

## **Professor John McNeil's Address at the Naming Ceremony of the Hetzel and Opit Meeting Rooms**

"I would like to welcome you all to our ceremony this morning.

The purpose is to name our two principal meeting rooms and to recognise two people who had a major influence in establishing and setting the early direction of this department, that is, Professor Basil Hetzel (the inaugural chair of the department) and Professor Lou Opit, the second chair, and my predecessor.

We are delighted to have been joined today by several guests. The first of these is Professor Basil Hetzel and his wife, Anne, who have come from Adelaide to join us. Unfortunately Lou is no longer with us but we have been joined by several members of his family including his daughter Nicky and her husband Mike Dorevitch, Judy, Lou's daughter-in-law from the UK, and four of Lou's ten grandchildren. We are very pleased to welcome you all.

We have also been joined by several of the staff of the department who worked with Basil and Lou and it is a tribute to them both that so many were keen to join us today. I also had several letters from others who, for one reason or another, could not join us but expressed a strong wish to be remembered.

We are also very pleased to welcome Professor Steve Wesselingh, our Dean, who, like Basil and Lou, is an Adelaidian and is shortly to return to Adelaide as the inaugural head of the new South Australian Institute of Health and Medical Research. Steve will be speaking during this ceremony but this occasion also gives us a good opportunity to thank Steve for his fine leadership of the Faculty over the past years and to thank him for his support of this School and Department. We wish him great success in his new role.

Now a few words about Basil. Basil is a graduate from the Medical School of the University of Adelaide (his father was a consultant physician at the Royal Adelaide Hospital who later became Dean). He was a Fulbright Scholar at Cornell University in the 1950s. After training in endocrinology in London he took up the Mitchell Chair of Medicine at the newly opened Queen Elizabeth Hospital in 1964, at The University of Adelaide.

He moved to Monash University as the Inaugural Chair of the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine in 1967.

He said that his interest in public health arose from an interest he developed in the psychosocial aspects of disease in New York, and his work in PNG where he recognised the importance of the organisation of health services, and his work with the Australian Frontier Organisation which addressed the needs of disadvantaged migrants.

While at Monash, Basil developed a range of initiatives and research activities in suicide, traffic accidents, indigenous health, mental health of students and the reproductive health of migrant women.

Basil gave a series of very influential Boyer Lectures on the ABC in 1971 and later published his concepts in a book entitled 'Health in Australian Society'.

After leaving Monash he became the first Chief of the Division of the CSIRO Division of Human Nutrition, and later Chancellor of the University of South Australia.

In research, Basil is best known for his groundbreaking work in Papua New Guinea, linking endemic goitre and cretinism to iodine deficiency. His demonstration that iodine supplementation could prevent these conditions is a great success story in preventive medicine. His work was the stimulus for a focus on iodine supplementation by many international organisations, including the United Nations, UNICEF, WHO and The World Bank.

When I first came to Monash, Basil was remembered very fondly by a wide range of my new colleagues and we are delighted to welcome you back Basil. You set the groundwork for a very distinctive department and set a very high bar for those coming after you.

Basil was succeeded from 1976 to 1985 by Professor Lou Opit who is also fondly remembered by many of us here today.

He was another Adelaide Medical Graduate who, after graduation, embarked on a clinical career in surgery and became a reader in surgery at the Queen Elisabeth Hospital in Adelaide.

He was one of the first truly academic surgeons and published a series of influential papers on vascular and general surgery, biochemistry, computerised records, health services research and occupational health.

He then got sick of cutting up people, and turned his imagination and intellect to mathematics, graduating from Warwick University in the UK with first class honours in 1969.

His interests then turned to epidemiology and then to social medicine, and he worked in senior academic roles in the UK, Canada and, from 1970-76, in the Department of Social Medicine at Birmingham.

He was head of this department from 1976 to 1985 when he returned to the UK as Professor of Community Medicine at The University of Kent.

Lou is remembered as one of the great personalities of Monash.

After his untimely death in 1998, one obituary read:

*“When this small man with a large beard and a Jewish consciousness put his head on one side, screwed up his eyes and began to talk, something illuminating or outrageous was bound to bumble out of his extraordinarily fertile and electric mind.”*

I think that both of these gentlemen made an enormous contribution to Monash and to our Department and School.

We are grateful for the heritage they left us and are very pleased to be able to recognise their contribution and achievement in this way.”