

RICHARD CHARLES NAIRN  
MD, PhD(L'pool), FRCPath, FRCPA, FRACP

Richard Nairn, Emeritus Professor of Pathology and Immunology of Monash University, Victoria, Australia, was born on 18 November 1919. He died on 1 August 1995 in England.

The achievements on which Richey Nairn's reputation rests were gained mostly in Australia and are less well known in this country than there and in America where his contributions to the study of the immunology of bowel cancer led to an honorary consultancy and later a visiting Professorship in Residence in the M D Anderson Hospital and the System Cancer Center at the University of Texas. Scientific recognition had already come in this country with his election to Fellowship of this Society and, later, was marked by visits to the Chester Beatty Cancer Research Institute as a Royal Society and Nuffield bursar. In addition, he gave nominated and foundation lectures in Houston and Toronto.

His work in Monash was so obviously an expansion of that done in Aberdeen, that it is appropriate to indicate how the professional interests of Richey Nairn, a man with ancestral roots in Scotland, matured here.

The first formative influence originated in Liverpool. He graduated there, MB ChB, with honours in 1942 and, after war-service afloat as Lieutenant-Surgeon, RNVR, he studied clinical medicine and pathology in hospital appointments, being awarded the doctorate MD in 1947 for that combined work. Acute awareness of the great lack of specific treatment for many conditions at that time decided his choice in favour of pathology and he became lecturer in the Department of Pathology in Liverpool University out of which he came with a doctorate (PhD 1952), granted for studies of oedema, and also with a firm belief that knowledge of pathological processes was the over-riding factor in devising help for patient and clinician.

From Liverpool, he went to Aberdeen University as Senior Lecturer in the Department of Pathology where he promptly revealed himself as an enthusiastic, entirely logical and relentless worker, a sore trial to less committed colleagues, but a source of much help and inspiration to others. In 1954 a sudden conversion to the use of fluorescent antibody tracing was the second important influence in forging his main interests. His organising ability became evident when he rapidly formed an inter-departmental group with members of the Biochemistry and Bacteriology Departments in order to tackle the problems of producing conjugated antibodies, as was necessary then; and Mr Colin Chadwick's discovery, with Professor Nairn, of lissamine rhodamine as an alternative orange tracer to green fluorescein did much to promote the reputation of the group's work at home and overseas. One consequence of this development was a widening of Nairn's appreciation of immune reactions as a factor in pathological change, as distinct from resistance to infection, and it was directly responsible for his long interest in the immunology of cancer. He was the first to observe that bowel tumour cells failed to bind antibody that was specific for epithelium of normal bowel and he was quick to infer that malignant tissue might have antigens specific to itself against which antibody might react to the benefit of the patient. A subsequent thought was that, if complement with antibody failed to destroy tumour cells, toxin-linked antibody might do so. This was not feasible work before monoclonal antibodies became available.

Over many years in Australia, Nairn did show that the outlook for patients who reacted immunologically against bowel cancer was more favourable than for those who did not. Becoming very attached to electronic wizardry as a means of increasing microscopic and human skills, he also initiated the use of fluorescein-labelled cells in order to accelerate the immunological diagnosis of cancer.

As might have been predicted from his organising powers which had become evident in Aberdeen, he built up in Monash University a large and successful teaching and research department containing sixteen members with medical or science qualifications, serving degrees in Medicine and Science and enrolling over thirty post-graduate or undergraduate honours students annually. As consultant pathologist and immunologist to various hospitals linked to Monash University, he created at the Alfred Hospital a first-class, and the first, diagnostic immunology laboratory in Australia, catering eventually for over 12,000 requests yearly. It is a legacy that Monash ought to foster. His numerous public offices and editorial posts in Australia need not be listed here.

Apart from regular contributions (upwards of 150) to medical and scientific journals, Richey Nairn was author, with colleagues, and editor of *Fluorescent Protein Tracing*, much sought after for 20 years by those who wished to know 'how to do it and what to do with it'; it ran to a 4th edition. He also edited *Practical Methods in Clinical Immunology* and brought the 9th volume to completion.

On retiring to this country, Nairn reactivated his keen interest in the British Society for Immunology of which he had been a founding member and undertook the task of archivist to that Society and, on the very eve of his sudden and fatal illness, he completed his Biographical Memoirs, *Shoulders We Stand On* for that Society. He also became a member of the Jenner Educational Trust.

Richey valued friendships and these were not confined to medical colleagues. His and his wife's hospitality to friends was regularly offered as a means of keeping in touch whilst on their annual visits to England. His hobby, chess of a high standard, was widely known to fellow medical men, but theatre, ballet and music were strong interests which he shared with friends. He enjoyed conversation rather as he enjoyed chess, often regarding a heard remark as a 'move' demanding an immediate 'counter', much to the entertainment (or annoyance!) of cantankerous Scottish friends. It was unfortunate for us that he had to go so far away to find an outlet for his talent and energy.

Professor Nairn is survived in Australia by two daughters from a former marriage and, in England by his wife, June.

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