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ROBERT GWYN MACFARLANE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE
ORGANIZATION OF BIORHEOLOGY - AND OTHER REMINISCENCES

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Last summer I learned the sad news about the death, at the age of 79, of my good friend Robert Gwyn Macfarlane, F.R.S., Emeritus Professor of Clinical Pathology in the University of Oxford. For several decades he was a leading research scientist on blood clotting until his retirement at the age of sixty.

It is probably not known that R.G. Macfarlane played an active role in furthering the new science of biorheology and hemorheology, its most active field. Gwyn was well aware of the significance of hemorheology in blood clotting, thrombosis and hemostasis.

Gwyn Macfarlane and several colleagues from Oxford attended the conference on 'Flow of Blood in Relation to the Vessel Wall', held in 1958 at Charing Cross Hospital Medical School, University of London (1). During the meeting F.J.W. Roughton, F.R.S., Professor of Colloid Science of Cambridge University, told me that the Faraday Society, which he represented, would be interested in sponsoring a conference on biorheology. Soon after I introduced F.J.W. Roughton, a direct descendant of William Harvey, to Gwyn Macfarlane. When I mentioned his interest and that of the Faraday Society in a conference on biorheology, Gwyn suggested without reservation that it should take place in Oxford during the following year. The three of us, together with George W. Scott Blair and four others, formed an Organizing Committee (2) which met in London and Oxford. Gwyn made the local arrangements in Oxford for this conference and also acted as its Honorary Treasurer. The conference was jointly convened by the Faraday Society and the British Society of Rheology. It was held at the University Laboratory of Physiology at Oxford on 23 and 24 September 1959. The choice of Oxford was a happy one, especially because Gwyn's local arrangements added much to the success of the conference.

There was a rather large audience in spite of a strike in the printing industry of the United Kingdom, which made the printing of announcements for the conference extremely difficult. Forty communications in hemorheology and other fields of biorheology were presented. Macfarlane et al. demonstrated a new apparatus for the measurement of the tensile strength of blood clots (3).

The conference became a milestone in the organization of biorheology as a new science (4), which serves as a link between most, if not all, life sciences (5). The Proceedings of this conference including its discussions, in which Gwyn Macfarlane participated, were published the following year (2).

It should be noted that R.G. Macfarlane's interest in the science of biorheology continued as a member of the Honorary Editorial Advisory Board of BIORHEOLOGY from its first publication in 1962 until 1972, five years following his retirement from The Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford.

Gwyn Macfarlane was a romantic person who loved nature, the land and the sea. His hobby was sailing. During several summers prior to his retirement he sailed with his wife Hilary along the Western coast of Scotland to find what he cherished as 'the most beautiful place on earth', where they had spent their honeymoon. After considerable search they found it, where they built a house for their retirement.

Although I did not meet Gwyn for nearly twenty years, I have vivid reminiscences about this extraordinary man. During my stay in Paris from 1952 to 1957, it was Gwyn who urged me to come to England. He initiated for me, aided by George W. Scott Blair, a position as Head of the Medical Research Laboratories at Charing Cross Hospital and as Director of Research on Vascular Diseases. Often I visited with him in his laboratory at The Radcliffe Infirmary as well as on his farm in Witney, near Oxford.

My first visit to his farm was on a late afternoon in the Spring of 1955, after spending several hours in his laboratory.

Upon arrival he immediately took me to a stable, where he introduced me to Hilary, a physician, when she was milking a cow. After he showed me the farm we went to his house, where I met Hilary, their daughter and four sons and Hilary's mother, a lively and witty lady who was an excellent cook.

The many stimulating discussions we had in Oxford and Witney were not limited to blood clotting, hemophilia, thrombosis and other hemorheological phenomena or conditions. They included conversations pertaining to different fields of science, the fine arts, music, literature and philosophy.

During the past few years Gwyn Macfarlane became known for his biographies of Howard Florey (6) and Alexander Fleming (7), the two heroes of the Penicillin Saga. As a biographer Gwyn became an artist and his attainments equaled those as a scientist.

Gwyn Macfarlane had a kind disposition. His unpretentious manner, openness, sharp intellect and wit, combined with deep understanding of human nature and his humor endeared him to all who knew him well.

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