



Randal Forbes Elliott

KBE GCStJ (12 Oct 1922 – 20 Jul 2010)

It could be said of Sir Randal Elliott that he was born into distinction: his father, James Sands Elliott (later Sir James) was the first house surgeon appointed to Wellington Hospital and, when he came to enter practice as a general-practitioner surgeon, he secured a plot of land adjacent to his own father's Presbyterian church in Kent Terrace, where he had his architect friend Gray Young design him a house with consulting rooms attached.



In this house, in which Randal grew up, prominent figures from James Elliott's wide circle contrasted with the residents of Te Aro flat for whose out-of-hours visits there was a speaking tube at the front door. It provided a stimulating environment. The house has also, in recent years, become the New Zealand headquarters of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. Unlike his two brothers, half a generation older, who attended Wellington College (their father's old school) Randal was educated at Wanganui Collegiate School, then at the Otago University Medical School, graduating at the end of 1946. In later life he would be one of the most prominent of Wanganui Old Boys.

He travelled to Britain after his house jobs in Wellington, and promptly acquired the Diploma in Ophthalmology; he held registrar posts at Moorfields, University College Hospital and the London and, when he returned to New Zealand in 1953, he brought with him the English FRCS in Ophthalmology, complementing this in the same year with the Australasian Fellowship.

During this period, too, he had married Pauline Young; they had six daughters and one son and, as the children grew up, Pauline was able to return to nursing duties as one of two unusually qualified staff nurses (Lady Beattie and Lady Elliott) who added a certain cachet to the orthopaedic ward of Wellington Hospital.

Randal was appointed to the visiting staff of Wellington Hospital in 1954; he would become head of his department and of the combined hospital staff, and a prominent figure in the establishment of the clinical school in Wellington. He was president of the New Zealand Ophthalmological Society in 1972, and served his term as an examiner in ophthalmology for the College.

He was made OBE in 1975 and knighted as KBE 2 years later. At this stage of his career he was widely touted in the media as a prospective governor-general.

He was a leading figure in the Order of St John, serving as Chancellor 1980–86 and emulating his father in reaching the highest rank as Bailiff Grand Cross in 1987. Two years later he was senior surgeon and warden of the Ophthalmic Hospital of the Order in Jerusalem, where he applied his administrative skills to a much-needed reform of the institution.

Like his father (who edited the *New Zealand Medical Journal* for many years) he was prominent in the affairs of the New Zealand Medical Association under its various titles, culminating in his appointment as chairman of Council 1971–73, when he saw off an attempt to set up a rival organisation, and President in 1977.

He became a member of the Wellington Club in 1955, was president 1986–90 and subsequently a trustee.

He was active in good works, leading surgical teams to the Pacific and South-East Asia in his role as an RNZAF medical officer, and reaching the rank of Group Captain.

His experience of eye injuries resulting from road accidents made him an effective lobbyist for the use of safety glass in windscreens, a pioneer in the use of seat belts and an authoritative figure in the field of road safety.

Tall and spare, he enjoyed the outdoors (he listed his recreations as yachting, ski-mountaineering, tramping, kayaking and fishing) and it was tragic that the onset of Parkinsonism deprived him of these pleasures, even as his increasing deafness limited his opportunities for the conversational exchanges in which he excelled. Pauline's death a year ago came as a severe blow to him.

Wyn Beasley (Surgeon/Writer, Wellington) wrote this obituary.