



Dr John Blair OBE, TD, KStJ, BA, ChM, Hon D Litt(St Andrews), FRCS(Ed)

31 December 1928 – 12 June 2023



Life President, Friends of Millbank
We shall remember him

Dr John Blair, who died peacefully on 12th June at Perth Royal Infirmary, aged 94, was born in Wormit, Fife, on Hogmanay, 1928. His father was Clerk to the Income Tax Commissioners and his mother was Irish/Argentinian, which led to a lifelong interest in his family in that part of the world.

He was the Dux of the High School of Dundee in 1946, but due to shortages of gold at the time, he wasn't actually given the medal until the first decade of the twenty-first century! At that School prize-giving ceremony, the Rector said it was the first, and almost certainly the only, time that the Dux had been presented with his medal accompanied by his wife and one of his children.

He studied medicine at St Andrews, where he was a Harkness Scholar, graduating in 1951. A career in surgery followed, initially in England but latterly in Dundee and, principally, at Perth Royal Infirmary between 1965 and his retirement in 1991. He also served in various honorary academic posts at the Universities of Dundee and St. Andrews. He was also made an Honorary Member of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, a relatively unusual award for a surgeon, and was made a Fellow of the BMA in 1991.

As a surgeon, he was not infrequently accosted by former patients while walking down the High Street in Perth. Invariably, they would approach him to say, "Mr Blair, you saved my life when you ..." Unfortunately, as his work usually involved looking at every part of their body other than their face, he often struggled to put a name to them.

In addition to his MB ChB degree and ChM, John was also awarded an external degree in History from the University of London in 1955. In 1991 he was awarded an honorary DLitt from St Andrews University.





A keen golfer, John was a member of the R&A and Blairgowrie Golf Club for many decades. He was likewise one of the oldest members of the Royal Perth Golfing Society, where he was captain in 1999-2000 and became an Honorary Life Member in 2013. During his time as captain, he was involved in the club's sale of some of its old, hickory-shafted clubs, one of which, a putter, fetched a then record price of £106,000.

He had a keen interest in all sports, including rugby and football and for several years was a season ticket holder at McDiarmid Park. He used to say that this gave him extra credibility with the porters at PRI, because he was able to join in their conversations about how St Johnstone had been doing the previous Saturday...

Parallel to his career in medicine, and after his national service in the Royal Army Medical Corps, John spent many years in the Territorial Army, commanding St Andrews (subsequently Tayforth) Officer Training Corps and then 225 Field Ambulance in Dundee. In 1971 he was awarded an OBE for his services to the TA.

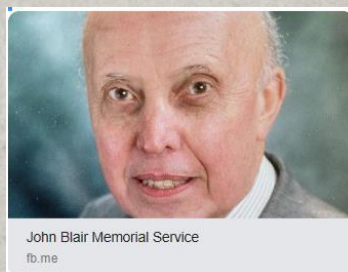
John worshipped in Aberdalgie Parish Church for many years and was an Elder of the Church of Scotland. A few years ago he received a certificate in recognition of over 60 years' service in the eldership of the Kirk.

He lived on the Glasgow Road from 1965 until the time of his death.

Latterly, after retiring from active work he developed his interests in history and medicine, becoming the World Vice-President of the International Society for the History of Medicine as well as being the Hospitaller of the Scottish Priory of the Order of St John. Dr Blair was a prolific writer of books and academic papers, including the Centenary History of the RAMC and the History of the Medical Faculty at St Andrews University. He also wrote a short book called "The Conscript Doctors," based on memories of contributors to the RAMC book, as well as "Ten Tayside Doctors," his personal take on the life and work of some of his colleagues over the years whose careers were particularly varied and interesting.

John Blair married Ailsa Bowes in 1953: she predeceased him in 2013. They had three children, Michael, Alastair and Anne, six grandchildren, Peter, Andrew, Douglas, Stuart, Georgia and Patrick, and four great-grandchildren, Alexandra, Katie, Sam and Ailsa.

Link to Memorial Service (starting 1415hrs) for those unable to attend in person



After a private family funeral in the morning, there will be a memorial service for Dr John Blair at 1430hrs at [Aberdalgie Parish Church](#) (near Perth) on 7th July 2023. Family, friends and indeed former patients will all be made very welcome.





A short bibliography of Dr John Blair

Books

His magnum opus was 'In Arduis Fidelis - Centenary History of the Royal Army Medical Corps 1898 – 1998' (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1998; 2nd edition by iynx, 2001). This was commissioned by the Director General, Sir James Baird, in 1990, and took over five years to write. John Blair stayed at Millbank many times during his research for this book.

'The Conscript Doctors', from memories of contributors to the Corps book

'Ten Tayside Doctors', a personal take on the interesting lives of some of his colleagues

History of Medicine at Dundee University

History of Medicine at St Andrews University

History of 'The Royal Perth Golfing Society and County and City Club'.

He also wrote some small books about local hospitals (his home was in Perth)

His last book was the novel 'How they broke Baxter', written in 2014 after his wife died.

His many articles, several written as World Vice President, International Society for the History of Medicine, included:

1. MITCHINER LECTURE, 1994 - The National Service Era in the RAMC *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 1995; 141: 7-14.
2. (Famous Figures series) Two Victorian Ladies and Military Medicine *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2002; 148: 186-187.
3. (Famous Figures) Henri Dunant, Founder Of The International Red Cross *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2004; 150: 145-146
4. (Famous Figures) Walter Reed USMC *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2004; 150: 221-224
5. (Famous Figures) Captain Oswald Hope Robertson *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2004; 150: 291-292.
6. (Famous Figures) Jean Dominique, First Baron Larrey *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2005; 151: 207-208
7. (Famous Figures) Sir John Pringle *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2006; 152: 273-275
8. (Famous Figures) Dr John Snow *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2007; 153(2): 136-137
9. (Famous Figures) James Lind *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2007; 153(1): 69
10. (Famous Figures) Sir Frederick Treves *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2008; 154(1): 74-75
11. (Famous Figures) Sir Alfred Keogh – The Early Years *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2008; 154(4): 268-269
12. (Famous Figures) Sir Alfred Keogh – The Great War *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 2008; 154(4): 273-274



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Courtesy of Alastair Blair



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