executive committee were alleviated by the formation of various other sub-committees of Council. It was therefore no longer essential that the executive should meet so often, and interstate members who had been formally elected became regular attendants at some executive meetings in the sixties. This undoubtedly gave the College a more strongly national aspect.

#### ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

The founders of the College, with all their wisdom, would not have foreseen that it had a destiny in the service of surgery far beyond these shores in teaching and qualifying surgeons of South-East Asia. This was an offspring of the Colombo Plan concept which sent Australian surgeons on teaching missions to Singapore and Malaysia. B. K. Rank was the forerunner in this programme. The idea of the College taking on this task resulted from talks between the writer and Professor Yeoh Ghim Seng of Singapore in 1955. The scheme was approved by Council in January, 1956, and details of an arrangement to send teachers and examiners to Singapore for the Primary examination were made at a special meeting attended by Dr Bland, the D.M.S. Singapore, and Professor Monteiro, the Dean of the Faculty, as early as May, 1956. The sympathetic help of Mr R. G. Casey (now Lord Casey), who was Minister for External Affairs at the time, led

to the despatch of the first batch of teachers and examiners under the Colombo Plan in 1957. Professor Sunderland and P. J. Kenny examined in Anatomy, and Professor King and Professor Courtice in Pathology and Physiology. Though there have been difficulties from time to time, this most valuable work has continued, and the Primary examination has been conducted regularly in Singapore ever since. Sixty-three candidates have passed this Primary examination.

In 1967 Hong Kong requested the privilege of having a Primary examination conducted there. This was held. It has been held twice since then, and 18 candidates have passed.

#### EXPANSION OF THE COLLEGE

In 1956 it became apparent that the great increase in the number of Fellows and the activities of the College made the existing buildings inadequate. It was also felt that there was a great need for funds to allow further development, research and teaching. To achieve these ends a development fund was opened by Ivan Jose (later Sir Ivan), the President, and was continued with appeals, to Fellows only, for three years. The response was inadequate. In 1960 Council decided to make a limited public appeal under the chairmanship of Lord Casey. In October, 1961 Sir Harry Platt, Bart, ex-President of the Royal College of Surgeons, came to Australia officially to launch this appeal. It resulted in the collection of £304,000. This sum was used first for the physical development of the College by the addition of two wings, one of which consisted of a Great Hall, and the other of a series of laboratories. Julian Orm Smith was President during the early period of this construction. It was appropriate that one who had been so closely associated with College development should have the satisfaction of supervising this work. The building was opened by Lord Casey in February, 1965, when K. W. Starr (now Sir Kenneth) was President.

The further development of the new building and its services was continued under the presidency of B. K. Rank, to whose vision and enthusiasm it was in no small measure due. The extra accommodation and availability of finance allowed Council to appoint Professor E. W. Gault as the first curator of a college museum. Over the next few years he worked

hard and assembled a considerable collection of museum specimens which he carefully annotated and used for teaching and examination purposes.

In 1965 Mr Frank Gray was appointed as College Prosector in Anatomy. In this way the College was able to undertake regular and thorough courses in preparation for the primary and final examinations.

A fitting end to these historical notes would be a quotation from Sir Hugh Devine's letter of resignation from Council:

I shall leave the Council with the confidence that its professional principles are so right that it will always attract the best surgical minds, and with such guidance the College will always be the highest influence for good in the profession of surgery.