

REGINALD BENJAMIN CROSBIE

Consultant Surgeon. Born 16th December 1927. Qualified M.B., Ch.B (Liv.), B.Sc. (Lond.), A.R.I.C., F.R.C.S. (Ed.), F.R.C.S. (Eng). Died 26th January 2018.

Reg Crosbie was born in Everton, the son of a skilled toolmaker. The middle child of three, he lost his elder brother aged eight to diphtheria, which nearly killed him too. He was a bright boy and after attending Gwladys Street School, gained a scholarship to Alsop Grammar School in Liverpool.

At the start of WWII Reg was evacuated to Holyhead, but returned to Liverpool during the worst of the bombing. He became a fire watcher, at night pedalling his bike between HQ and the fire stations, so that fire engines could be directed when other lines of communication had been disrupted. While on fire watch duty, he sat alongside a chemist who inspired him to leave school at 16, take a job in the laboratory at Bibby's and study for a BSc in chemistry at night school. Reg was the first person to gain a first class honours degree externally from London University. He took up a post as a laboratory scientist at Sefton General Hospital and while working there, his thoughts turned to becoming a doctor, believing it would make him a better researcher. At that time, he also met and married Betty. Betty, a nurse, continued to work as he studied, in order to help support them. Reg also lectured fellow students in Chemistry for extra cash and when Betty became pregnant, he trawled big businesses looking for sponsorship so as to allow him to complete Medical School. Reg used to laugh that present-day students are not the only generation with university debt! To earn extra after qualifying he borrowed his landlord's car and did GP night calls with his friend hanging out of the car window shining a lamp to follow the pavement in the Liverpool peasouper fogs.

During his training Reg got 'the bug' for surgery. In a subsequent interview for a Registrar post the Professor of Surgery and several Consultants attempted to deter him, suggesting that being a little older and with a wife and small children, this would be a difficult route for him to pursue. Nevertheless, they sensed his determination and he was offered the job.

Reg worked long hours learning his craft and spent most of his time in the hospital. Betty used to try to take their now three daughters to the doctor's mess on a Sunday afternoon, to see their Dad if he had a little down time on duty. She would announce, 'Children, I would like to introduce you to your father' and the girls loved it. Reg enjoyed the camaraderie amongst the junior doctors many of whom became friends for life.

By the time he was appointed as a Consultant in Birkenhead he had gained an exceptional range of surgical skills and was comfortable operating within the chest, could operate on the full length of the gut and had both urological and vascular expertise. One of the last true general surgeons.

Reg worked at Birkenhead General, St Catherine's and Victoria Central Hospital until Arrowe Park opened in May 1982. He was an innovative surgeon and quick to adopt new techniques. Before the advent of ultrasound he adopted laparoscopy to assess stomach and liver cancers, in an attempt to reduce the number of 'open and close' laparotomies. Olympus developed fiberoptic gastroscopes and colonoscopes and he became proficient in their use. When they then went on to develop a finer flexible cystoscope he persuaded the League of Friends to buy one. This proved to be one of the first to be imported into the UK and he was using it before any of the full time Urologists in the North West.

He was a keen teacher and particularly enjoyed the firm dinners arranged by each group of medical students at the end of their attachment to him. Many still recall the pearls of wisdom which he dropped on his ward rounds. However, it was equally impressive to observe his bedside manner which was always kind and compassionate, treating patients with empathy and as his friends. Of note, when one of the Physicians had a patient with a difficult problem, they would usually first attempt to approach Reg for his opinion. In other words he was the thinking man's surgeon.

From the standpoint of being a junior doctor under him, Reg was always both helpful, polite and 'easy to get in' if necessary. He never seemed to raise his voice on any occasion, no matter how stressful.

Even into his late fifties he remained very hard working. Each Thursday he had an all-day list in parallel theatres with his Registrar. However, around 5pm one of the theatres had to close, at which time he and the Registrar would often jointly embark upon a major case, finishing between 8 and 9pm. Reg would then pick up a meal on his way home, 'as a weekly treat and peace offering to Betty'.

At retirement Reg stated that he loved every single day of his working life, even the rough ones. What made the difference were his patients - good Scouse stock, and the medical and nursing colleagues he worked with.

Outside the hospital Reg was interested in model railways and all things mechanical. He developed a passion for flying and for aerial photography. Thankfully his surgical skills were far superior to those required for landing light aircraft... one time he managed to 'prang' the undercarriage of a Cesna, temporarily closing Speke Airport, much to the horror of other members of his beloved CATS! (Cheshire Air Training School).

Reg loved family life and enjoyed leaving the city behind to go either camping or caravanning in Wales. He was a nature lover and particularly fond of animals. He and Betty had many great friends, their house was always full of people, and with friendships enduring over many decades.

Reg passed away peacefully at home, succumbing to Parkinson's with Lewy body disease. He leaves behind three devoted daughters, Jan, Sue and Gill.

Nigel J Parr
Consultant Urologist Wirral, friend and former trainee