

Department of Surgery, University of the Witwatersrand – a brief history

MARTIN VELLER

Department of Surgery, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

The original hospital in Johannesburg was a hastily constructed structure of wattle and daub that also served as a prison. The first major operation performed in this building, by Dr Hans Sauer in 1886, was the amputation of a necrotic arm that had been crushed by a wagon wheel.

The first official hospital was built on land to the north of the burgeoning city. This piece of ground, on which the first permanent structure was built in 1889, was donated by the Government of the Transvaal. The Honorary J. M. A. Wolmarans, member of the executive committee of the ZAR, officially opened the newly built hospital on 5 November 1890.

The initial proposal that Johannesburg Hospital should become a teaching hospital appears to have been made at the 1898 congress of the South African Medical Association, held in Johannesburg, by its first president, the surgeon George Murray. He talked of the conviction shared by many members of the medical profession in Johannesburg that such a teaching hospital would eventually have a medical school attached to it. Such talk occurred at a time when, apart from the well-run Transvaal Medical Society that regulated the affairs of the profession in Johannesburg and on the Reef and the adequately financed Johannesburg Hospital establishment, little order existed in the medical profession of the Transvaal. In addition, shortly after this meeting the South African War broke out and it would take more than a decade and a half before further decisions in this regard were taken.

After the war the Transvaal Medical Society, and after 1912 its successor the Witwatersrand Branch of the British Medical Association, continued to be strong protagonists for the development of a School of Medicine in Johannesburg. These efforts were hampered by the economic hardship caused by the war and by the resulting political volatility. Debate raged with regard to whether a University of Johannesburg should be established. Significant opposition to this and the formation of the Medical School came from Jan Christiaan Smuts who was Colonial Secretary at the time and whose attitude towards the medical profession was described (as recorded in the *British Medical Journal*) as 'calculated to be detrimental to its well-being and influence'.¹ The other significant consequence of Smuts's opposition to the development of a Medical School and subsequently also the development of a University in Johannesburg was that Otto Beit's bequest of £200 000 to develop such a university went to the recently developed University in Cape Town.

During the years of World War I, matters concerning higher education were displaced by the struggle for survival. In 1916, the Minister of Education, F. S. Malan, presented



University of the Witwatersrand – Great Hall.

the Universities Bill to Parliament, proposing three South African universities, one each in Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Pretoria. Johannesburg was to have a constituted College, the South African School of Mines and Technology. This was greeted on the Witwatersrand with wide discontent. On 17 April 1916, at a general meeting of registered practitioners in the Transvaal called by the Council of the Witwatersrand Branch of the British Medical Association, it was proposed by Dr W. Watkins-Pitchford (head of the South African Institute for Medical Research, established in 1913) that 'the time has now arrived when, in the interest of the community, a School of Medicine should be established in the Transvaal, with the facility of granting diplomas'. Sir Kendal Franks, one of Johannesburg's early surgeons (on the honorary surgical staff of the General Hospital from 1902 to 1907) and the elected chairman of the meeting, thought that the matter was so important that it should be considered immediately, despite the terrible war that was raging and in the face of the controversy concerning the development of the University of Johannesburg.² After extensive debate a resolution was passed which was subsequently sent to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education and all the members of both Houses of Parliament. Interestingly, at the time Johannesburg had the largest population of any other town in Africa if the other Reef towns were taken into consideration.

The Witwatersrand University Committee was established as a result of the above Universities Bill in March 1916 and was composed of a number of prominent Johannesburg and Rand citizens who undertook relentless and heated negotiations with the government, which eventually resulted in the Minister of Education relenting. A University

College, which would include a Medical School, could be established if the Witwatersrand provided the money for it. Although the University Committee worked rapidly, with money being raised and property being made available to build the Medical School, this was not the end of the impediments to achieve this goal. Emigration from the Home Countries had been severely curtailed after the war and as a result the departure of professors of anatomy and physiology was not permitted. In addition, when these emigration restrictions were lifted, the Minister of Education at the time felt that, in terms of the Anatomy Act, he could not recommend to the Governor-General that a School of Anatomy be established in Johannesburg. The lack of the minister's support is believed to have been the result of animosity between him and the Johannesburg City Council, but it was justified by the Minister of Finance for financial reasons. After extensive protest the Minister of Education withdrew his opposition in March 1919, provided that Johannesburg gave up its claims for an agricultural college. Although the University Committee did not agree to the compromise, the Anatomy Act was proclaimed for the magisterial district of Johannesburg on 1 July 1919 and a week later the then School of Mines announced the appointment of individuals to the first chairs of anatomy and physiology.

Regarding the clinical disciplines, in 1919 the medical advisory committee of Senate deliberately rejected the appointment of full-time professors (the only full-time appointments in the early years were to the chairs of anatomy, physiology and pharmacology), preferring to make part-time appointments 'both on the ground of teaching efficiency and because of local circumstances'. It was felt that 'teachers of the practical branches must be men who are in daily contact with the practice of their profession, as the chief aim of the Medical School is to train general practitioners and not specialists'.⁴

The foundation stone of the Medical School was laid by Lord Buxton, the Governor-General, on 28 January 1920. The building, which was only completed in 1928 because of financial constraints, was adjacent to the General Hospital on Hospital Hill next to the recently opened South African Institute for Medical Research (opened in 1913, in a building designed by Herbert Baker) and in close proximity to the Fever Hospital, the Queen Victoria Maternity Hospital, the



Picture of Hospital Hill taken in 1979 (taken from: *The Medical School, Hospital Hill 1920 to 1982: 2*).

Transvaal Memorial Hospital for Children (TMH) and the Non-European Hospital (NEH) which was built in 1923. The University of the Witwatersrand opened on 1 March 1922, with medicine being one of four faculties preparing students for the professions. For the combined degrees of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery a 6-year programme was instituted with four professional examinations. The first four students, who had started their studies at the 'tin temple' in 1919, completed this course at the end of 1924 and graduated in March of the following year.

Department of Surgery – the early years (1920 - 1958)

The first Professor of Surgery was appointed in 1920. George Ritchie Thomson, C.M.G., M.B. Ch.M. (Edin.), was described by one of the first medical students to be 'unhurried, imperturbable, pawky with a caustic Scots humour which could sear and tickle and could puncture conceit deftly and effectively'. He graduated in 1887, did his internship at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary and then moved to Tottenham Hospital, North London, as Resident Medical Officer. In 1891 he returned to Glasgow as Assistant Surgeon at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children and was University Assistant to Professor Sir William MacEwan. During 1900 - 1902 he saw service as a surgical specialist in the second South African War, with duties mostly in Estcourt and Pretoria. In 1902 he was elected President of the Transvaal Medical Society. During World War I he saw service in South-West Africa and in 1915 became first Surgeon in Charge of the Surgical Division of the first South African General Hospital at Bournemouth and in Abbeville, France, where he was eventually promoted to the post of Commanding Officer of the South African Hospital. On returning to Johannesburg he went into private practice with an honorary appointment at the Johannesburg General Hospital until his appointment



Picture of the Old Medical School (taken from: Murray BK. *Wits – The Early Years. A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and its Precursors, 1896 - 1939*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1982: 110).

to the Chair of Surgery by the School of Mining in 1920. In 1926 he was awarded the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

In 1921 the Academic Department of Surgery consisted of Professor Thomson and Joseph J. (J. J.) Levin (a formidable character and surgeon, whose injunction to his juniors was that there were only two reasons for running in this world – one was haemorrhage and the other was if summoned by J. J.), and F. D. Mudd in anaesthetics. In 1923 C. F. Beyers, nephew of the famous Boer General, joined the staff as a surgical tutor, James McNab as lecturer in diseases of the ear, nose and throat (retired 1926), R. A. Ross as lecturer in diseases peculiar to children and H. Gluckman as lecturer in venereal diseases.

On 13 June 1923 the NEH opened and on 29 October the TMH was commissioned. Both hospitals were staffed by the General Hospital establishment.

Also in 1923 the subdepartments of diseases of the eye (J. G. de Kok) and radiology (W. Stuart) were added to the academic Department of Surgery. In 1925 the subdepartment of urology was started by H. Temple-Mursell and A. Maisels. In these years Innes Wares Brebner, who was to become the next head of department, J. A. (Jackie) Douglas, who would become acting head of department in 1956, F. B. Fouché, who would make a substantial contribution to orthopaedic surgery, Maxie Greenberg, who would make a significant contribution to paediatric surgery and A. Lee-McGregor joined the staff. Lee-McGregor later became internationally recognised for his book *Synopsis of Surgical Anatomy*.

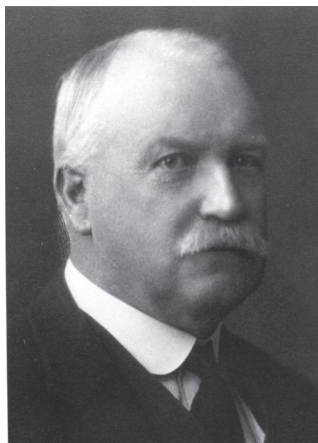
In 1931, Innes Wares Brebner succeeded Ritchie Thomson as Professor of Surgery. He was born in Bloemfontein, graduated in Medicine at Edinburgh in 1906 and after various locums in England took up a post of medical officer at Grey Hospital in King William's Town. In 1908 he was appointed as house surgeon at the Johannesburg Hospital and 3 years later set up private practice in Turffontein, Johannesburg. He served in France during World War I and was awarded the MBE. After the war he became Assistant Surgeon at the Johannesburg Hospital. He obtained the F.R.C.S. (Edin.) in 1926. Brebner was a very human and much-liked person. He was a man of principle and for that reason offered his resignation from the professorship in 1933 as the University had failed to give him the support to establish what he considered to be an adequate department. He had to spend from his own salary to remunerate essential members of staff. Despite the early tribulations he remained head of

the Department until his retirement in 1945. Brebner was awarded the Honorary Fellowship of the American College of Surgeons in 1938, that of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1943 and that of the South African College of Surgeons in 1961. The department at the time consisted of four surgical units (Professor Brebner's, Dr D. J. Dauth's, taken over in 1945 by Lee McGregor, D. J. Douglas's and Dr W. A. Pocock's) and a number of well-established subdepartments that, although academically responsible to the Department of Surgery, had their own clinical identity. They were diseases of the ear, nose and throat; diseases of the eye; diseases peculiar to children; venereal disease; anaesthetics; radiology; urology; and orthopaedics.

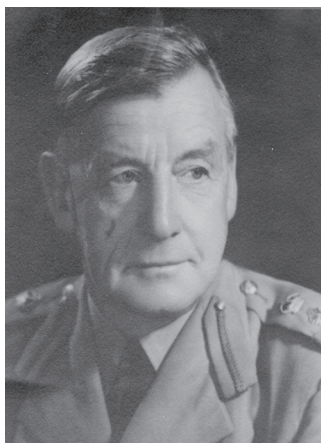
In 1946 the University of the Witwatersrand inaugurated full-time chairs in the disciplines of surgery, medicine and obstetrics and gynaecology (this had first been recommended by the Dean, Professor Raymond Dart, as early as 1933). As a result William E. Underwood succeeded Professor Brebner to the Chair of Surgery. He was educated at Rossall School and St Bartholomew's in London, where he graduated M.B. M.Ch. (Cantab.) and obtained his F.R.C.S. (Engl.). He worked at St Bartholomew's and Queen Mary's hospitals and was elected Hunterian Professor of the Royal College of Surgeons for his work on hydronephrosis. He had a distinguished war record, being mentioned in dispatches on two occasions. While head of the Department of Surgery he served a term as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. Towards the end of his headship the Department had 13 surgical registrars.

Baragwanath Hospital opened as a provincial hospital in 1948 for the rapidly growing population of Diepkloof and Orlando; it had previously been a British military hospital during World War II. This brought many new members of staff into the Academic Department of Surgery. The NEH remained the responsibility of the Johannesburg General Hospital surgical staff, whereas Baragwanath had its own staff establishment headed by Mr L. Fatti (R. Crawshaw, S. Skapinker, S. Kay, E. S. Braun). Among the early registrars at this hospital were Sonny du Plessis, Lennie Stein, Olaf Hannsen, Dennis Walker and Hymie Gaylis.

Professor Underwood resigned from the faculty in 1956 after the *Rand Daily Mail* accused him of scientific fraud. Today information on this incident is sketchy. He was involved in experimental cardiac surgery using dogs, together with Reg Crawshaw, Vernon Wilson and Paul Marchand, which was apparently pioneering and successful. This infor-



Ritchie Thomson



Innes Brebner



William Underwood



Jackie Douglas

mation was brought to the notice of the public (including details of the dog on which this surgery had been performed) and Underwood was then approached by the newspaper. When asked by the newspaper if the experiment had been successful, he replied in the affirmative although it appears that he was unaware that the dog, had died. He was asked to supply a photograph of the dog, and apparently when he was told that the dog was dead instructed the chief technician, Mr R. Caunter, to paint another dog's paws to make it resemble the now dead dog. The reason for this instruction is not clear and Caunter is said to have objected. Professor Underwood was eventually successful in subsequent litigation against the newspaper for defamation of character. Underwood moved to Kitwe, then in Northern Rhodesia, to work in a mine hospital.

In 1956, Jackie Douglas was appointed acting Head and Chief Surgeon in a part-time capacity. He was the product of Edinburgh University. During his career he became interested in neurosurgery and studied for a period under Professor Dott in Edinburgh. He was a founder member of the College of Medicine of South Africa. His tenure was a difficult one after the adverse publicity of his predecessor yet he is credited with handling this to the best of his ability in a part-time capacity.

D. J. du Plessis (1958 - 1977)

Daniel Jacob (Sonny) du Plessis attended Paarl Boys' High School, where he distinguished himself as a scholar and sportsman. He went on to Cape Town University and graduated M.B. Ch.B. in 1941. He saw service in World War II in North Africa and Italy as a captain in the South African Medical Corps in the 20th Field Ambulance of the 6th South African Armoured Division. On demobilisation he, with Phillip Hattingh, Dennis Walker and Len Stein, were the first four full-time surgical registrars appointed at Baragwanath Hospital. He obtained the Ch.M. in 1951 for work on mixed salivary tumours. In the same year he received a Nuffield Fellowship to Oxford University. On his return to South Africa he was appointed as a specialist surgeon at Groote Schuur Hospital.

He was appointed to the Chair of the Department of Surgery on 1 July 1958. With this appointment he faced many challenges, which he tackled with great thrust and determination. He initiated many changes in the Department and stimulated clinical, teaching and research activities. His

personal research included pioneering work on the aetiology of peptic ulceration which brought him international recognition. Under his guidance various individuals created highly specialised clinics. These included head and neck surgery (Sholem Kay), breast cancer surgery (Myron Lange), thyroid diseases (Theo Lorentz) and vascular surgery (Len Stein and Hymie Gaylis). At the time of Professor du Plessis' appointment there were 6 full-time and 15 part-time surgeons at the Johannesburg General Hospital and 26 registrars in the Department.

During 1958, A. J. (Tony) Leonsins returned from Boston where he had gained experience with early dialysis. He persuaded Professor Du Plessis to embark on an acute dialysis programme which became the forerunner of the chronic dialysis and transplantation units within the Department.

After Professor Du Plessis had seen how successfully trauma was treated at the Birmingham Accident Hospital in 1960, A. E. (Fred) Wilkinson was sent to Birmingham to study trauma and the management of such a service. Subsequent to his return to South Africa, the Accident Service, in which trauma could be treated in an independent setting, was opened in 1962 under Fred Wilkinson's direction.

In 1963 Orthopaedic Surgery became an independent Department under Jock Edelstein and in 1964 Ophthalmology followed suit under Maurice Luntz. The clinical facilities at the Johannesburg General Hospital were further improved, motivated by Professor Du Plessis, with the first intensive care unit in South Africa being opened next to the Professorial Block in April 1968.

By 1965 there were many new full-time members of staff. J. A. (Bert) Myburgh was appointed in June 1959. He started at Coronation Hospital and from 1960 to 1968 was in charge of the satellite surgical unit at the Princess Nursing Home in Hillbrow. C. J. (Carel) Mieny was appointed in 1965 and stayed in the Department until he took up the Chair of Surgery at the University of Pretoria in 1977. H. H. (Buddy) Lawson was senior surgeon at the NEH until he became Professor of Surgery at Baragwanath Hospital in 1971.

25 August 1966 saw the culmination of extensive laboratory and clinical research when the first renal transplant in South Africa was performed at Johannesburg General Hospital with the help of Tom Starzl, who was the second Michael and Janie Miller Visiting Professor (*vide infra*). This was the start of a very successful transplant unit, which was created under Bert Myburgh's leadership. This unit achieved



Sonny du Plessis



Bert Myburgh



Lewis Levien



Michael Davies

international recognition both in the clinical field and in transplantation research with the help of the immunologist J. A. (Koos) Smit and biochemist M. M. J. (Thys) Oosthuizen.

In 1967 Bert Myburgh became *ad hominem* Professor of Surgery and Dennis Walker was appointed the first full-time head of the division of plastic surgery. In 1968 P. J. P. (Nol) van Blerk became head of urology, in 1969 Michael Dinner became head of paediatric surgery, and Donovan Haynes was appointed head of otorhinolaryngology in 1970. Associate professorships were awarded to Dennis Walker (1968), Fred Wilkinson and Boris Lewin at Coronation Hospital (1969), S. Kleinot at Baragwanath (1970), P. J. P. (Nol) van Blerk and Michael Dinner (1971), Dave Tanne at Coronation Hospital (1974), Cedric Bremner, Reader in Surgery (1974), and Donovan Haynes (1976). Chairs of surgery were created at the other teaching hospitals. H. H. (Buddy) Lawson was appointed to Baragwanath Hospital in 1971, Cedric Bremner to Coronation Hospital in 1979 and Lewis Levien to Hillbrow Hospital (the old Johannesburg General Hospital after this hospital moved to the new site on Parktown Ridge in 1979) in 1983. The Divisions of Surgery were strengthened at the time by the appointment of full professors. In 1974 T. G. (Terry) O'Donovan became Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery, and in 1978 Nol van Blerk became Professor of Urology, Michael Dinner Professor of Paediatric Surgery and Robert Lipschitz Professor of Neurosurgery. In 1981 Ian Smith was appointed part-time head of maxillofacial surgery (as honorary Professor) and in 1985 W. (Bill) McIntosh was appointed to the Chair of otorhinolaryngology.

Professor Du Plessis retired from the Chair of Surgery at the end of June 1977 to become the Deputy Vice-Chancellor in a full-time capacity. He had already been active in this post on a part-time basis for 3 years. He was invited to take over from Professor G. R. Bozolli as the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand in January 1978. He retired from this post at the end of 1983. In the nearly 20 years as head of the Department of Surgery he inspired the practice of good clinical medicine and teaching and stimulated research in many fields. During this time 64 registrars were trained in the Department and the Department had achieved national and international recognition. Professor Du Plessis also made substantial contributions to the practice of surgery and medicine in South Africa. Examples include being a founder member of the College of Medicine of South Africa, and the *South African Journal of Surgery*, the Surgical Research Society of Southern Africa and the Biennial Congress of the Association of Surgeons of South Africa were his innovations. He received many awards and honorary fellowships including those from the American College of Surgeons, the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland, the American Surgical Association, the College of Medicine of South Africa and an Honorary L.L.D. from the University of the Witwatersrand and an Honorary M.D. from the University of Cape Town.

J. A. Myburgh (1977 - 1994)

Johannes Albertus (Bert) Myburgh was appointed in July 1977. Born in the Free State, he had matriculated at Parys High School with distinctions in all subjects. He graduated M.B. Ch.B. (with first-class honours and distinctions in surgery, medicine and obstetrics and gynaecology) from the University of Cape Town in 1950. He was active and

talented in sport, being awarded Springbok colours in athletics in 1950. In 1952 he went to New College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar, where he obtained the F.R.C.S. (Engl.) in 1955. On his return to South Africa he was awarded the Ch.M. for work on acquired immunological tolerance from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1966.

At the time general surgery units existed at Johannesburg Hospital (head J. A. Myburgh; full-time surgeons C. G. Bremner, J. R. Botha, S. A. R. Cooke and A. E. Wilkinson), at Coronation Hospital (head B. Lewin; full-time surgeon D. Tanne), at J. G. Strijdom Hospital (head G. A. G. Decker), at the NEH (full-time surgeons R. A. Hinder and D. Pantanowitz) and at Baragwanath Hospital (head H. H. Lawson; full-time surgeons R. M. A. Giraud, J. A. Hunt, B. Rabinowitz, J. M. A. L. Moshesh and A. Mannell). The divisions of surgery consisted of paediatric surgery (head Professor John Chappell; Michael R. Q. Davies from 1983), urology (head Professor P. J. P. van Blerk), cardiothoracic surgery (head Professor T. G. O'Donovan; Professor R. H. Kingsley from 1978), neurosurgery, plastic surgery, otorhinolaryngology, maxillofacial and oral surgery and venereology. Administratively the Department was run by Mr R. F. (Ronnie) Stokes and Mrs Jocelyn Cuthbert. The laboratories were extremely active under the leadership of Koos Smit (immunology: assisted by Jenny Stark and Clive Gray) and Thys Oosthuizen (biochemistry: assisted by Hugo Lambrechts, Gwynn Rasmussen and Jane Robson). Others included Shelagh Hunter (gastroenterology), Abdul Rasool (flow cytometry), Edith Andrews (audiovisual unit and Brebner museum) and the technical staff of Fred Isaacs, Jacob Morake, Alfred Nemudzivhadi, Lucas Motshoane, Petrus Mavhulawa, Petrus Monyani, Levisohn Ncube, Chris Pooe, Amon Moema, Johannes Mathipa and David Rasekula.

During Professor Myburgh's headship substantial changes occurred in the Department as a result of the political policies being applied in the country at the time. Surgical services continued to be available only in segregated facilities (including the training of registrars) until the mid 1980s. Black registrars could only train on black patients in 'black' hospitals; white registrars were allowed to operate on all races. With ever-increasing pressures on the provincial authorities this slowly changed but it was not until 1990 that facilities were fully integrated. Unfortunately, the early years of segregation also resulted in some well-established and high-quality services being destroyed.

The NEH was transferred to the old Johannesburg Hospital (now Hillbrow Hospital) in 1982. Lewis Levien was appointed to the new chair of this hospital with units run by himself, André Giraud, Gordon Hersman, Sam Berzin and Jaap Osterlee. On Lewis's resignation in 1987, Cedric Bremner was appointed to this chair while Desmond Pantanowitz took over the chair at Coronation Hospital. When Cedric Bremner retired in 1992, George Decker was appointed as head of this hospital.

With the stroke of a bureaucratic pen, the J. G. Strijdom Hospital was designated as an 'own-affairs' (i.e. whites-only) hospital in 1989. This desperate attempt at maintaining segregation in the hospitals in the west of Johannesburg was rejected by the University and as a result academic units were withdrawn from this hospital. George Decker, who had been head of the academic surgical unit at this hospital since 1977, and his staff were appointed at Hillbrow Hospital. In 1991, with the rapid changes in the South African political

sphere, a non-racial admission policy was again permitted by the provincial authorities at the J. G. Strijdom Hospital (soon to become the Helen Joseph Hospital). As a result academic surgical services transferred from the units at Coronation Hospital which was then also bursting at the seams. Presently the Helen Joseph and Coronation hospitals form a single administrative complex, with medicine and surgery at Helen Joseph Hospital and paediatrics and obstetrics and gynaecology at Coronation Hospital. Des Pantanowitz, who took over the chair at Coronation Hospital in 1989, became the head of surgery at Helen Joseph Hospital in 1991.

Buddy Lawson retired from Baragwanath Hospital in 1991 and Demetri Demetriades was appointed to this position until 1993 when he took up a position in Los Angeles. Roger Saadia took over as head at the renamed Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital.

The 1980s was also the era of the general surgical units at the Johannesburg Hospital developing expertise in specific areas: vascular surgery (Hymie Gaylis, Lewis Levien, George Louridas), hepatobiliary and pancreatic surgery (Bert Myburgh), gastroenterology (Cedric Bremner, Ron Hinder), transplantation (René Botha), paediatric surgery (Michael Davies, Peter Beale) and trauma (Hymie Green, Ken Boffard), with all units developing separate identities.

Under Professor Myburgh's leadership, the Department maintained its standard of excellence and developed further recognition in South Africa and abroad. Personally, his achievements were widely recognised with numerous honorary degrees (honorary M.D. from the University of the Orange Free State, honorary D.Sc. from the University of the Witwatersrand) and fellowships (American College of Surgeons, Royal College of Surgeons of England, American College of Physicians, American Surgical Association, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, College of Medicine of South Africa). He was President of the College of Medicine of South Africa from 1986 until 1989.

Department of Surgery – the recent years (1994 - present)

On Professor Myburgh's retirement, Lewis Levien was appointed to head the Department. Michael Davies took over in 1999. Martin Veller is the present incumbent (since 2001).

Today the Division of General Surgery (with the restructuring of the University general surgery is a division of the

Department of Surgery) is represented at Johannesburg Hospital (head Professor Ken Boffard since 2001; unit heads Jacques Goosen – trauma; René Botha – endocrine, head and neck, transplantation; Martin Veller – vascular surgery; Damon Bizos – gastroenterology); Baragwanath Hospital (head Professor Martin Smith since 2001; unit heads Elias Degiannis, Sam Berzin, Akos Kiss and Maganlal Lakhoo); and Helen Joseph Hospital (head Professor Desmond Pantanowitz since 1989; unit heads Julien Oettle, Carol Benn and Duraisamy Sridaran). Hillbrow Hospital was closed in 1999 to become a community hospital. The academic staff of this hospital, at the time headed by George Decker, were absorbed into the other teaching hospitals, principally Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital.

Undergraduate teaching continues to thrive in all of the teaching units. Registrar training, in a rotation that includes all teaching hospitals, is as robust as previously with more than 184 individuals having been trained since 1950. The development of subspecialist interests is rapidly expanding, allowing for excellent subspecialist training in trauma, gastroenterology, vascular and paediatric surgery with accredited subspecialist training units at all three hospitals.

The Division continues to make substantial contributions to excellence in teaching, service and research as is evidenced by recent professorial appointments (Associate Professor René Botha – 1994, Associate Professor Julien Oettle – 1999, Associate Professor Elias Degiannis – 2001, Professor Ken Boffard – 2001, Adjunct Professor Martin Smith – 2001; *ad hominem* Professor Martin Veller – 2002, Adjunct Professor Peter Beale – 2002, Adjunct Professor Graeme Pitcher – 2003, Adjunct Professor Sam Berzin – 2003, Adjunct Professor Talib Abdool-Carrim – 2003). Of concern is that the research output has become less and for this reason Dr Geoff Candy has been appointed to head the laboratories in the Department. Developments in the clinical fields have however continued and for this reason the academic department has again become a leader in clinical innovation and excellence and departmental members have won the senior faculty and university teaching awards in the last 3 years in succession.

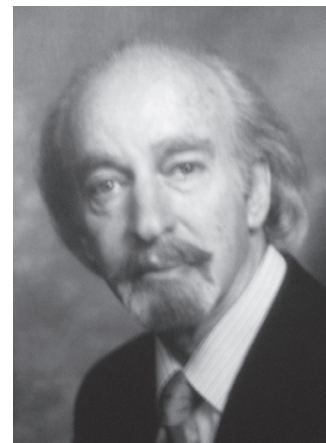
In the South African surgical community the Department continues to make contributions. Lewis Levien, Martin Veller and Talib Abdool-Carrim have, in recent years, served at various times as Secretary, Treasurer or President of the Vascular Society of Southern Africa. Ken Boffard, Jacques Goosen and Frank Plani have had a substantial influence



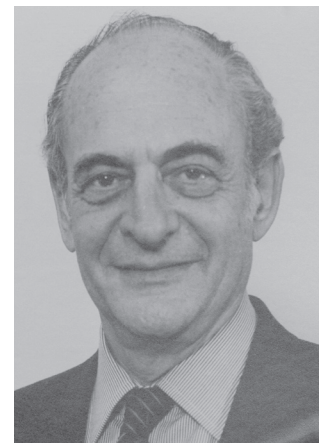
Michael Miller



Janie Miller



Len Miller



Percy Fox

on the Trauma Society in a similar fashion. Barry Jacobson is the present president of the Surgical Research Society of South Africa. Damon Bizos, Martin Smith and Martin Veller have served in various capacities on the executive committee of the Association of Surgeons of South Africa. The Biennial Surgical Symposium, originally conceived by Professor Du Plessis and first presented in 1967, will be presented for the twentieth time in 2006.

The other divisions of surgery within the department now consist of paediatric surgery (head Peter Beale appointed 2004), plastic surgery (head George Psaras appointed 2002), cardiothoracic surgery (head Fanie Cronjé appointed 1989), maxillofacial and oral surgery (head John Lownie appointed 1982), urology (head Mohammed Haffejee appointed 2002) and orthopaedic surgery (head Makhulele Lukhele appointed 2003).

Exciting innovations such as the development of the Graduate Entry Medical Program (GEMP) for the training of medical students and the purchase and growth of the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre are fully supported and often driven by members of the Department.

Major benefactions to the Department of Surgery

In the Department of Surgery, support for research has come from statutory bodies such as the South African Research Council and the National Cancer Association. In addition the Department has been fortunate to have received extremely valuable financial and other support from the following sources:

The Michael and Janie Miller Foundation

This Trust was established in 1965 by Mr Michael Miller who with his partner Mr Sam Cohen had pioneered departmental stores in South Africa. He was advised by his physician, Dr Arnold Teeger, and Mr Jack Wolfowitz who at the time was a senior part-time surgeon in the Department. The objective of the Trust is the support and stimulation of clinical practice, teaching and research in the Department of Surgery. To this end the Trust has supported: (i) an annual Visiting Professorship to the Department of Surgery (to date there have been 36 such visits by internationally recognised individuals who have made a substantial contribution to academic surgery in the Department and in South Africa);

(ii) an Annual Fellowship to be awarded to members of staff or trainees of the Department (40 fellowships have been awarded, many resulting in those individuals establishing an academic career in surgery); and (iii) annual prizes to be awarded to the best surgical registrars of the year.

After Michael Miller's death his son Mr Len Miller succeeded him. Len and his wife, Tina, have maintained a close personal interest in the affairs of the Department and have made substantial recurrent bequests to the Trust. In appreciation and recognition of his continuing personal involvement, the Len Miller Lecture Theatre in the Department was opened at a function on 27 January 1988. The current trustees are Mr Len Miller, Mr Wolfie Lack and Mr Raymond Hack who continue managing the Trust's invaluable support of the Department.

The Percy Fox Foundation

In accordance with the will of Mr Percy Fox, the trustees of this Foundation donated R20 000 to the University of the Witwatersrand as capital, the income of which was to be used to assist in the establishment and operation of an immunology laboratory in the Department of Surgery to be known as 'The Percy Fox Laboratory'. In subsequent years Mr Edwin Fox administered further regular donations and maintained a keen personal interest in the activities of the Laboratory. In 1999 a special donation of R100 000 was made in memory of Professor Du Plessis' contribution to surgery; in total nearly R400 000 has been donated since inception of the foundation in 1970.

The Masonic Research Fund

The Masonic Research Fund was started in 1984. This followed a proposal made to the District Grand Lodge of the Transvaal by Dr Phoebus Perdikis, who at the time was a senior part-time surgeon in the Department, to donate R10 000 raised at a Masonic Charity Sports Day (organised by Mr John Bredenkamp) to support research in the Department. This was motivated by the high standard of research being carried out and the urgent need for additional funds to continue and expand this work. The proposal was accepted and the Masonic Research Fund was launched under the guidance of the District Grand Master of the Lodge, who at the time was Mr E. T. (Ted) Ablett. This fund was regularly and substantially augmented by donations from the District Grand Lodge and some personal donations



Phoebus Perdikis



E. T. Ablett



Janet Antrobus



Phillip Sceales



Oscar Norwich



David Lurie

from Mr Frank Hogg. By the close of the project in 1992, R260 000 had been raised to support numerous research projects. In recognition of this substantial contribution the Biochemistry Research Laboratory in the Department was named the Masonic Research Fund Laboratory in May 1988.

The Phillip Scales and Janet Antrobus Cancer Research Trust

Janet Scales Antrobus died as a consequence of breast cancer in December 1990 after having undergone a mastectomy 13 years previously. Her wish was that a Trust be established to stimulate and encourage postgraduate training and research in the field of breast cancer. With this objective and with substantial input from her sister, Mrs Barbara Lindop, this Trust was launched. When Janet's father subsequently died the Trust was named the Phillip Scales and Janet Antrobus Cancer Research Trust. To date the Trust has supported 14 research or educational projects focusing largely on breast cancer.

The Oscar Norwich Travelling Fellowship

The above Fellowship was created in 1997 after the death of Dr Oscar Norwich who was a surgeon in practice in Johannesburg and who was also well known for his collection of Africana maps. The purpose of the Fellowship is to encourage, stimulate and reward surgical excellence in the Department by giving young postgraduate surgeons the opportunity to be exposed to surgical expertise at centres of excellence or alternatively to assist in furthering the research objectives of promising young investigators. To date the Fellowship has been awarded to eight individuals, many of whom continue to make substantial contributions to the Department. Rose Norwich, Oscar's widow, continues to have an active role in the supervision of this Fellowship.

The David Lurie Research Scholarship

The David Lurie Research Scholarship was established in 1946 in memory of Dr David Lurie, who died during World War II in a motor vehicle accident near Cairo in Egypt. He had been a registrar and assistant in the Department of Surgery from 1934 until he went on military service in 1941. To date 26 individuals and projects in the Department have been assisted by this fund.

Future challenges

The Department continues to face challenges specific to the Department but will also need to help resolve some of the national issues. Some of these challenges are:

1. The number of registrars required to meet the departmental staffing requirements and the need to increase the number of surgeons available to service the population of South Africa.
2. The majority of medical graduates in South Africa are women. As a result it is essential that a career in surgery be made attractive to women. This is a worldwide challenge and solutions to this dilemma have as yet not been found.
3. Maintenance of academic careers and inculcation of a culture of research, at the same time ensuring that the income of surgeons is sufficient to keep them in the Department. It is also important to ensure that the finances available to the Department are adequate to achieve the required academic goals.
4. Strengthening subspecialist expertise while ensuring that trainees are given a broad-based education in surgery.

In conclusion, in the 85 years of its existence the Department of Surgery has made a substantial impact on the practice of surgery in South Africa. It is our aim to maintain these standards of excellence in clinical practice and in the teaching of surgery to our undergraduate, postgraduate and post-specialisation students.

A manuscript of this nature cannot be written without the input of many individuals. Bert Myburgh, Ken Boffard, Martin Smith, Julien Oettle, Susan Parkes, Bev Noble and Jocelyn Cuthbert have made an invaluable contribution.

REFERENCES

1. The medical profession in South Africa. *BMJ* 1910; 1: 713-714.
2. Medical education – proposed school for the Transvaal. *S Afr Med J* 1916; 11: 135-141.
3. Lucas MB. The Medical School, University of the Witwatersrand. Its prehistory and beginnings. Monograph lodged with the library and the Department of Surgery, University of the Witwatersrand.
4. Murray BK. *Wits – The Early Years. A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and Its Precursors, 1896 - 1939*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1982.
5. Van Blerk PJP. The history of Surgery relating to the Johannesburg Hospital and the University of the Witwatersrand, 1889 - 1989. Monograph lodged with the library and the Department of Surgery, University of the Witwatersrand.
6. Myburgh JA. Major Benefactions to the Department of Surgery. University of the Witwatersrand. May 2002. Monograph lodged with the library and the Department of Surgery, University of the Witwatersrand.