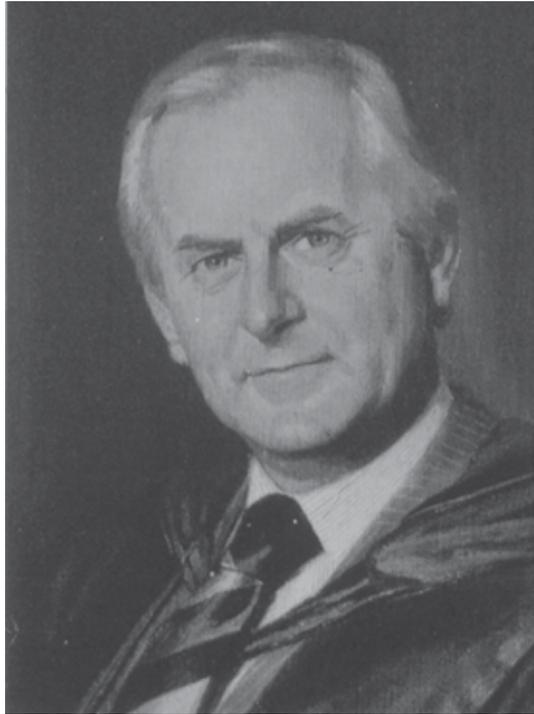


# BERNARD McCARTHY O'BRIEN (1924-1993)



Bernard O'Brien was born in Melbourne, Australia on Christmas day, 1924, the second of five boys.

Bernard was educated at Xavier College, Kew, where he was football captain and a member of the athletics team as well as taking part in many other school activities.

At Melbourne University Bernard continued his multifaceted career combining a science degree with the medical qualifications and graduated Bachelor of Science, 1948, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, 1950. He was captain of the university athletic team and champion in pole vault and javelin.

Post-graduate education commenced at St Vincent's Hospital where he remained in various positions for the rest of his working life, apart from those periods spent overseas in surgical training. Having taken the Master of Surgery degree from the University of Melbourne in 1955 he proceeded to England as the Nuffield Dominion Clinical Assistant

in Plastic Surgery at the University of Oxford and took the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in that same year. A particular interest in Hand Surgery became apparent and was reinforced following a period spent with John Barron at Salisbury. In 1959 a position as Chief Resident at the Roosevelt Hospital, New York with Dr Littler confirmed this devotion to Hand Surgery which stayed with Bernard all his life.

Upon returning to Melbourne in 1960, Bernard commenced general plastic surgery practice in private practice and with an appointment to St. Vincent's Hospital. He immediately commenced research at first into tendon healing and then into the development of microsurgical techniques. The research endeavours by him at that time were quite unusual in Australia, where research had been mainly within academic institutions. To enable the laboratory work to continue it was necessary to develop the Microsurgery Foundation and it was with this endeavour that Bernard displayed his organizational and administrative genius. The Microsurgery Foundation has drawn together a group of hard-working and philanthropic community leaders who have been able to provide funding for the building of the superb microsurgery laboratories and to help with the on-going budget.

More than 120 research fellows from 30 different nations have worked in the Microsurgery Centre. Many of these surgeons have returned to their home countries to become instrumental in the development of reconstructive microsurgery.

Bernard was a founding member of the Australian Hand Surgery Society in 1972, and became an overseas member of the British Society for surgery of the Hand in 1973. In 1976 he was made a corresponding member of the American Society for Surgery for the Hand and in that same year Chairman of the Committee on Microsurgery of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand. In 1979 he was president of the Australian Hand Surgery Society and through his endeavours Melbourne was selected for the International Congress of Hand Surgery. In 1981 he was Chairman of the Sixth Symposium of the International Society of Reconstructive Microsurgery which was also held in Melbourne.

Bernard O'Brien was honoured by many of the senior Surgical Societies in the world and spent a great deal of time as visiting Professor or guest lecturer, displaying the results of the emerging speciality of microsurgery. No country was too remote for Bernard to visit and no surgical society or hospital too small to be recognised by him or to interest him. He was completely devoted to the development of reconstructive surgery with particular emphasis on the place of microsurgery.

His contributions to the community were recognized in 1982 when he was made companion of the most distinguished Order of St Michael and George and in 1991 companion of the Order of Australia which is the highest award given by the State to an Australian citizen. Of the many honours bestowed upon him Bernard was particularly pleased to be named Victorian of the year in 1992 and to be given the Advance Australia award for outstanding achievement in the field of medicine in 1993. The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons bestowed the Sir Hugh Devine Medal in 1993; this is the highest award that the College bestows during a Fellow's lifetime. Bernard had served 12 years on the College Council.

He was also president of the Federation of Surgical Colleges, the Pan-Pacific Surgical Association, the International Society of Reconstructive Microsurgery as well as the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH).

Bernard O'Brien deserves without any doubt the title bestowed on him: "Pioneer of Hand Surgery" which was awarded during the 6th International Congress of the IFSSH in 1995 in Helsinki, Finland.

(Adapted from the Obituary by Allan MacLeod which appeared in the JHS Vol 19B No 3 p403)