

Australia

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CHAPTER



Founded 1972

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Australian hand surgery does not begin with Andrew "Ben" Murray but his story is illustrative.

Born in Tasmania, educated in Medicine in Melbourne, he lost his leg to a shooting accident and ulnar nerve function to another mishap. Like many Australians, a part of his formative surgery training was gained overseas. When rejected for military service because of his physical disabilities, he was instrumental in setting up a hand clinic at the Leith Hospital in Edinburgh in 1942. In 1946 he published perhaps the first article describing pollicization of the index finger by transfer on its neurovascular pedicle, before Gosset in 1949. He inserted artificial hinge joints and described interosseous wiring as a reliable method of internal fixation many years before the publication of articles which received recognition for the introduction of these techniques.

Ben Murray returned to Australia in 1948. In

Brisbane in 1955, a flourishing career was cut short when he and a senior colleague were shot dead by a disgruntled patient, dissatisfied at his failure to obtain a medical certificate for a back injury.

Murray's hand surgery experience developed parallel with and perhaps because of the necessity for hand surgery services created by limb injuries sustained in the Second World War. Prior to this, the focus of hand surgery was on the management of hand infections. In the United States, Sterling Bunnell developed concepts for reconstruction of the injured hand. In Australia, Sir Benjamin Rank, though mostly involved in secondary reparative surgery during and immediately after the war years, established the place of primary repair for hand injuries which became rife with the mushrooming of light industry. Rank and Alan Wakefield published the "Surgery of Repair as Applied to Hand Injuries" in 1953, being joined for the last two of five editions by John Hueston. These Melbourne plastic surgeons developed a rich breeding ground for hand surgery training and development in Australia.

In the more northern states of New South Wales and Queensland, orthopaedic surgeons played a major role in Australian hand surgery history. In Sydney, interested surgeons had formed an association to discuss hand surgery clinical cases, with regular meetings from 1961. Crawford McKellar was an enthusiastic and active person whose endeavours led to the formation of the New South Wales Hand Surgery Association in 1963. This group included interstate members, such as John Hueston from Melbourne and Peter Millroy from Brisbane.

In 1970, and again in 1971, John Hueston invited members of the NSW Hand Surgery Association to Melbourne, for informal discussion of hand surgery cases and demonstrations of his surgical expertise. At this time the concept of a nationwide hand surgery society was discussed

and the members of the NSW Hand Surgery Association prepared a draft constitution and a mechanism for setting up an inaugural meeting. In March 1972 Sir Benjamin Rank came to Sydney and was met by the office bearers of the NSW Hand Surgery Association. This was at a time of much political debate and activity in the medical world concerning the differential recognition of specialists, which continues to this day. After discussion, the Australian Hand Club was established. The foundation meeting was held on 1 July 1972 in the hall of the British Medical Association building in Macquarie Street, Sydney, with 47 surgeons from around the country in attendance. The elected Office Bearers were:

President - Sir Benjamin Rank,

President Elect - Alan McJannet

Secretary - Frank Harvey

Treasurer - Richard Honner

Committee Members - Peter Millroy, Don Robinson, Bernard O'Brien

The Australian Hand Club held a Scientific Meeting each year, rotating through each State, and eventually decided to change its name to the Australian Hand Surgery Society in 1990. (Fig. 1) This society is now the platform for the continued development of hand surgery in Aus-

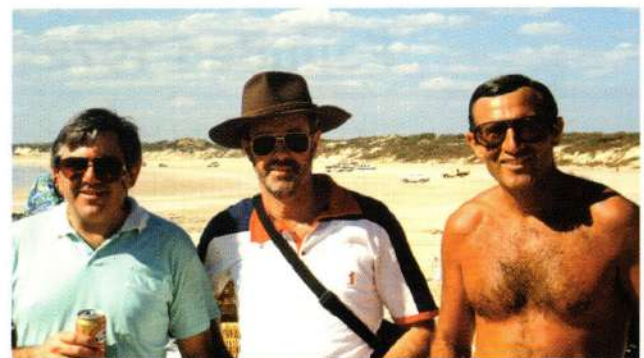


FIG. 1 Guest Professor Guy Foucher with previous AHSS Presidents, Peter Hales and David Vickers, in typical Australian style at the 1990 AHSS Annual Scientific Meeting.

tralia, advocating training programmes and certification which incorporate those aspects of hand surgery previously within the domains of plastic surgery and orthopaedic surgery.

The current membership of the Australian Hand Surgery Society numbers 163, including 19 overseas New Zealand members. An additional 33 surgeons, national and international, have been invited to honorary membership. An Annual Scientific Meeting with overseas Guest Professors is conducted each year. This meeting is often associated with a separate two day program in hand surgery for Registrars on surgical training schemes in Australia and New Zealand. The AHSS also convenes hand surgery programmes for the Annual Scientific Meetings of the Australian Orthopaedic Association and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

The visit of Dieter Buck-Gramcko from Germany in 1983 as Guest Professor at our Annual Scientific Meeting, will be remembered for a frightening excursion to a coral reef, on which members of the Australian Hand Club were stranded during a fierce storm and a rising tide (*Fig. 2*). Access to the reef and the prevention of a developing disaster was not possible from the boat chartered for the

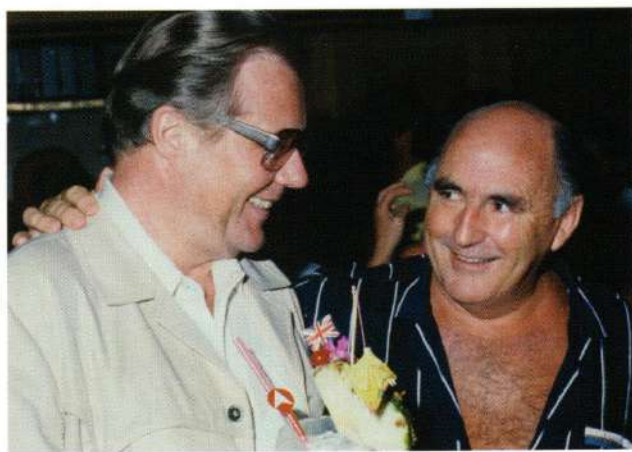


FIG. 2 Guest Professor Dieter Buck-Gramcko and John Hueston at the 1983 AHSS Annual Scientific Meeting, prior to the reef incident.

excursion, but horrific consequences were averted by the timely arrival of a small rescue boat sent to the reef by a large tourist vessel nearby. Members of the Australian Hand Surgery Society continue to take delight in scaring future international guest professors with this story of the possible consequences of acceptance of an invitation.

Australian hand surgeons have benefited from the training available in overseas centres, such as Canniesburn in Glasgow, the Pulvertaft Hand Centre in Derby, Louisville Hand Surgery and Duke University in the United States. We are also indebted to teachers such as Guy Pulvertaft, Ian McGregor, Harold Kleinert, Graham Lister and James Urbaniak, amongst many others. In turn, Australian centres provide sophisticated hand surgery training for Australian and overseas trainees, led in Melbourne by Bernard O'Brien and subsequently Wayne Morrison. They, along with their Sydney counterparts have embraced the concept of hand surgery units which combine the expertise of orthopaedic and plastic surgeons.

The Australian Hand Surgery Society joined the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH) in 1977. In 1979, the Australian Hand Club hosted an international hand surgery congress held in Melbourne under the chairmanship of Bernard O'Brien, with smaller satellite meetings in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. Over 300 surgeons from around the world attended. This was followed by the very successful Sydney 2007 IFSSH Congress hosted by the Australian Hand Surgery Society, with an attendance of 1200 surgeons and trainees. Bernard O'Brien was honoured with the IFSSH Presidency (1979 to 1983) (*Fig. 3*). Michael Tonkin is the current Secretary-General of the IFSSH.

The Australian Hand Surgery Society was a founding member of the Asia-Pacific Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (APFSSH), hosting the inaugural APFSSH Congress in Perth

in 1997. Wayne Morrison, Michael Tonkin and Bruce Conolly have been appointed to Presidency of the APFSSH.

A number of Australian hand surgeons have been recognised as IFSSH Pioneers in Hand Surgery – Sir Benjamin Rank, Sir Sidney Sunderland, Bernard O'Brien, John Hueston and Bruce Conolly. These, and others, including Wayne Morrison, David Vickers, Timothy Herbert and Michael Sandow, to name a few of many, have contributed to Australia's status in the international world of hand surgery. It has been a profitable journey, from the outstanding anatomical descriptions of the hand by C. Gordon Shaw and F. Wood Jones in the 1920s to the current time.



FIG. 3 Bernard O'Brien, AHSS President 1978-80, IFSSH President 1979-83.



FIG. 4 The koala is a native marsupial of Australia. It is of interest to hand surgeons as it has two opposable thumbs for better gripping.