

Obituary Tribute Professor William Wilkkin Davey 1912 – 2004

William Wilkin Davey, Professor and Head of Surgery, University College Ibadan and Consultant General Surgeon at the University College Hospital, Ibadan from 1959 to 1964 died at Altona, Victoria, Australia on Sunday morning May 30, 2004. He was aged 92 years. He had suffered in recent months from a series of strokes; the last attack, which occurred on Wednesday May 26, proved fatal.

When Professor Beatrice Joly, the Foundation Head of Department of Surgery in this University, retired in 1958 there was urgent need to have a relatively young and dynamic surgical teacher to prepare the first batch of Ibadan clinical students for the final examination of the MB.BS degree of London University. That responsibility fell on the shoulders of William Wilkin Davey (WW Davey to his many friends, colleagues and students around the world). He was further encouraged to accept and face the challenging job by the persuasion and support of Dr. Keith Gillison, then Head of the Ibadan University College Health Services, who shared the moral and doctrine of the MRA (I Moral Re-Arrangement) with him. To the new Professor who came to Ibadan in 1959, Surgery became a blend of medical and moral mission.

An internationally acclaimed general surgeon, a teacher of the highest quality and a moral and philosophical crusader, WW Davey will be remembered as the author of "Companion to Surgery in Africa" Published in 1968; as a didactic and clear-minded teacher of clinical surgery to a generation of medical and nursing students and as the devoted family man who, with his life-long inseparable wife, Gill and their wonderful family, remained throughout his life in the Vanguard of the Moral Re-Armament (MRA) and the Initiative for Change (IC).

WW Davey was born on February 28, 1912 in North Ireland in a well-known Presbyterian family, one of five children. Two years ago, on his 90th birthday the Department of Surgery in its journal, "The Ibadan Surgeon", specially congratulated him.

He graduated in medicine at the University of Belfast in 1935 and gained the MD of the same University in 1941. His specialist surgical qualifications included Fellowship of the Royal College of Ireland, 1942; Royal College of

Surgeons of England, 1947; American College of Surgeons, 1960 and the Royal Australian College in 1965.

He was House Officer under Sir William Thomson who influenced his choice of career as Surgeon. He was specialist surgeon in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War 1939-1945 and became a Squadron Leader. He was the first Surgeon to land in Normandy, France on D-day, June 6, 1944.



Prof. W. W. Davey

He trained in the specialized surgical field of gastroenterology at St. James Hospital, Balham, London where he served as Registrar and later Senior Registrar from 1946 to 1951. There he trained under the legendary Norman Tanner, famed for the relaxing incision in the rectus sheath (Tanner slide) in the operation of hernia repair. Tanner popularized his unit for the major operations he carried out in gastric surgery in his modest, scantily equipped surgical theatre. The exposure prepared WW Davey for his enormous work on surgical gastroenterology for which he became world famous. WW Davey later became Director of Gastroenterology at the Whittington Hospital, North London, and his unit the prototype of that of his teacher, Tanner. He removed several stomachs for chronic duodenal ulceration. He made history when he described the "teapot deformity", a special complication of duodenal ulceration. He served as Secretary of the Proctological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine, London. His many sided

A Adeloje and JK Ladipo

Department of Surgery, University College Hospital & College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

contributions to general surgery was rewarded in 1958 when he was elected Hunterian Professor by the Royal College of Surgeons of England. He contributed to the chapter on 'The Stomach' in the eleventh edition of Bailey and Love's 'Short Practice of Surgery' published in 1959, the year he came to Ibadan.

He was a most stimulating teacher of clinical surgery through his didactic lectures and clever yet simple demonstration of surgical cases. He will be remembered by his students and colleagues for his repertoire of quotable, easy-to-remember phrases and words used to describe clinical conditions. Outside the operating theatre were his array of pictures and photographs to illustrate unusual and "teaching" cases, embracing the commonplace, the contemporary and the classical.

After Ibadan and a short stay in the United Kingdom, which period he employed to finish his "Companion to Surgery in Africa", he emigrated with his family to Melbourne, Australia in 1971 where he continued to lecture and practice surgery not only in his adopted new country, but also in New Zealand, Tasmania and Papua New Guinea. He made history by becoming the first non-Australian to be elected President of the Provincial Surgeons of Australasia.

An avant-garde of the Moral Re-Armament, WW Davey and his family attracted students of the staff of the University College, Ibadan to their new faith based on the four absolutes of love, purity, honesty and unselfishness.

The movement sponsored the film "Freedom" in the late 1950s in which the President and Secretary of the Students Union of University College, Ibadan played leading roles. The film called on Nigeria to play a leading role in Africa. Resuscitation and adoption of the cardinal principles of the MRA can foster a new healthy moral climate amongst our students and staff of today. A few

years ago, the MRA changed its name to IC (Initiative for Change) but the enthusiasm of the Daveys as moral crusaders persisted.

Towards the end of his life, WW Davey took up the reading of "Every Day with Jesus", which he recommended with his characteristic candour to his friends all over the world. He and his wife Gill maintained their capacity "to make genuine connections with individuals from all walks of life" from their old students, the famous "First Fourteen" clinical students at UCH, Professors of Surgery – Anand and Ngu, his surgical colleagues at Ibadan, to others outside the University like Russell Carpenter of London, the one time advisor to Nnamdi Azikwe, Hugh Elliott and His Royal Highness Ado Bayero, the Emir of Kano who hosted the Kano, conference of the MRA in April 1997.

He maintained interest in the "companion to Surgery in Africa" right to the end of his life. In his last mail to one of us, he cautioned that the third edition may have to compete with other new surgical textbooks of surgery in Africa.

He found relaxation in calligraphy, which he took up after recovering from his coronary thrombosis a decade ago. Since then he had suffered from attacks of strokes. He is survived by his wife, Gill and their five children, Frank a chemistry graduate, Paul a labour union leader, Catherine, a medical doctor who was born here in Nigeria, Andrew a building artisan and Rachel, an occupational therapist.

We give the last words to WW Davey, words which he wrote in his obituary tribute to a famous Australian surgeon of Irish Pedigree, Milligan, in 1985: "*Death is not the extinguishing of the light but putting out the lamp because the dawn has come*".