

Frank J Ham
1931 - 2015



Frank Ham was born in Kew, schooled at Scotch College and obtained his MB.BS at the University of Melbourne in 1955. He courted and married Elizabeth Bennett in 1957 whilst training for his Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons which he obtained in 1961.

He set off with his young family to train for 2 years in Plastic Surgery at Frenchay Hospital in Bristol under the guidance of Fitzgibbon and Bodenham, disciples of Sir Harold Gillies. Whilst there he sat and passed the FRCS of England.

In 1963 he returned to the Royal Melbourne Hospital and was appointed Assistant Plastic surgeon to Sir Benjamin Rank. With Sir Ben's "guidance" and support he set up the Plastic Surgery Unit at Preston and Northcote Community Hospital which housed BKR's brainchild, the Victorian Plastic Surgery Unit (VPSU). In 1974 Frank relinquished that post to succeed John Hueston as Head of the Plastic and Faciomaxillary Unit of the Royal Melbourne Hospital, a position he held for 17 years. He insisted on being phoned first regarding all emergency admissions for the whole time as Head of the Unit

Frank was a giant of a man, not only in stature but by his reputation within the surgical community. His surgical experience was vast and unique as it spanned eras from the pedestrian multi staged tube pedicled flap migration, used during the World War periods, to the modern day launching of the microsurgical free tissue transfers. He was a meticulous, methodical, safe and gifted surgeon who never undertook a new surgical venture without a planned "lifeboat" alternative should the procedure fail or need to be abandoned.

Frank was a team man, a great teacher and an inspirational leader who attracted colleagues who felt it was a privilege to be part of his Unit. He was an invaluable source of guidance, common sense and insight into managing difficult problems. He was a man of integrity, humility, responsibility and sense of humour. Who would ever forget his wardrobe of safari suits worn on ward rounds.

He was a man of vision who encouraged innovation, tempered by common sense. If not 'The Free Flap' would not have evolved when it did. Whilst on holiday from the PANCH Unit in 1973 and when consulted before undertaking this venture, Frank said "If you have considered the alternatives and believe that this is the right thing to do without undue harm to the patient. - then go ahead"

Although Frank encouraged research and publication, he was a co-author on only two papers; both were world firsts - the free fibula and the free vascular nerve graft.

Frank's political contributions were enormous. His persistence and ability in his various roles with ASPS included fee negotiations with the government. Frank did his homework as learnt from his mentor BKR, and was uncompromising when he considered that his point was correct. He was chairman of the Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery with the RACS and an examiner in Plastic Surgery. He was also a volunteer with Interplast.

In his private life, Frank was devoted to his family. He was a keen farmer of Murray Grey cattle and had an extensive collection of stamps and coins. His particular interest lay in antique hand tools. He set up the Hand Tool Association of Australia and was its secretary for 27 years and became a National and International authority on the subject.

Above all, Frank was a wonderful and loyal friend who was always there for you and is sadly missed by many. He is survived by his 3 children Lindy, Stewart and David together with 5 grandchildren.

Credit: Ian Taylor, Russell Corlett and John Anstee