IN MEMORIAM

DOUGLAS LESLIE SAVILL

1913–1973

Douglas Savill died on May 9 in the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, following a heart operation. He was sixty years old. He had, when younger, faced severe illness several times. His health was never good. At the end of a long operating day he would be pale with fatigue. The next day he would again be eager for work, as he always was. He never compromised, and as his physical limitations slowed him down he never altered his objective, which was perfection in what he was doing.

His last illness began a year ago. His slow recovery and inability to return to normal activity frustrated him greatly. When it became obvious that full recovery could not occur without operation his decision was immediate. The decision made, his gaiety and wit returned in full and to visit him in the days before the operation was an occasion, light-hearted and amusing.

He graduated from Edinburgh in 1937 and began his training in orthopaedics only a year later. Early in the war, already medically unfit, he went to Larbert with Ian Smillie. Here he was for the rest of the war to be prodigiously busy with service casualties. In the latter years these poured in as the Highlands of Scotland became increasingly the site of realistic battle training in the preliminaries to the invasion of Europe.

During these busy years Savill acquired an immense experience of orthopaedics. After the war he went with Smillie to what became an excellent and very large orthopaedic centre at Bridge of Earn, near Perth. In 1951 he returned to Edinburgh as surgeon at the Royal Infirmary and the Princess Margaret Rose Orthopaedic Hospital.

Over the last fifteen years he had been able to develop an increasing interest, the surgery of rheumatoid arthritis, before then limited to unsatisfactory procedures in late cases. It soon became possible to relieve him of some of the routine orthopaedic work, and this opportunity led to his pioneering many of the surgical developments in this field. The success of this venture needs no emphasis. With the active help of Professor J. J. R. Duthie, Professor of Rheumatology in Edinburgh and a war-time colleague of Savill’s, there developed a unique centre with an ideal combination of medical and surgical expertise in this crippling disease.

Soon Douglas Savill attracted visitors from all over the world and these continued in uninterrupted succession. Few could rival him in experience of the problem; few could
talk about it better. Many younger men came and stayed to learn. There are orthopaedic surgeons from many countries who learnt from him and now practise in their own centres, several already well known and contributing to new knowledge.

In 1963 he was invited to the Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, to set up an arthritis service for this remarkable centre. From the States he returned with a greatly increased reputation and a host of new friends. Like many of us, he was much impressed with the Rancho Los Amigos and was happy to see recent developments in Edinburgh of similar character.

Few diseases disable more people than rheumatoid arthritis. The disability is chronic, painful and hard to bear. Savill’s tremendous contribution and involvement in this difficult new surgical area brought him well deserved recognition from many countries. What pleased him most, however, was the help it gave to the gravely disabled; he had a sympathetic understanding of disability. He disliked writing and hated administration; he gave his huge talents to the care of patients.

He much enjoyed his periods of service on the Editorial Board of this Journal and on the Executive of the British Orthopaedic Association.

Douglas was essentially a modest man and would be greatly surprised if he could know how much his colleagues and friends miss his tall, ambling figure with its puckish grin, but we all do, greatly. To his wife Joy, who shared many of his enthusiasms, we all extend our sympathy.

J. I. P. J.

THOMAS BARRET WHISTON

1911–1972

Tommy Whiston, senior orthopaedic surgeon to the Scottish Borders Hospitals group, died suddenly on November 3, after a very short illness. His many friends, both in the Borders and much farther afield, were stunned and distressed by the news, and innumerable patients expressed their sorrow at the loss of their loved and respected surgeon.

Tommy began his medical career already mature and with an unusually wide education, having first graduated M.A. at Edinburgh University in 1933, and having thereafter taught French and Latin in Edinburgh schools for some years. He then returned to the university as a medical student, qualifying in 1943. Throughout his life he maintained his interest in the humanities, read widely in French literature, and spoke the language fluently. As house surgeon to J. N. J. Hartley at Carlisle he developed a deep and searching interest in pathology which influenced all his subsequent work and showed clearly in his writings. His orthopaedic training under Ian Smillie at Bridge of Earn was rigorous and thorough, and he often spoke in later years of the grounding he obtained there. A clinical tutorship in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary led to the Fellowship of the Edinburgh College in 1947, and thereafter he moved to Falkirk Royal Infirmary as assistant orthopaedic surgeon to A. J. Innes.

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In 1954 Tommy was appointed consultant orthopaedic surgeon to the Borders, based at Peel Hospital, and there until his untimely death he steadily developed and expanded the service to the Border counties. He made several important and original contributions to the literature and he was continuously active in research, much of it in collaboration with his friend Professor Robert Walmsley of St Andrews. In 1961 he spent three months as European Travelling Scholar of the British Orthopaedic Association, and subsequently maintained close contact and friendship with several of the surgeons whose clinics he had visited.

A gentle quiet man, Tommy was nevertheless a provocative conversationalist, with a rich sense of humour. Saddened though his many friends are by his death, they will recall with pleasure his kindness and helpfulness, and remember the warm hospitality shown to them by him and his wife Cecilia, to whom and to their two sons and four daughters we offer our sympathy.

G. W. B.