

Richard Watson

1936 – 2020



Richard Watson was a plastic surgeon in Adelaide South Australia. Born on September 5, 1936, on the Yorke Peninsula just before World War II, he was the son of Dulcie and Arthur and the youngest brother of John and Graham.

Paratrooper, historian, horse rider, pilot and more. Whatever plastic surgeon Richard Watson set his mind to, it was guaranteed he would throw himself into the adventure.

Growing up, he spent many hours driving through the countryside making house calls with his father, a GP.

Richard went to Yorketown Primary School before boarding at St Peters College from the age of nine. He was well known for his love of drawing planes – a fascination with flight that led to him becoming a paratrooper in the British army and flying on one of the last Concorde flights.

Throughout his time at boarding school, Richard took an active role in the school community in rowing, debating and science. During holidays he would return to Yorketown to drive grain trucks and ride horses, instilling in him a lifelong interest in agriculture.

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Richard studied medicine at the University of Adelaide and, in 1956, began a lifelong association with St Mark's College during a six-year stint as a resident student.

He was a successful coxswain in the Adelaide University Boat Club and sat for his pilot's licence during that time.

In the 1950s, Richard did his national service in the navy.

Moving to the UK in 1963, he joined the British army as a medical officer. He was made a captain and trained as a paratrooper and would later become a patron of the British Airborne Forces Association of South Australia, a position he held until his death.

During university breaks, he would work as a waiter on The Ghan railway, and during his final year in medical school he volunteered as an assistant in the Papua New Guinea highlands. He continued to travel for much of his life.

In 1962, Richard married Mary and, in 1963, they sailed to the UK to live and work for eight years. He lectured in anatomy at Guy's Hospital in London from 1964-66, and worked as a plastic surgeon in Bristol and Glasgow from 1967-71. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1968.

Richard returned to Adelaide in 1972 to practise plastic surgery at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. He specialised in reconstructive hand surgery, repairing factory workers' injuries. Richard became a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons that year, and lectured in surgery at the University of Adelaide.

He helped set up and was head of the plastic-and-reconstructive-surgery unit at the QEH from 1989. Richard's other professional achievements from 1972-2010 included serving on many boards and committees. He was a founding member of the Australian Hand Surgery Society.

In 1989, he returned to study, topping the state in Year 12 classical studies while still working full-time. This led to a Master of Philosophy, majoring in medical history, from Oxford University in 1995.

In other travel adventures, Richard served as ship's surgeon twice on supply ships to the Antarctic, in 1982-83 and 1986-87, recording the bird logs on both expeditions.

He was employed as a ships' surgeon on Pacific Island cruises in the 2000s, and took Mary and sons Mark and Guy on many trips, including four-wheel-drive tours in the Outback and trekking through the Himalayas. He also worked as a tour guide across Europe, following his UK study, sharing his extensive knowledge of culture and history.

Richard held several positions at St Mark's College through his life, including serving as acting master in 1998 and helping develop the library collection.

Long-serving St Mark's librarian Pirjo Oakden said the school owed Richard much for his commitment to the library and "his unwavering support and enjoyable company".

His children remember Richard as a great bloke who always had a twinkle in his eye – a kind, tolerant man of the highest integrity.

They said he was an unassuming man, despite all his great achievements, and was compassionate and considerate of others.

Richard is survived by Mary, Mark and Guy and five grandchildren.

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