

## William Oliphant Baird CBE



Air Commodore William Baird, who has died aged 90 years, was commissioned into the Royal Air Force Dental Branch in 1941. The Branch numbered more than 1000 dental officers but Baird was exceptional in that he was one of the very few dentists who was also medically qualified. It was this dual qualification which established him,

some years later, as the founder member of a new specialty within the RAF Dental Branch — oral surgery.

Together with Terence Ward (later knighted) and Douglas Paley-Battersea, Baird was seconded to join special hospital units which had been formed in and around London to deal with the anticipated heavy air raid casualties during the Blitz. On returning to the Service, Baird helped to set up specialized dental departments at RAF hospitals to support the surgical units handling casualties with facial trauma from home and overseas.

By 1943, Baird had been graded as a specialist and thus the seeds of the dental specialty in Service hospital practice had taken root. By 1945, Sir William Kelsey Fry persuaded Baird, now a squadron leader, that he should apply for a permanent commission, and thus Baird became the founder member of the new dental specialty in the service. Baird initiated a training programme for the new generation of specialists later to be known as oral surgeons.

Baird became a Founder Fellow of the Faculty of Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and, in 1946,

was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire.

During the late '40s and early '50s Baird served at hospitals with the Middle East Air Force. In 1951 he returned to his beloved Halton Hospital where he stayed until his retirement in 1973. He remained devoted to the task of establishing a first class team of oral surgeons, recognized by the royal colleges as having parity with their civilian counterparts. Promoted to Air Commodore in 1961, he was appointed honorary dental surgeon to Her Majesty The Queen in 1964 and Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1966.

Baird was born in Perth, Scotland in 1908, but moved south to London where he was educated at Finchley County School. He met his future wife, Doris Irene Bailey (Dot) there and they married in 1935.

William Baird gained his dental qualification at the Royal Dental Hospital and his medical degree at the Middlesex Hospital. He was a dental surgeon with West Sussex County Council, Chichester, from 1938 until he joined the Royal Air Force. His wife died in 1992. There were no children.

**R.B.**

## John Burns

John Burns died suddenly but peacefully on 9th February 2000 at Noble's Hospital, Isle of Man after suffering a stroke. John was born in Liverpool in 1917, the son of a dentist. After finishing school, John started his career as a stockbroker, but after meeting his wife to be, Monica, in 1936, he followed his father and studied at Liverpool Dental School. He graduated in 1943. John joined the navy as a Surgeon-Lieutenant and spent the first part of the war at HMS Ariel in Warrington. He married in 1942 and was then posted to Ceylon. While abroad his first son Geoffrey was born. Following discharge from the navy in 1946 he at first joined his father's practice in Liverpool but eventually went into a very successful partnership with Vernon Greenhalgh. John had a second son Michael and is remembered as a loving and caring father.

John 'retired' to the Isle of Man in 1969, but his enjoyment of dentistry led him to form a new practice in Ramsey, Isle of Man with George Huntley, a relatively new graduate who was able to benefit and learn by John's experience and communication

skills, bearing in mind this was in the days when there was no post graduate training for GDPs. John finally retired from practice in 1977 but still had great energy and was appointed a RDO on the Island and continued in this position till he was 70. John was a man of integrity, great charm and humour, slow to anger and reluctant to criticise. These were, of course, ideal qualities for a dental practitioner and his patients held him in respect and affection. You always felt better after meeting him.

He enjoyed life to the full and, together with Monica, loved to entertain friends. He was a keen golfer, was a very active member of Rotary and latterly of the Past Rotarians to whom, only the week before he died, John gave a speech. He was involved and committed with his church and loved to sing in the choir.

I consider myself very lucky to have been associated with John and his family.

He touched many peoples' lives, as was evidenced by the large number of people who attended his funeral service. We were all better people for knowing him. We all



send our sincere condolences to Monica, Michael and Geoffrey and their families too. John was very proud of his sons and grandchildren and his memory and character will live on in them.

**G.E.H.**