ALEC LETTS DAWKINS
1905–1975

Alec Letts Dawkins, who died on August 7, 1975 after a year of retirement, will be sadly missed in the orthopaedic community of Western Australia. He was born in South Australia in 1905, the son of a general practitioner. After eight years at Prince Alfred College he went as a medical student to the University of Adelaide in 1923 and graduated in 1928. While at the University he won a Blue for lacrosse and was an inter-varsity captain. In 1931, after his residency in Adelaide, he obtained the degree of F.R.C.S. (Edinburgh) and worked in the United Kingdom until 1932, when he returned to the Adelaide Hospital as a clinical assistant on the surgical side and honorary assistant pathologist, a post which gave him an interest he was to retain for the rest of his life. In 1935 he gained the degree of F.R.A.C.S., being one of the first to do so. The following year saw him in Liverpool, where he took his M.Ch.(Orth.). He then returned to Adelaide but in 1939 moved to Perth, where he embarked on an outstanding orthopaedic career, first as honorary assistant orthopaedic surgeon to the Royal Perth Hospital and to the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. Then came the war.

One of Alec’s outstanding attributes was devotion to his country. He had been a member of the Civilian Medical Military Forces since 1923, and at the outbreak of hostilities joined the 2/7th Field Ambulance with the rank of Major. After the campaigns of Libya, Greece and Crete he was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and served with the Medical Directorate until 1942. Finally, as a Brigadier, he joined the Second Australian Corps in Bougainville. He was awarded the O.B.E. in the Middle East and mentioned in despatches in New Guinea. After the war he retained a keen interest in army affairs, and in 1962 he was appointed Honorary Colonel to the West Australian University Regiment.

During his professional career immediately after the war Alec was honorary surgeon to two hospitals, the Royal Perth and the Princess Margaret, and orthopaedic surgeon to the Repatriation General Hospital. He served all three in exemplary fashion, showing great administrative ability during those years. In 1963 he was instrumental in forming the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the Royal Perth Hospital and became its first Chairman. It is now one of the foremost orthopaedic services in Australia. Up till his retirement he was a friend, adviser and guide to many young orthopaedic surgeons, and continually stimulated the development and scope of orthopaedic surgery in Western Australia. His contribution to our speciality was recognised by the Australian Orthopaedic Association, who elected him President for 1965–66, and by the British Orthopaedic Association, who elected him a Fellow.

Outside orthopaedics, Alec Dawkins rose to high office in a number of medical or para-medical organisations, notably the British Medical Association, the Medical Board of Western Australia, the Medical Committee for the Commonwealth Games, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and the Physiotherapy Board, but perhaps above all the Order of St John of Jerusalem, of which he was made a Knight in 1959.

Alec had been a sick man for two or three years, and we learnt with great thankfulness that his passing had been a kindly one. It was pleasing to see so many people ready to pay their respects at the simple service of farewell. Alec Letts Dawkins will be long remembered in the community of Perth, and our best wishes go out to his widow and five sons in their loss. W.G.

WILLIAM WYLIE RENTOUL
1895–1975

The death of William Wylie Rentoul on June 19, 1975, at the age of seventy-nine, severed one of the few remaining direct links with Sir Robert Jones and Dame Agnes Hunt. His training in medicine at Queen’s University, Belfast, was interrupted by the first world war, when he served in a cavalry regiment and was decorated with the Military Cross. After the war he completed his
training and subsequently went to Oswestry for four years, becoming resident surgical officer and Sir Robert's last operative first assistant.

A preliminary reconnaissance in Cornwall revealed a great need for an orthopaedic service, especially after two epidemics of poliomyelitis. Rentoul entered a general practice in Truro and secured an appointment as honorary assistant surgeon to the Royal Cornwall Infirmary. The remainder of his active surgical life, from 1930 to 1960, was devoted to the development of the orthopaedic and accident services in the county. The problems involved in starting such a service without the resources of the National Health Service, which are nowadays taken for granted, might have been insurmountable but for support from the Cornwall County Council. A start was made with fourteen children's beds on a budget of £2,000 per year and a grant of £50 for equipment. In 1932 he was active in the foundation of the Cornwall Committee for the Care of Cripples (now the Cornwall Disabled Association), a voluntary organisation which not only staffed after-care clinics throughout the county and provided much of the transport, but was also a potent educational influence which made the public aware of the need for treatment and the benefits it had to offer. Crippled children have always been an emotive subject and the unexpected result of the campaign was a strong orthopaedic bias in the Royal Cornwall Infirmary. Eight years after his appointment to the staff Rentoul had fifty orthopaedic beds, nine peripheral clinics and a unit for skeletal tuberculosis at Tehidy Chest Hospital. He had also assumed responsibility for the treatment of fractures, the first orthopaedic surgeon in the south-west to do so.

The second world war brought large numbers of servicemen and women to Cornwall as well as children evacuated from London. Rentoul directed two large rehabilitation units in addition to an increased number of orthopaedic beds. When a stray bomb hit the Infirmary, killing patients and staff, he took charge with such efficiency that the hospital did not close, and out-patient departments were running next morning as usual. After the war he played an influential part on the committee which planned the new Royal Cornwall Hospital at Treliske. He retired from the National Health Service in 1960 but continued to support the Cornwall Disabled Association and in particular its appliance work. Aided by public subscription, the employment of handicapped persons has extended beyond the field of surgical footwear and splints, and a new building named the Rentoul Workshops is an appropriate reminder of all he did to provide for the needs of the physically handicapped in Cornwall.

Rentoul was a man of strong principles and could be stubborn in pursuit of any claim he felt to be right. Possessed of a wit which was dry to the point of acidity, he was often misunderstood by those unable to distinguish irony from sarcasm. The long service of his ancillary staff, however, was a tribute to the affection in which they held him. His work was his life, and an extension of it was his duty as a warden of Kenwyn Church. In recent years he successfully underwent two major operations and was active until the day before he died. Our sympathy goes to his wife and their two sons, one of whom is in general practice in Cornwall.

R. H. C. R.