

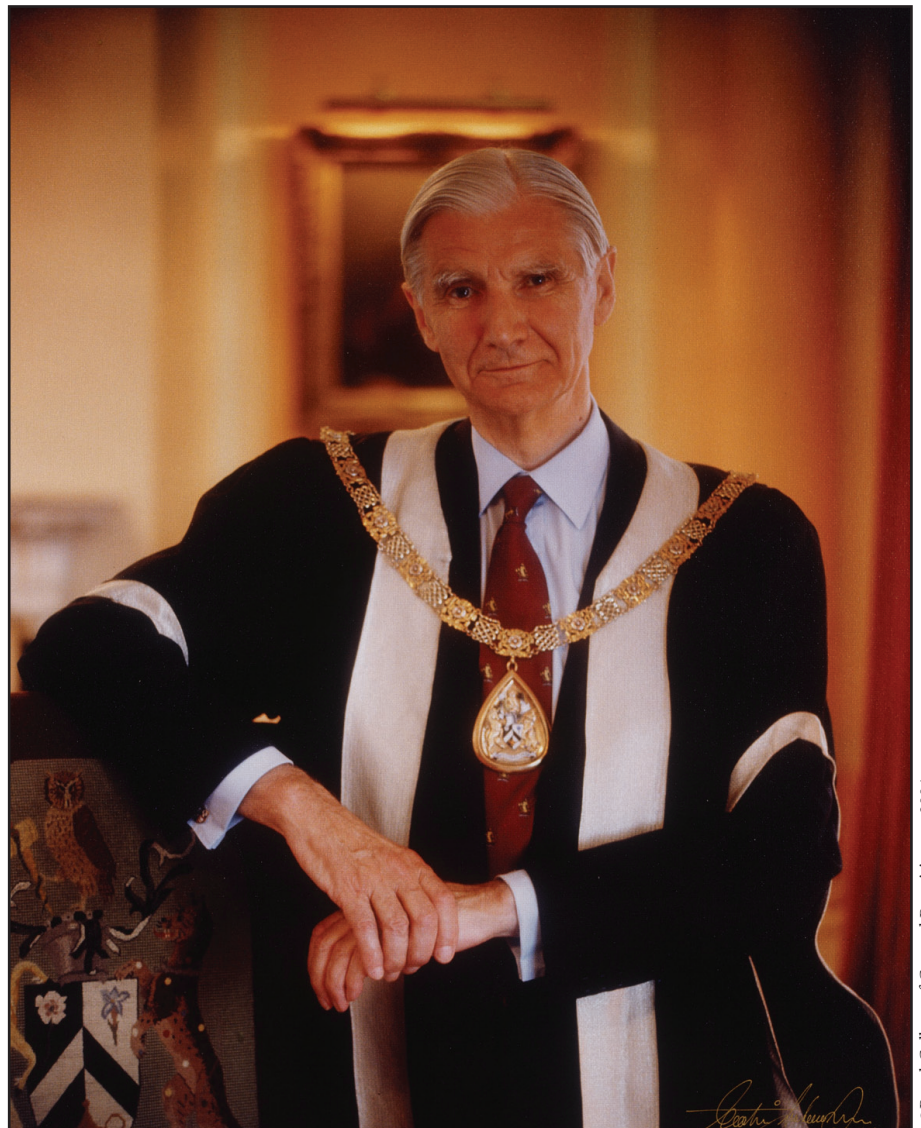
Alastair Donald

Alastair Donald was quite simply one of the truly outstanding GPs of his time — and one about whom no-one ever had an unkind word to say. Brought up above the Leith Mount surgery, from which he was later to become the third of four generations of the Donald family to provide care to the people of Leith and Cramond, Alastair was very much a part of the Edinburgh establishment. Educated at the Edinburgh Academy, he first did an MA at Cambridge returning to Edinburgh to qualify in medicine in 1951, having by then demonstrated his formidable all-round talents.

It is difficult to select from or to prioritise among the many professional roles that filled his life; his many years as a much-loved local GP; his key role over two decades as Regional Adviser establishing postgraduate training in and for general practice in the conservative environment of the medicine of south-east Scotland; his influential time as a national College leader during the heights of the renaissance of general practice from the 1970s onwards; and throughout his career as an internationally involved and respected counsel on general practice matters.

Alastair brought immense clarity of thought to everything he took on. He had the priceless ability to see sensible and practical solutions to difficult problems, to know when the time was right to take action or to wait for a more propitious opportunity, and to keep people on board when others would have lost them. He was a natural leader of teams, and a sensitive and effective chairman of meetings. He combined the ability to delegate efficiently, with ever-present willingness to acknowledge the contributions of others.

Alastair was one of only four to have been both Chairman of College Council, and later President. As Chairman of Council between 1979 and 1982 he revolutionised the way the College structured and organised its business, and what happens at Princes Gate now is



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still clearly modelled on the visions he had then. His Presidency from 1992 to 1994 followed a year when he covered for the Prince of Wales. In between these roles, he was Chairman of the UK Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice as well as holding numerous offices at home and abroad.

Alastair was a thinker as well as an organiser. His 1985 Mackenzie Lecture showed his ability as a critical analyst of the balance between new knowledge and old skills, and his promotion of the series

of Occasional Papers produced during his Chairmanship of Council, on what came to be known as Anticipatory Care, helped bring to fruition the first serious attempt to move general practice from being the largely reactive discipline of the past into the more proactive mode it now offers with increasing effectiveness. In retirement he worked tirelessly to establish a video-record of the early times and personalities whose work shaped the life of general practice in general, and the College in particular.

Flora medica

Richard Lehman

From the journals, May–June 2005

In later years Alastair bore a series of cruel personal events and failing health with the courage and dignity that has characterised everything he did. He was a gifted sportsman to the end — a truly companionable man to play golf with, and much involved in the work of Cramond Kirk, Rotary, the Edinburgh Academy, and the community around him. He will be greatly missed by a host of those whose lives have been the better for having been looked after by him, having worked with him, or simply having known him.

John Horder

John Howie

New Eng J Med Vol 352

1977 The American vogue for radical prostatectomy causes unease in those of us who would prefer to take a slower route to incontinence and impotence. This study shows a slight superiority over watchful waiting in early prostate cancer.

2049 For an accurate picture of renal function, cystatin C is the blood test most likely to replace nitrogenous waste products: here it proves better than creatinine in predicting death and cardiovascular events in the elderly.

2082 Do we really need to offer pneumococcal vaccine to all our patients with asthma? Yes, because this study shows that they are at twice the risk of invasive pneumococcal disease.

2174 Between 1997 and 2000, coronary artery bypass grafting provided better outcomes than stenting in the US; but we don't know if this applies to drug-eluting stents and the latest techniques of CABG.

2184 Another reason to put statins in the water supply: they might halve the risk of colorectal cancer, according to this case-control study of an unselected population in Israel.

2379 Vitamin E, shown elsewhere to decrease survival, proves useless at slowing cognitive decline in Alzheimer's. And donepezil is little better.

2398 If you had an aortic aneurysm, would you go for open or endovascular repair? Outcomes at 2 years are the same, although endovascular repair has fewer short-term complications.

Lancet Vol 365

1687 A mind-bogglingly thorough meta-analysis of chemotherapy and hormonal therapy for early breast cancer, already out of date due to new drugs. But there's a very useful chart of cancer trends in Western countries on page 1714.

1728 Colorectal cancer will increasingly be treated with laparoscopic surgery, provided the patient is properly selected and the surgeon is experienced.

1779 Yet another reason to put statins in the water supply: the Heart Protection Study shows that they are cost-effective over a wider range of cardiovascular risk than previously thought.

1849 In a New York study, free nicotine patches helped people to stop smoking.

JAMA Vol 293

2257 In the same fortnight that the *BMJ* and *Lancet* both published good randomised trials showing that vitamin D did not protect against fractures in risk groups, this meta-analysis shows results that are 'compelling

for general vitamin D supplementation in the range of 700–800 iu/d for elderly persons.'

2343 Gluten allergy is much commoner than we thought — about 1 in 100 when looked for using anti-tissue transglutaminase: some of this may be attributable to exposure to gluten before the age of 4 months, according to this Danish study.

2372 Serotonin reuptake inhibitors taken in pregnancy may cause jitteriness in the neonate, but rarely anything more serious, according to this useful review of the literature.

2391 Another key paper in the marvellous 'Rational Clinical Examination' series — learn how to identify a stroke correctly in 1 minute.

2776 An update on the treatment of tuberculosis, rounding off a whole issue devoted to this once and future killer.

Other Journals

Arch Intern Med (165: 978) contains an intriguing case-control series from Denmark which seems to show that all NSAIDs (not just coxibs) carry a risk for myocardial infarction, with rofecoxib among the highest, and celecoxib the lowest. Pages 997–1048 contain studies showing that male health professionals will do well to eat dairy products, drink more than 7 units of alcohol a week, and take exercise. Although the 'number-needed-to treat' (NNT) was devised to help shared decision-making with patients, a randomised trial shows that it makes little difference (page 1140). And on page 1147, a depressing survey of adherence with antihypertensive and lipid-lowering therapy shows that patients (in the US, anyway) rarely take more than two medications consistently. *Ann Intern Med* (142:) 805 shows that rifamixin, a non-absorbed antibiotic, prevents traveller's diarrhoea in Mexico: Montezuma denied his revenge. On page 832, a paper pointing out that although adults are whooping, internists are not listening: pertussis is a very common cause of persistent cough. 'Diazepam with your dinner, sir?' is the typically provocative title of Bruce Charlton's piece on safer alternatives to alcohol as a social anxiolytic in *QJM* (98: 457). As for the harms of our other favourite addictive drug, tobacco, there seems to be no end: the latest is accelerated progression of multiple sclerosis (*Brain* 128: 1461). Scanning too much medical literature can lead to *Dreaming* (14: 240); early clay tablets show that the interpretation of dreams was a thriving industry 5000 years before Freud.

Plant of the Month: *Lilium* 'Pink Perfection'

A huge purplish lily with an intoxicating scent, worthy of Oscar Wilde's buttonhole.