William Waugh was born on 17 February 1922 in Dover where his father was a general practitioner. Both of his parents came from Ulster, but he was brought up in England and educated at Eastbourne College and Pembroke College, Cambridge, although this was during the Second World War when students were few. He won an entrance scholarship to King’s College Hospital in London, where he did the clinical part of his medical studies, graduating in 1945 and being awarded the Legg Prize in Surgery. He subsequently worked as resident medical officer and senior house officer at the same hospital.

In 1947 he married Janet McDowell whose father was Professor of Physiology at King’s College. They had two daughters.

His surgical career can be divided into three phases. The first was the period of training. He was a surgical registrar at King’s College Hospital and then, for two years, a surgical specialist in the Royal Air Force, which included nine months in Aden. After this he took up orthopaedic surgery returning to work at King’s and then in Toronto. He obtained his MChir (Cantab) in 1952 and three years later moved to Oxford as first assistant to Professor Trueta, where he struck up a lifetime friendship with Jimmy Scott who was later to become one of the senior orthopaedic surgeons in Edinburgh. Connections established in these posts reappeared later. He arranged for orthopaedic trainees in the Royal Air Force to spend two years at Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hospital, and later at Nottingham. Mr Buxton, his Chief at Kings’ College Hospital “was involved in the creation of an orthopaedic and rehabilitation service in war-shattered Greece. He arranged for Greek orthopaedic surgeons to come to King’s and other centres for postgraduate training”. William maintained this link and many Greek surgeons trained at Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hospital and in Nottingham and Derby. His work in the Academic Department of Orthopaedics at Oxford established his credentials to set up such a unit himself 20 years later.

In 1957 he was appointed consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hospital in Nottinghamshire. It had been opened in 1929 through the initiative of Alan Malkin, who became President of the British Orthopaedic Association in 1948-9, by which time Harlow Wood had established a considerable reputation. This was carried forward by William Waugh and his senior colleague Peter Jackson and they became close friends. He said that Jackson had the better clinical brain, but that he (William) was the better writer. They collaborated closely on numerous publications, especially on surgery of the knee and foot. Together they edited a book on Surgery of the knee joint, published by Chapman and Hall. William was an outstanding teacher; his lectures appeared informal and even casual, but were carefully prepared. He played an active part in the postgraduate courses at Harlow Wood which had been started by Peter Jackson. At that time these were the only such courses and were therefore attended at least once by most trainees from all parts of the country.

When William was appointed to the Editorial Board of the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery in 1970 he felt that he had reached the summit of his orthopaedic career. In this he was wrong; there was much more to come. When he and Peter Jackson were over 50 years old they took up knee replacement, a challenge shirked by some of their contemporaries, and became leading authorities in this field.

In 1965 the Pickering Committee recommended that a new Medical School should be established in Nottingham, the first in the UK in this century. The first students entered
in 1970. At that time, Harlow Wood was completely separate from orthopaedics in Nottingham, although its out-patient clinics, staffed by consultants and registrars from Harlow Wood and originally held in a building belonging to the old Cripples’ Guild, had been relocated to the Nottingham General Hospital. Jackson and Waugh saw that the balance was changing and in 1970, on the retirement of Noel Birkett, then the senior orthopaedic and trauma surgeon in Nottingham, they began trauma sessions in the city.

With the establishment of the Medical School several new consultant posts in orthopaedic surgery were created and those appointed feared that they might find themselves in conflict with the older and established consultants. The reverse was true; Waugh and Jackson welcomed them and built up a happy and united team. A new Medical School and University Hospital were built and formally opened in 1977 by the Queen who named the whole complex ‘The Queen’s Medical Centre’.

It was decided to establish a Chair of Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgery in Nottingham and William was appointed. He recalled that “I was invited finally, and accepted with some reservation. I chose the date of April 1 1977 to start, which somehow seemed appropriate”. He was then aged 55 and later described the years which followed as “a long and difficult period for me”. Nevertheless, he achieved a great deal.

His first step was to design an undergraduate course which involved attachment to the Departments of Orthopaedics, Rheumatology and Accident & Emergency for eight weeks, with a clinical and viva examination at the end. This proved to be one of the best undergraduate courses in orthopaedics in the country.

His research activities focused on the outcomes of osteotomy of the tibia and of total knee replacement. With Marjorie Tew, a statistician, he carried out a long-term review of all the knee replacements performed in his unit. Later, they introduced the concept of survivorship analysis for knee replacements, now accepted as one of the best ways of measuring the success of joint replacements generally.

In addition to these heavy clinical and academic commitments, William was a great supporter of the British Orthopaedic Association, serving on the Executive Council and as Vice-President in 1984. He was a member of the Editorial Board of the British volume of the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery and was President of the Orthopaedic Section of the Royal Society of Medicine in 1980-1.

A Division of Orthopaedic and Accident Surgery had been set up in the Department of Surgery, headed by Professor Jack Harcastle. Before his retirement, on the advice of orthopaedic surgeons throughout the country, William obtained agreement from the University of Nottingham to establish Orthopaedic and Accident Surgery as an independent Department within the Medical School.

He had always intended to retire before the age of 65 years and did so in 1984, when Angus Wallace, who had been a Lecturer in the Department, succeeded him. The Waughs then moved to the home which they had purchased some years earlier in Wadenhoe, a village in Northamptonshire, and for a few years he taught some sessions in the Department of Anatomy in Leicester University. He enjoyed his retirement enormously and had time for his interests in gardening, photography and architectural history.

He did not rest on his laurels, but blossomed in a new career as a medical historian. His taste for writing on subjects other than surgery itself had been whetted by an invitation to revise the book The whiskies of Scotland which had been written by his father-in-law but was then out-of-date. The new edition was published in 1986. It was followed in 1987 by a 200-page book on The development of orthopaedics in the Nottingham area, including Derby, Leicester and Mansfield. This was published by Nottingham University and we have quoted from it above. He next embarked on a biography of Sir John Charnley, whom he had known well. It was hard to write an interesting biography of a doctor whose life consisted of encounters with many different people. In this case, however, the development of the hip replacement provided a strong theme for the book which is subtitled The man and the hip. It is an illuminating study of the struggles required to achieve this huge advance in surgery. It was published by Springer-Verlag in 1990.

His last book was A history of the British Orthopaedic Association which he was invited to write to mark its 75th anniversary. This was an even more difficult subject to organise, but William managed it very successfully, dividing it into periods in each of which he outlined the progress of the Association and then gave pen-portraits of the successive Presidents who were, of course, the leading orthopaedic surgeons of their time. It is thus a history, not just of the Association, but of British orthopaedics. It was published in 1993 by the British Orthopaedic Association. In recognition of this work William was made an Honorary Fellow of the British Orthopaedic Association, a distinction once described by a former President as “far more exclusive than the Presidency”.

Even after this he continued to edit papers for the journal International Orthopaedics until he developed a cerebral lymphoma earlier this year. After an illness lasting two months, he died on 21 May at the age of 76 years.

Most of us would be proud to establish a reputation either as a distinguished orthopaedic surgeon, a Professor, or a successful author. To have been all three in turn is remarkable. His colleagues, however, will remember him best for his kindly encouragement and wise advice, which were invaluable to us. He had a stock of useful aphorisms. One of these emerged from a survey which tried to define the characteristics of the orthopaedic surgeon and concluded that he is “a reliable gentleman”. William Waugh exemplified this.