

Robert Thompson

1931 – 2009



Born on 14 April 1931-31 July 2009, Robert (Bob) Vance Sutherland Thompson grew up in Country Victoria.

He secured a University Scholarship and Residency at Queens College, Melbourne University, graduating in 1954 with MBBS (Hons). During his course he was Prosector Anatomy in 1950 and won the Gold Medal in Anatomy the following year. After three years at the RMH where he was a registrar in the Thoracic Surgical Unit, 1958 to 1960 saw him in London at the St. James Hospital, Balham where in 1960 he gained his FRCS in general surgery. Over a period of 1960 to 1970 he occupied various positions at the RMH, including as the Director of Accident and Emergency focusing on repair of soft tissue and facial injuries.

In 1965 he travelled to South Vietnam and became a critical part of the RMH's first surgical team, based in Longxuyen. In the most adverse circumstances he remodelled faces and limbs grossly disfigured by war, disease and heredity.

His return to Australia in 1966 was marked by his appointment as Senior Consultant Plastic Surgeon to the Western General Hospital in Melbourne. During this period, which coincided with his appointment to the Guy Miller Tutorship in Operative Surgery at Melbourne University under Professor Maurice Ewing, he worked on a minor surgical classic entitled "Primary Repair of Soft Tissue Injuries", published in 1969 by Melbourne University Press with a foreword by Professor Maurice Ewing. It was illustrated with his own photographs and draughtsman like illustrations. It still holds its place today and should be studied by all those confronted by soft tissue trauma.

In 1986 he resigned from WGH after a tremendously successful period and went to NSW where he was appointed as a Consultant Plastic Surgeon to the Royal Canberra Hospital and associated hospitals at Cooma and Pambula. Although plastic surgery was still his heart throb he now had the chance to spend some time on many other interests which included painting, photography, fishing, sailing, golfing and deer farming.

His keen interest in plastic surgery and in particular hand surgery and nasal reconstruction, took him on numerous trips overseas to the United States, the United Kingdom (including as visiting plastic surgeon at Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge and Consultant Plastic Surgeon, Plymouth) and especially to France. A dedicated Francophile, he spoke French and revelled in the atmosphere, culture and literary works of that country. In line with his altruistic traits, Bob also completed various surgical missions to developing countries in need of surgical expertise including Interplast visits to the Solomon Islands in 1983 and again in 1986. In his latter years before his illness he worked as a medico-legal consultant.

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Throughout his career Bob was an active contributor to various Surgical Associations and achieved many notable publications. In 1994 Bob submitted an entry for the prestigious Kay-Kilmer Prize awarded by The British Society of Plastic Surgeons. He won with his essay entitled "What are the priorities in Plastic Surgery" (Brit. J. Plastic Surgery 1995 48 410-418).

Bob is survived by his children Kerstin and Charles, and his grandchildren Finn, Harrison and Ondine who all reside in Melbourne.

Credit: RACS website