

Mr Arthur 'Sam' Davidson

Consultant ENT Surgeon, Dean and Regional Advisor in Postgraduate Medicine, Mersey Region

Sam Davidson was born in Liverpool on 8th February, 1919 and educated at the Liverpool Collegiate School at a time when a modest fee was payable. He was taught biology by the renowned Edwin Yerbury, who as a young man had taught at Oundle School at the time that Cyril Clarke was a pupil there. He started at the Liverpool Medical School, in what is now the Whelan Building, in 1937 and he is said to have never bought a textbook, relying on the university library and the lectures. He commented that failure in the 2nd MB could result in either being called up into one of the services as a lowly 'other rank' or sent down the mines as a 'Bevin Boy' and that helped to concentrate the mind. He worked standing at the mantelpiece to stay awake. He qualified on the shortened wartime course in December, 1942 (in the clinical years the long summer break was converted into a fourth term) and joined the RAMC where he told the powers that be that he would like to be an ophthalmic surgeon. The army wanted ENT surgeons and that was that. He served in Burma, Malaya and Singapore and ended the war as a Specialist Otologist with the rank of major.

Returning to the UK he completed his surgical training, married Dorothy, Lord Cohen's ward sister, with whom he had three sons, and became a Consultant ENT Surgeon in Kettering and Northampton, before moving to the Wirral Hospitals, finally working in Arrowe Park Hospital. He claimed that his most valuable contribution was pioneering an endaural approach to condylectomy, but he was a very physicianly surgeon, always maintaining a keen interest in the medical aspects of his speciality. For about the last fifteen years of his career, he combined surgery with the post of Postgraduate Dean to the Mersey Region. This was a joint appointment between the University and the Regional Health Authority. For some years his office also served as a kitchen for the rest of the Faculty Office staff in what was then called the New Medical School, now the Ashton Street Building. One of his four staff was Audrey Roberts, later Administrative Secretary at the LMI. Audrey remembers the happy atmosphere in the Postgrad Office – working for Sam was fun. Sam had an interest in antiques, particularly paintings, and occasionally Audrey would be sent out to the auction rooms in Shaw Street with a blank cheque and instructions on how high to bid.

Sam's other great interest was sailing, and all things nautical. He had learnt to sail in the straits of Johor while he was in the army. Apart from his three sons, his great sailing companions were the Walton Physician, Robert Kemp and the Clatterbridge Physician Philip Robinson who had been in the same year at medical school. Sam wrote Philip's obituary for Transactions in 2007. In this he waxed lyrical on their observation of the green flash, an atmospheric effect at sunset that most people have never seen. Living in West Kirby, he and Philip Robinson had seen it often and Sam's account of it, even after being drastically reduced by the editor of Transactions, ran to almost three times the length that would have been permitted for an entire obituary in the BMJ.

Sam's retirement was almost as long as his working life as a doctor and he had a second career by combining his hobbies and becoming a noted expert on old maritime paintings. He published five books on the subject and even, on the prodding of the editor, a short piece in the LMI's Transactions for 2009-10. For sixteen years he was the President of the Liverpool Nautical Research Society. His opinion was regularly sought by the London auction houses, for whom he often wrote the commentaries in their catalogues. He had a network of contacts in the UK and North America whom he visited and with whom he kept in touch by email. He looked at the paintings with all the care with which he had examined his patients. His great advantage was that he knew the different types of vessel, their rigging and even their signal flags, as well as the

landscapes in the background and the artists' little trade marks. He also made ready use of the reference works which listed the owners, masters and voyages of the ships.

If you mentioned a 19th Century ship painting to him, he would know about it. I once showed him a print which I had bought of a painting by the noted artist Sam Walters. He told me that the original painting had 'disappeared' from the collection of the Liverpool Museum during the war but had surfaced again at Bonhams in Chester in 1983. Bonhams had sought Sam's opinion and he had identified the painting partly on account of a patch on the back of the canvas over a particular sail. The current owner, a St Helen's physician, had bought it in good faith in 1953. After legal advice, the owner offered it to the Maritime Museum for £3,000, far less than its true value, and the offer was accepted. Sam's last project was to look into the history of Ernest Willins Barrett, an amateur water colourist whose books of small paintings he had found many years before in a shop at the bottom of Brownlow Hill. These paintings, often with dates and times, recorded half a century of shipping in the docks and River Mersey. At her marriage, Barrett's mother had given the registrar a slightly altered surname to hide the fact that she was marrying her brother-in-law. The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act had yet to be enacted.

On Wednesdays, Sam would cycle to the station at West Kirby and take the train into Liverpool, getting off at James St and walking to the Maritime Museum. When he had finished there he would walk up the hill to The Athenaeum Club where he read the Financial Times and had lunch with the author of this obituary and put the world to rights before catching the train from Central Station to collect his bike and cycle home. Twenty years ago he took up Scottish Country Dancing, often in full regalia, three times a week, latterly reducing this to twice a week. During the last two years of his life he was troubled by Parkinsonism and he no longer felt able to get to Liverpool but he remained in touch by email with colleagues in the art world. He did not possess a television set. From his flat in West Kirby, he could look across the Dee to Wales. Dorothy died in 2000 after being cared for by Sam for some years, but he is survived by his three sons and two grandchildren. His oft repeated canon was "Play to the final whistle. Don't argue with the ref."

Arthur Samuel Davidson. Born 1919, qualified Liverpool 1942, DLO Eng 1944, FRCS Ed 1950, Consultant ENT Surgeon to Wirral Hospitals, Postgraduate Dean, Mersey Region. Life Member Liverpool Medical Institution, Fell Roy Soc Med.), died following a fractured neck of femur, 24th December, 2016.

Dr W Taylor