

AN APPRECIATION

PROFESSOR ANTHONY BUSUTTIL OBE

Tony Busuttill has been the editor of our journal since January 1996 and he is now retiring from this very responsible College position. Words cannot express adequately the debt of gratitude we owe him so I simply say 'thank you' on behalf of us all. If we remind ourselves that it was under his guidance that our *Proceedings* was transformed into our current, greatly improved, and redesigned (as well as more cost-effective) *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* while other work continued unaffected, you will appreciate how much he has done for us. We are fortunate that he will continue to support us with editorial advice in the future.

Tony is not leaving the editorship for a life of ease with his pipe and his slippers. Indeed, he leaves not only because he has done the job for a long time, but also because of an endless increase in the demands for his professional services as a forensic pathologist. Best known to the public as the pathologist who

dealt with the horror of the Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am flight 103, he is now a vital pillar supporting Scottish forensic practice.

Tony's friendliness and helpfulness brings him into contact with a wide range of people, and is well-illustrated by Ian Rankin's memoir below. How easy it would have been to brush off the questions of a young writer! Ian is now known worldwide as the creator of John Rebus, the Edinburgh detective who has made him a best-selling novelist. John Rebus is a puzzling contradiction of a man whose abilities make him a successful detective but whose liabilities make him a fascinating but (so far) unsuccessful career policeman. Tony Busuttill, by contrast, shows how intellectual and personal qualities can combine to bring professional success and personal respect. Thank you Tony.

Dr Niall DC Finlayson

When I started planning my first crime novel, I knew nothing about real police work, forensics, pathology or criminal justice. I was a 23-year-old postgraduate student, working towards a thesis on the modern Scottish novel. But now I had an idea for a novel of my own, and it would feature a police detective, whose name would be John Rebus – a 'rebus' being a picture puzzle.

My idea of research was to write a letter to the Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders Police, asking for his help. He passed me along to two Leith-based CID officers, who showed some bemusement (and not a few suspicions of their own!) at my questions about murder most foul.

So it was that the first three Rebus novels came to be written in a state of benign ignorance. This state might have continued were it not for two things. One, I started to feel somewhat guilty about making money (albeit not much) from telling lies about real-life professions. Two, a CID officer who had become a fan of the books told me I made a lot of basic mistakes.

Therefore, when it came time to start the fourth Rebus novel *Strip Jack* I decided that I would spend more time and effort on research. The story involved a drowning, and I realised that I'd no idea if one could tell whether a body found in water had been deceased before entering the water. I went back to first principles and wrote a letter, this time to a pathologist whose name had been passed to me by my friendly CID man. Like many cops I've met since, this friend split his working world into two groups – 'good guys' and the rest. He assured me Tony Busuttill was one of the former, and so it proved.

I received a reply from Tony, offering me 15 minutes of his precious time. I duly arrived at the University of Edinburgh armed with a notepad and pen and a dozen or so questions about autopsies and pathology. Being a few minutes early, the secretary told me I could wait in Tony's office . . . and this is where a good story begins to get in the way of the facts.

Down the years, I've regaled audiences around the world with my version of what happened next, and that story has become ever more embroidered, to the point where Donald Findlay* would have little trouble picking it apart were I to present it from the witness box. I'm fairly sure that there was a brown envelope on Tony's desk, and that when he came bustling in he started to open it, having mistaken me for a CID officer. Inside were post-mortem photographs, meant for this officer. However, the error was soon cleared up, and I tried as best I could to ask my questions. Not easy when you're thinking to yourself 'I've seen you somewhere before.' (Only later did it click that Tony bore a striking resemblance to the Danny DeVito of *Taxi* fame.) One question I didn't ask until much later was, 'How do you reach the slab?'

Tony was brilliant during that first meeting with the gauche Scottish author. He was patient, informative and even offered me the chance to witness the internal machinations of the autopsy suite. It was a few years before I took him up on that offer – I think we filmed my visit to the Cowgate for a TV documentary. Tony made for a brilliant interviewee, effortlessly intelligent, passionate about his subject, yet infused with a telling humanity. For him, the job of pathologist has allowed a rare understanding of the wonders of the human form, the miracle of life. He sees it not just as a vocation, but as a privilege.

It's certainly been my privilege getting to know him.

Ian Rankin

*Donald Findlay is a well-known defence advocate in criminal trials in Scotland.

Ian Rankin is an Edinburgh-based, multi-award winning crime novelist whose books have been translated into 22 languages. Most recently, in May this year, he was awarded the the Mystery Writers of America 'Edgar' award for best novel. Ian Rankin © 2004.