

Obituary

Antony Charles Harington WATSON (1936–2018)



A.C.H. Watson (1936-2018)

ACH Watson or Tony as he was commonly and affectionately called unobtrusively influenced the course of plastic surgery not only in his native Britain but also in India for over four decades. Born in 1936, he did his basic medical training in Edinburgh, Scotland, UK and graduated in 1960. His early surgical training started in The Royal Hospital for Sick Children or the 'sick kids' in Edinburgh and went on to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary in General Surgery and allied branches until 1965. During this period, he qualified with an FRCS (Ed.) in 1964.

Plastic surgery training was at the Bangaur General Hospital in the South East Scotland Regional unit under Mr. AB Wallace (of the rule of 9 fame), Mr. Buchan and Ms. Anne Sutherland from 1966 to 1970. The year 1971–1972 was spent as the Maytag-Macahill Fellow under Dr. Ralph Millard. I suppose this led to a lifelong love affair with cleft surgery. In 1972, he came back and became a consultant in the same unit at Bangaur, where he continued to work until his retirement in 1996.

He contributed hugely to plastic surgery in general and cleft work in particular. A search on Google Scholar revealed over four pages of published papers and books. He was one of the earliest to adopt nasal endoscopy for diagnosis of velopharyngeal incompetence. Personally, I saw some beautiful cleft work while training under him in the 'sick kids', but what was more impressive was his dedication to the children, his patient manner in the out-patient clinic with fractious and to my eye, often spoiled kids and his very effective collaboration with the Speech therapist. Records were meticulously kept and proved a treasure trove for writing papers and drawing useful conclusions, which influenced care. The hallmark was, of course, the complete lack of fuss and pomp.

He also contributed to breast cancer by being one of the early proponents of immediate reconstruction in

Edinburgh. This work was later carried on by his colleague, James Watson. There are many other contributions, but they are too many to list here.

Organisationally he played a huge role in the Royal College, as well as in the British Association of Plastic Surgeons (BAPS) as an office bearer, examiner and *via* the Specialist Advisory Committee which worked very hard to maintain and raise basic standards in teaching and training. He held multiple positions in BAPS, but the two most important were as Editor of the then BJPS and as President.

His influence in India was through his numerous trainees, the author being one of them. Working with him taught us to be sincere, meticulous, balanced and most importantly well behaved. The last being the most challenging. Just as parents live on by spreading their genes to their offspring; I believe firmly that surgeons live through their students who have imbibed their skills and values. In that respect, Tony was a great success in the UK as well as in India and many other parts of the world. In 2010 he was honoured with the Honorary membership of the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India by the author who was then the President of APSI in recognition for his contribution to training Indian Surgeons.

He also greatly helped the Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery after I became editor and guided me to make it a somewhat sensible scientific publication. As always this was done silently, with empathy and kindness. Over the last several years he has provided similar editorial input to 'The Short Notes in Plastic Surgery' a blog post run by Dr. RL Thatte with the active help of APSI.

Tony lived life with grace and dignity and passed away in the same fashion. His passing is a great loss to plastic surgery in India for we have lost a revered Guru and a genuine friend of this country. Tony is survived by his wife Anne to whom he was married for five decades as well as three daughters and one son.

Rest in peace Tony, we hope we can emulate some of your great qualities.

Mukund Ramchandra Thatte

Department of Plastic Surgery, Bombay Hospital and
Institute of Medical Sciences, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
E-mail: mthatte@gmail.com

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