

# RES MEDICA

Journal of the Royal Medical Society



## The cigarette in the office

Dr D. K. Whyler, Olim Praeses

### Abstract

Patricia Strong, Auntie Pat or simply AP, was an institution within an institution. To many of us she was a surrogate mother, very protective towards her little brood of medical students but with qualities that ran much deeper than this. I believe she cared for her RMS students and had a soft spot for the underdog. She was, to a large extent, unshockable. Whatever scheme or plan we had, she had seen it all before.

Copyright Royal Medical Society. All rights reserved. The copyright is retained by the author and the Royal Medical Society, except where explicitly otherwise stated. Scans have been produced by the Digital Imaging Unit at Edinburgh University Library. Res Medica is supported by the University of Edinburgh's Journal Hosting Service url: <http://journals.ed.ac.uk>

ISSN: 2051-7580 (Online) ISSN: ISSN 0482-3206 (Print)

Res Medica is published by the Royal Medical Society, 5/5 Bristo Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9AL

Res Medica, 2001 : 9

doi: [10.2218/resmedica.v0i0.985](https://doi.org/10.2218/resmedica.v0i0.985)

## The Cigarette in the Office

Patricia Strong, Auntie Pat or simply AP, was an institution within an institution. To many of us she was a surrogate mother, very protective towards her little brood of medical students but with qualities that ran much deeper than this. I believe she cared for her RMS students and had a soft spot for the underdog. She was, to a large extent, unshockable. Whatever scheme or plan we had, she had seen it all before.

But she had been around students long enough to know that no matter what we did, or how badly we thought that we had fared in exams, we would all get through in the end. She was ever the optimist on our behalf.

The RMS office was her domain and in it you could always be sure of two things. The kettle was always primed. The cigarette was always lit and in AP's hand.

Countless medical students had carefully explained the pros and cons of smoking to AP, but in the end they were always helped to reach the same conclusion. If AP wanted to smoke, then AP was going to smoke. As a medical student in the RMS you soon learnt that that was the way it was, like it or lump it!

AP and cigarettes were inseparable, like Tom and Jerry, like fish and chips, like Obstetrics and Gynaecology - you can't have one without the other.

During the summer recess in 1982, it was decided to redecorate the Main Meeting Hall for the first time since the RMS had moved into the premises. AP was away in France; it seemed the ideal time. Not only was it to be re-decorated but a picture rail was to be put up to hold the oil paintings of past presidents and associates. The job of decorator fell mainly on the then Entertainment Convenor, later to become a junior president and later still to hold an honorary post in the RMS. He was one of the few RMS members who was not in the medical faculty but in the science faculty.

Perhaps he had more time during the summer vacation, perhaps he liked decorating, perhaps we persuaded him it was his job or perhaps he was just less apathetic than the rest of the students, who knows? But he spent the best part of the summer in overalls up a ladder in the RMS. It was wonderful to watch.

With a few days to go before AP's return, the job finished and the clearing up in progress, an idea began to germinate. No-one is now willing to remember just who had the idea, when or indeed why, but there it was.

In AP's office there was a single support column that ran from floor to ceiling (and vice versa). It was cylindrical and about 40cm in diameter. The temptation was strong. "Why not paint it to look like a cigarette?"

The paint was barely dry when AP returned. We hid in the small meeting room next to the office, holding our breath, pondering our fate. The light clicked on and then: silence - for about ten seconds. Then came howls of laughter and we knew we were safe.

We offered to paint over the cigarette so that it matched the rest of the decor, but AP insisted that it stayed.

David K Whyler

Olim Praeses