

EULOGY OF WILLIAM DELACOURT BAGNALL BY PROFESSOR
MACINTOSH (footnote by B. Lockett) *

MEMORIAM of William Delacourt Bagnall

24 July 1895 – 9 August 1973

Bill was born in Manly and his first school was at Brookvale. Bill his cousin and lads of "the village" (Manly), including such names as Padson, Ferguson, Bass, Wakeley and Barre pioneered surfing at Freshwater and the Oaks, later to be known as Dee Why. They, with others, were among the founding members of Freshwater and Dee Why. Subsequently Bill's schools were at Leichardt and Annandale. Leaving school at 15 he worked for 2 years with Thomas A Edison and then applied for a job in the Department of Anatomy, University of Sydney. He was interviewed by Acting Professor S. A. Smith (brother of Sir Grafton Elliot Smith), and Mr. Louis Sheaffer (still remembered as the great technical all-rounder of the School of Anatomy). Bill was referred to as "the boy in the department". His duties included running messages, attendance on the lectures, keeping rolls, lighting wood, coal and coke fires at 7.30 am in two large dissecting rooms, two lecture theatres, the museum and the Professor's room at the end of each day the fires had to be banked, the rooms cleaned and any tasks for the next day prepared. Often this meant working until 7pm or even 8pm, but there was compensation of nine pence tea money for each night worked. He was officially appointed attendant on 5.5.1913.

Professor J. T. Wilson FRS returned from sabbatical leave at the beginning of 1914. Bill relished recounting stories of the daily 10 am inspection of the school by the Dean, Professor Sir Thomas Anderson Stuart in company with Professor Wilson; notable among these anecdotes being the occasion when he received a half hour reprimand over the detection of one match on the

dissecting room floor.

Bill's worth began to be recognised, because he was given the additional task (in his spare time) of learning histological and embryological techniques in Professor Wilson's laboratory, and of supervising the student's preparation and interpretation of such materials. No one at that time foresaw that this was the beginning of a role that was to make him an even more complete "all-rounder" than the remarkable Louis Schaeffer.

Bill had joined the St. George's Rifles before 1912 and the introduction of compulsory military training, so inevitably he enlisted when war broke out in August 1914, giving his age as 21. His parents however had him withdrawn because he was under age. He tried twice again after that, but the University withdrew him under reserved occupation. Finally gaining his parent's consent without notifying anyone in the University until two days before due in camp. He received a dressing down first from Schaeffer then from Professor Wilson, was threatened with the sack and no job when and if he returned. Professor Wilson cooled down however, and the following day called him into his office, apologised, said he wished he could go too, and " what's more, your job will be ready on return and the University will make up the difference between military pay of 6/- a day and University pay".

Bill had tried to enlist in the A.A.M.C. Failing that he had entered as a private in Infantry and then transferred to the Light Horse, but it looked like being stuck at Holsworthy, so he succeeded in transferring to A.A.M.C. and sailed in December 1915 for Suez.

Merit sometimes lurks in situations, which appear frustrating to the individual at the time. During the 16 months delay in Bill's attempt to go to the war, he was sent to the Australian Museum

to learn plaster casting, this also in his spare time! Professor Wilson and Professor Sir Edgeworth David exhibited and demonstrated the Talgai skull to the visiting British Association for the Advancement of Science in Sydney, 1914. Excitement and acclaim by the many European authorities, including Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, was more than considerable. What would normally have become a continuing program of analysis of the skull by them did not occur, because Professor David went overseas with the Australian Army and Professor Wilson, who had been Colonel of the Australian Scottish Regiment, was appointed Censor-in-Chief. Charge of the Anatomy Department and the deciphering of the Talgai skull were delegated to Dr. S. A. Smith as acting Professor. Details of what happened to the skull in the late 1914 and in 1915 were not recorded in any overt form, and indeed until 1965 no relevant archives could be found. The full story of unraveling the details of work done on the skull in 1914-15 I have published elsewhere. Sufficient here to say that Bill Bagnall was the only eye witness who was able to give me the key to make such enquiries. Briefly Bill was able to testify that Louis Schaeffer did practically all the chipping removal of the encrustation of the skull and its sectioning. Professor Smith at intervals inspected progress. Curator staff from the Australian Museum started making casts of the skull, Schaeffer never having done any casting work. The casting was completed at the Australian Museum. Bill Bagnall, because he was learning the technique of casting, assisted sufficiently to know that thin carpenter's glue and tube sicative were used in the first attempted casting. Subsequently scores of casts were made at the Australian Museum, using the same materials, and sent to museums all over the world. (These materials, soaking into the skull, gave misleading figures for its nitrogen content when we attempted analysis 50 years later). Bill Bagnall was also able to tell me that Raymond A. Dart was a participant in some of these operations. In November 1973

Emeritus Professor Dart of the Department of Anatomy in the university of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg, and enunciator of the famous Taungs skull, was guest orator at the Sir Grafton Elliott Smith Centenary Memorial Ceremony in the University of Sydney. He was able to confirm and to add to what Bill Bagnall had told me. Without Bill's information, later investigation of the skull would have remained enigmatic, so much for Bill's 16 months frustration in getting off to war and the knowledge he was able to transmit as a result.

Aboard the troop ship, Bill who had exhibited above average ability in most sports, trained with lightweight Jeffries, his cousin Harold Pattison and the professional Kinnamont and was runner up in the ship's lightweight boxing tournament. Based at Abbassia Barracks with the 1st A.G.H. in Cairo, Bill took out a welterweight boxing contest for the local forces. In October 1916 his unit was located at Salisbury Plains, England, which I mention only because of coincidence. For a brief period the morning parades were taken by a British Army C.O. named Claude Witherington Stump. In 1926 Professor C.W. Stump, Dean of Medicine in Bangkok, was to become Bill's immediate chief as Professor of Embryology-Histology at the University of Sydney.

Bill married an English girl, returned to Sydney in 1919 and resumed work at the University on 10th November. His subsequent promotions are recorded as Laboratory Attendant 1.1.1923, Chief Laboratory Assistant 31.8.1942, Chief Technician Grade I 25.11.1957, Chief Laboratory Technician Grade II 3.11.1958. He retired 31.12.1960 and I was able to persuade the University to re-employ him part-time at similar status from 1.3.1961 to 20.8.1962, when a heart attack decided him to give up work and enjoy an easier life. That consisted of selling his holiday house on Scotland Island and buying a block of land in Glossop

Road, Linden, where he built a house practically single-handed. (Note: this is untrue he did not sell Scotland island and he bought a house) He had been a member of Victoria Park Bowling Club and so of course joined the Bowling Green and R.S.L. Clubs on the mountains where he took out as many trophies as he had at Victoria Park. In February 1968 following several (fortunately minor) heart attacks and increasing frequent treatments for skin sun-cancers, he sold the mountains home and took a unit at Manly and so returned to "The Village" of his father and grandfather. Shortly before his death his children and grandchildren persuaded him, in spite of his independence, to move with his wife Emmie to Cronulla to be close by their own homes and so their daily companionship.

In the 1920's the subject of histology was transferred from physiology to anatomy. Bill was put in charge, given an assistant and told to fit out the laboratory at the top of the spiral staircase, to which all equipment had to be hand-hoisted by rope and pulley. That laboratory served the students of Medicine II, Science II, Veterinary Science, Massage I. Bill cut the microtome sections and prepared individual slide sets for every student repeatedly over successive years. He also demonstrated to them, and delivered a series of lectures on tooth structure to dental students. He began then to contribute technical articles to the Journal. This enormous amount of work consumed his holidays and most nights with no additional monetary compensation no promotion. With Professor Stump's arrival the laboratories were moved down stairs and Bill had the task of setting these up all over again. Yet it was not until August 1942 when the position of Chief Laboratory Assistant to the Department of Anatomy fell vacant that he was given that position and so promotion at last. He then found that with the numerically very small and relatively untrained technical staff available to him, he had to become not

merely an equal but more a versatile supervisor, trainer and operator than Louis Schaeffer had been, as well as being responsible for the entire department budgets and paper work. Returning to the task of cadaver preservation and administration, intractable because of the antiquated mortuary conditions and systems then operating, he had to handle all photographic needs meticulously performed by Schaeffer earlier. Mr W. Jamieson, formerly first assistant to Schaeffer and subsequently his successor for a brief period, handled the x-ray requirements with great skill, but frankly at personal risk with the equipment available. This task also, and with the same equipment, became Bagnall's responsibility. His stamina and endurance are indicated by his total sick leave: 17 days in 1930, 18 in 1934, 20 in 1950, 21 in 1959, all due to surgical repair to traumatised muscles and testimony to the gladiator quality which always gets up and comes back for more. (The efforts of Bill and his colleagues to develop technical standards and roles can be gleaned from a paper " Historical Survey of the Society, 1914-1939" by J. English and W. Bagnall, published in the Jubilee Issue of the Laboratory Journal of Australasia, Vol 2 m No. 1, June 1939).

I think I have shown that the work load carried by Bill was infinitely greater than technical loads carried today; and possibly not many technical personnel throughout the University realise how much their present status and conditions and remuneration are owed to Bill Bagnall's efforts. Consider the following abbreviated list of his activities:-

- Foundation and Life Member of the Australian Institute of Medical Technology, holder of its Diploma, its sometime Librarian and its President 1940-43.
- Foundation and Life Member of the University Welfare Association.
- Inauguration and delivery of the first series of lectures in Laboratory Technique and Histology to

the Australasian Institute of Laboratory Medical Technologists.

- Senate appointee to A.R.P. Committee as a Senior Warden to train and organise sector posts during World War II. - President of the Society of Laboratory Technicians of Australia at that same time (as well as member of it's State Council and Editorial Committee President), and in that role collaborated with Lady Halse Rogers, Lady Dew, Sydney Lord Mayors and University Patriotic Funds working for comforts for troops (and of course it fell to Bill to arrange the packing and despatch of those parcels). - Foundation Member and past President of the University Branch of the Hospital and Laboratory Employees Association and Conciliation representatives.

It was in this last mentioned capacity that Bill was able to do much for technical recognition. His integrity, easy friendly nature, objectivity and reasonableness (but capacity and willingness to fight if necessary) made him an ideal negotiator. Added to which was his transparent sincerity, concern for the University and those in its employ, and unconcern for his own personal interests. Such men were the real servants or perhaps one could say the totally dedicated slaves to the University, and their exact like we will certainly not see again.

In 1955 when I was appointed to the Chair, Bill had an unspecialised staff of five. He was able to see this increased to a technical staff of 16 to 20, of whom 8 became highly specialised in separate divisions of technical skills. Each of these was trained in the department and all owed the implication of their ultimate abilities and promotions to the basic training from Bill, the all-rounder. Never did anyone hear the slightest expression of ruefulness from Bill about the comparison of the unrelenting load he had to carried and his tardy promotions compared with the new deal, which had eventuated by the time of his retirement. On

the contrary, this was what he had tried to effect and therein was his satisfaction as a 'mother hen' and a handler of men he was superb, and the clerical girls loved him and now mourn his passing.

Bill must have held a near record for the number of Professors, Acting Professors and Visiting Professors under whom he worked or assisted for brief or long periods and in one capacity or another, all regarding him with affection and esteem. That is no mean feat, taking cognizance of their varied personalities, including as they do Sir Thomas Anderson Stuart, J.T. Wilson, R.A. Dart, Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, S.A. Smith, F.A. Maguire, Sir Hugh Poate, Douglas Lee, J.M.M. Drew, John Irvine Hunter, Sir Harold Dew, A.N. Burkitt, C.W. Stump, A.A. Abbie, J.L. Shellshear and lastly Macintosh. He said to me once, "I have deemed it a great privilege to have known them all".

It is unchallenged that Bill was not only worthy but an even greater successor to those two great Technical Chiefs in the History of the Department of Anatomy, John Shewan and Louis Schaeffer. His own successor, Mr Barry Locket, acknowledges his debt to the personal supervision, guidance and training by Bill Bagnall; he kept in constant touch with Bill in his later years, was possibly the last non-family member to visit Bill in hospital just before his death and now reveres his memory. It was Barry who asked me to write this memorial note and I asked him to be co-author, but he said he wanted me to do it - perhaps he may add a footnote.

I have referred to the extraordinary devotion and service of Bill Bagnall to the Department of Anatomy and to the University of Sydney. I need add references to his service, help and advice to me, personally as well as academically, and a warmer friend I have never had. Young in mind and body despite his age, he was

staunch and imperturbable through all vicissitudes, and I can never hope to express adequately my debt to Bill. Perhaps it is near record and most certainly no one with that or shorter length of service has been so universally loved in the University of Sydney.

A devoted husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather, he sustained with fortitude the tragic death of his son Peter and daughter-in-law Rosemary whom he adored. Our sympathy goes out to his widow Emmie, his son's Keith and John and their families whose grief at his loss is intense, as is that of his brothers and sister, his former colleagues, and mine. I feel honoured and privileged in being asked by now Senior Technical Staff, formerly his colleagues, disciples and friends to attempt these quite inadequate words of eulogy, admiration, friendship and gratitude for William Delacourt Bagnall.

Signed N.W.G. Macintosh (N.W.G. Macintosh) Professor Emeritus Anatomy

Footnote re: W.D. Bagnall There is much more that could be said of W. D. (Bill) Bagnall, 'The Master Technologist', especially concerning his devotion to staff and profession: However, it was his friendly nature and generous attitude to life and people that always impressed me. He was a basic man, always concerned with his family and enjoyed the freedom of the 'outside' activities, such as building two houses at various times in anticipation of his eventual retirement, which was no small feat in terms of dexterity as well as cost. During the greater part of his working life his family and himself occupied a University residence so that he was constantly on 'on call duty' for the guidance and arrangements necessary to the Cadaver Donation Service operated by the Department of Anatomy. In addition he still found me and was as judged a fine athlete and sportsman.

As a Junior growing up in the department I can say with gratitude that Bill became far more to me than the "Chief". He initiated my interests especially histology as well as encouraged my progress throughout the various sections of the department and subsequent in-training periods. As a Senior member of the staff he became a loyal friend and mentor and never refused to help and advise when sought, and in retrospect there were many occasions when I needed him.

In conclusion, and on behalf of both past and present members of the staff of the Department of Anatomy and the many friends Bill knew and loved throughout the University, may I thank Emeritus Professor N.W.G. McIntosh for his most sincere and spontaneous eulogy of our esteemed colleague. Signed Barry Lockett (B.C. Lockett)