

Dr Robert Allardyce Main

1926 – 2003

Bob Main, consultant dermatologist in Aberdeen from 1962 – 1988, died on 4 April 2003 after a long struggle against Parkinson's disease.

Born in Dundee on 1 November 1926, he attended Dundee High School before qualifying in medicine at St Andrew's University in 1949. After house jobs at Stracathro Hospital and Aberdeen Royal Infirmary he served his National Service in the Royal Air Force and was trained in aviation medicine, leaving in 1952 with acting rank of squadron leader. His training in dermatology began under Dr John Kinnear at the Royal Infirmary Dundee and after passing the membership examination in 1956, he worked for a year in Boston USA, studying for a period under Dr Walter Lever. On returning to Dundee, he spent two years as a research fellow, investigating the endocrine control of pigmentation. At the conclusion of his fellowship he obtained an appointment as dermatologist at the Manitoba Clinic, Winnipeg, Canada and remained there for two years before returning to Scotland, first as a senior registrar in dermatology with Dr Frain-Bell at the Royal Infirmary Dundee and then as a consultant dermatologist at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Bob Main was an accomplished clinician, dedicated to the welfare of his patients and with an enthusiasm and facility in teaching appreciated by the staff and students alike. He had a lifelong interest in research, particularly of diseases of the hair and published many papers on a variety of topics. In 1975 he was appointed clinical reader in dermatology at the University of Aberdeen.

His contribution to the practice of dermatology in Scotland was considerable. Experience of practice in Canada and the United States led him

to value the National Health Service and the opportunities for cooperative effort which it provided. The North British Dermatological Society had been founded in 1924, as a largely informal clinical society and during his period as secretary from 1965-86, he recognised the need for radical change to meet the educational and medico-political aspirations, particularly of the ever increasing younger group of members. He led the movement for change, which culminated in the formation of the Scottish Dermatological Society in 1970. In 1979 he was appointed President of the Society.

These changes in the Society provided him with a platform on which he could present his views on the development of the speciality. Like many of his generation, he believed in the value of individual leadership and sought to provide it. In education he deplored the diminishing role of dermatology in the undergraduate curriculum which he felt was the best recruiting ground for future dermatologists. Indeed he would have liked to see the dermatologist teaching the anatomy and physiology of the skin to the student in the pre-clinical or early clinical years. At postgraduate level he put forward the idea of a national training plan for embryonic dermatologists where expertise available in different training centres would be accessible to all. For the qualified dermatologist, he recognised the importance of continuing education and suggested that sabbatical leave of absence should be built into the contract. Enthusiastic as he was about research, he recognised that the resources available could only support a few centres and he saw a regulatory role for the Society in this area. In clinical practice he promoted the objective of properly structured and staffed dermatology centres with



Dr Robert Main

general practitioner involvement many years before these ideas were generally accepted.

Bob Main was an outgoing and friendly man, devoted to his family and whose leisure pursuits included snooker, walking and tending his beautiful garden which looked down on the River Dee. He will be remembered with respect and affection by colleagues and the many students and training staff who passed through his hands.

He leaves a wife Kay, a daughter Patricia and son Robert, and two grandchildren.

Dr Gordon Fraser

Inverness