

Mr A.R. Thompson

Past president: 1969-1970

Allan Thompson (Tommy) died on November 26, 1991. He had one of the most outstanding careers of any Guy's dentist and it spanned a remarkable period of development. He entered Guy's as a student in 1926, the same year that Montagu Hopson retired from the staff (Hopson had been the first student to enrol in the dental school in 1889). Allan became a consultant in 1949 and eventually retired from Guy's in 1973. Continuing to practice vigorously until December 30, 1986. He played a major role in the transition of dentistry from relatively simple procedures to modern high-tech operating.

He was a brilliantly successful student with outstanding eye-hand coordination. He won the operative prize, the fourth-year prize and the Newland Pedley Medal and Prize. Later he was awarded the travelling scholarship to study at the North Western University in Chicago. He was one of the first people to take and pass the BDS degree.

After qualifying, Allan was House Surgeon to Kelsey Fry. In Chicago he was taught by Schlosser, the prosthetist, and by Loren Sayre, the crown and bridge specialist, both the foremost men of their time. When he returned to Guy's he started the first tooth carving classes for students, first of all using blocks of soap. By the time war broke out he was almost totally involved in the Dental School, teaching in many departments and also running the dental radiology department.

Allan, however, was probably one of the most outstanding all-round practical dentists of his time, with an influence on countless dentists both at Guy's and outside the hospital. His ability was so remarkable because it was so wide. To list but a few of his achievements is quite a task. First of all, in the surgical field he was an outstanding operator. He had immense experience of all types of extractions from his early days, when there was still a belief in focal sepsis. He would elevate and remove teeth that most people would deem impossible without cutting flaps and commencing a full minor oral surgery sequence. However, if a surgical intervention were required, he was the master of the techniques. Using a headlight and his sucker-cum-retractor he would remove third molars or canines in the palate and especially carry out root resections with lightning speed. His sessions with Dr W. S. McConnell were started in the early days of short acting intravenous anaesthesia, and they worked closely together to pioneer a safe operating technique. He built his own automatically controlled water spray system using commercial solenoids before these were available on dental units. He was always an advocate of crown and bridge dentistry, and of course in his hands it was carried out to the highest standards.

He largely introduced the cantilever spring bridge into practice to replace missing anterior teeth. This technique used pinlays on canine and posterior teeth, and a palatal or lingual or 'spring' to support the missing anterior units, then made from porcelain long pin facings. This was an especially valuable procedure before the days of bonded porcelain, and he built his own hydrocolloid bath so that he could use Dentocoll, one of the first elastic impression materials available. His patients would bring over supplies from America. He was one of the first dentists in London to use bonded porcelain when it was introduced, and his technicians used the Permament system before vacuum furnaces were introduced.

When the new Borden high speed turbine drills were introduced in 1958, he obtained one of the first three imported by the S. S. White company. Ten years later, at the age of 60, he bought one of the first split dental units especially made for supine operating and overnight changed his operating methods to fully seated four handed dentistry. Another advance in the 1960's was the introduction from Switzerland of factory-made precision attachments, and 'Tommy' immediately saw the advantages of attachments to join non-parallel abutments and this led to the possibility of making larger fixed-removable bridges with acrylic work on a removable superstructure.

In his active lifetime Tommy gave hundreds of lectures, including many postgraduate lectures at BDA meetings. He was a natural speaker and, needing few slides, would always draw a full audience. He loved the thrust and parry of an argument, and fought hard for recognition of his views on various committees. He was, however, not a politically active dentist in the wider sense.

He was too busy doing clinical dentistry to spend time on national committees. However, in 1966 he became president of the Metropolitan branch of the BDA and gave an outstanding presidential address which was later reprinted in the British Dental Journal as an article 'British dentistry today'. It was an outspoken criticism of academic dentistry and the gulf which was then developing between the teachers and practitioners. This paper was influential in the founding of the British Society for Restorative Dentistry, and he was later unanimously elected to become president. Allan retired from Guy's in 1973 at the age of 65, and continued to produce the highest quality of dentistry until his last day in practice at the age of 79.

His patients, who adored him, subscribed to a first-class lathe as a retirement present, and at the age of 80 he made a clock, cutting out the gear wheels individually from sheet brass, still striving for the highest engineering accuracy. His main outside interest, however, was always his garden, first of all at Northwood and then at Shardeloes House in Amersham where he restored Repton's fine garden. He had a great botanical knowledge, especially of flowering shrubs and had a lot of experience of growing them over many years. He knew many of the great gardeners of England with whom he exchanged cuttings and plants. He was, however, not just a theoretical gardener; even at the age of 80 he could be found up a tree with his chainsaw. His physical fitness was allied to his gardening and it was quite typical that he started skiing at the age of 58 and within a few seasons was to be found on the most difficult runs. He enjoyed it so much that he visited France and Switzerland once or twice every year afterwards and of course learnt French to a fluent level.

Allan's wife Jane who died 18 months before him was his support system. Without her devotion he could have never achieved so much. There can also be few consultants who have had the pleasure of seeing their three children graduate from their own school.

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