

Professor Sir Raymond 'Bill' Hoffenberg: a celebration and thanksgiving

The life and work of Bill Hoffenberg was celebrated at Wolfson College, Oxford, on 17 November 2007 and a summary featured in the journal (*Clin Med* December 2007 p 641). The three tributes are now published in full to reflect the importance of his contribution in clinical and academic medicine and his outstanding leadership and personal qualities.

Jonty Driver

Old friend

The different names and titles Bill had are a way of revealing a variety of relationships. If one knew him from childhood, he was Billie. Army and university friends left off the diminutive; he was Bill, plain and simple. To his patients he was Dr Hoffenberg. To his students he was Hoff (not to his face) and Prof (to his face). To Professor was added, in due course, Dean and then President – times two, really. Then, of course, it was Sir Raymond. There are many who think that, if he had not treated various politicians with such honest scorn, he might have become Lord Hoffenberg. My remit is to deal with Billie and Bill, only a little with Prof and Hoff, very little with Sir Raymond, and not at all with Lord-Might-Have-Been. I never managed to find out how or why Raymond became Bill.

Bill was born in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape in 1923; he had two older sisters and a younger brother. He was a first generation South African: his father had immigrated as a very young man and his mother's parents when she was a baby. I know very little about his father's family, but his mother was the daughter of the only tobacconist in Grahamstown – my ancestral town, as it happens. Billie's father was a strict disciplinarian, and they often clashed, sometimes vigorously; I suspect this is one of the reasons Bill always had a tendency to be sceptical of authority, even when in due course he became authority himself.

He did very well at school, twice jumping years, so that he matriculated at 15. That seemed too young to go to university, so he did an extra year at school; his subjects included Greek and English literature, and he always remained grateful to his English teacher, David Miller – the only schoolteacher he named in the brief and unrevised autobiography he wrote for the family – for instilling in him an informed love of books. He was not sure which subject he wanted to read at university; mathematics was probably his favourite, but his headmaster could not see where that would lead. So the choice fell on medicine; Bill wrote that he did not really have a strong vocation to be a doctor, but that 'it seemed a safe and sensible choice for someone...undecided'.

His career at the University of Cape Town (UCT) was inter-

rupted by war service. The army tried to make him finish his medical studies first but, because most of his friends had already joined up, he said that if he were forced back into medical school he would simply make sure he failed his exams. The recruiting officer told him, since he was under age, he would need his father's signature to serve. Bill was unsure he would get it, so he forged it.

Bill claimed to have had an undistinguished war, earning just the one stripe to make him Lance Corporal Hoffenberg. Like many who fought through Italy, he kept a permanent love of the country and its people, although, looking at the photograph of his fellow prefects at Grey High School in his last year there, Bill believed half of them had been killed on active service, including three of his closest friends. He was still only in his early 20s, but one consequence of the greater maturity granted by his service was that he now had a much clearer idea of his own priorities.

Bill had always been good at games and at university his first reputation was not as an academic, but as a superb all-round games player. He got blues for tennis, golf, squash, and was playing first team rugby until a front row forward from Stellenbosch headbutted him, breaking his nose so badly that, in later life, he became an even more attractive subject for sculptors and painters than some less battered famous men; the smashed nose put an end to rugby and to boxing. He was a very good swimmer, immensely strong. Even in his 80s he would tackle the roughest seas at the Wilderness without a qualm.

Since Bill was also very sociable, it was a puzzle to his contemporaries that he continued to do so brilliantly on the academic side. Groote Schuur Medical School already had an international reputation for excellence, and Bill was one of its brightest stars; he managed to get his work done by waking much earlier than most people, and putting in three or four hours of solid work before breakfast. It was a habit he kept all his life, even when he had been up late the night before.

He also had the best head for alcohol of anyone I have ever met. There is a story he repeated on his deathbed, of being challenged by another ex-soldier to a drinking contest. They sat down with two full bottles of whisky. The other man passed out before he had finished his bottle; so Bill finished his own, put the man to bed, and then finished the second bottle himself. I have a very happy memory of a night in Cape Town, when he was trying to explain to me the research he was doing into nuclear protein, towards the end of which Bill opened a second bottle of KWV 10-year-old brandy. We must have been making some noise, because Margaret – Bill's wife – appeared in her dressing gown and gave me a considerable ticking-off for leading him astray: that way round, mark you.

I first met Bill in 1958, when he came to give a talk in one of the men's residences at the university. Bill and Margaret had lived in England for three years in the early 1950s, and had only recently returned from a year in the USA. The main subject of the talk was a visit they had made some years earlier to Albert Schweitzer's mission hospital in the Congo. Though he did not say so on that occasion, Bill had been invited to take over from Schweitzer but had decided not to, mainly because the medical work seemed to him limited in scope. Indeed, he was quite

critical of the standards he had observed. Since Schweitzer was regarded, even in South Africa, as a secular saint, Bill's iconoclasm was refreshing. He was always very much the scientist: he did not take things on trust but wanted evidence.

I do not think that Bill was, by nature, a political animal. He said he grew up as unaware as most white South Africans of the enormous inequalities between whites and blacks, and later felt ashamed that he had not realised earlier. Having fought against fascism in North Africa and Italy he did begin to see that the draconian apartheid the Afrikaner Nationalists were imposing on South Africa was very similar. He was also heavily influenced by his university friend, and rival on the squash court, Peter Brown, the wealthy scion of a family in Natal and one of the founding members of the South African Liberal Party. It was the stupidity and the unfairness of segregation within the hospital which affected Bill most and which led him to join the Liberal Party soon after its foundation in 1953. He was a liberal through and through, believing in an egalitarian but pluralist and tolerant democracy, and with an ingrained suspicion of all extremes.

Bill and Margaret met in 1948 and married a year later when he was still a house officer at Groote Schuur and she in her final years at the UCT studying for a postgraduate degree in social work. It was to be a long, secure and mutually supporting marriage, though not without its tides and tempests. With the arrival of first Derek and then Peter – I think probably still the noisiest baby I have ever known – the first stage of the Hoffenberg family was complete. Bill and Margaret were admirable parents. The addition of grandchildren to the family was a great joy; I have in my study at home a picture of Bill cradling a granddaughter, and his happiness is almost palpable.

In South Africa during the 1950s, Bill was, in part at least, a government employee and so contractually obliged to abstain from politics. That was difficult, especially in a university because the government had introduced a severe segregation bill; in that topsy-turvy world it was known as the Extension of University Education Act. Despite massive national and international opposition the act became law in 1960 making it almost impossible for black students to get into the so-called 'open' universities, including the UCT medical school. Bill became more and more influential among university students, not only at UCT but nationally – though in his autobiography he says, as modestly as ever, 'I was more influenced by their thinking than they could have been by mine'. He also played a considerable role behind the scenes in the Liberal Party, through his friendship with Peter Brown, its chairman, and Alan Paton, its president. One of Bill's regular fixtures was to accompany them and a couple of other friends to a remote shack in the Drakensberg mountains; ostensibly, they were fishing – actually, they were drinking to escape the annual horrors of what was once called Dingaans' Day. Bill took over as Chairman of the Defence and Aid Fund in the Cape which channelled money to arrange the defence of those charged with political crimes and the provision of aid for their families, and became Chairman of the Advisory Committee to the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in 1964.

In his autobiography, Bill writes about the occasion when he

'crossed the line' (to use his own metaphor). After a New Year's Eve party, he and I were driving to another party when we saw a police van pull up beside a lone black man; the police jumped out, beat the man, and threw him into the van. Bill drove after them to the police station and demanded to see the victim. After some time, the man arrived: his face swollen and bruised, and in a clear state of shock. We recognised him as a fellow member of the Liberal Party. The police claimed he had been arrested for drunkenness. Bill telephoned the district surgeon to get him to check the man's state. Bill was deeply disillusioned when his so-called colleague confirmed the police story; especially as the victim later told him he had not had a single drink that evening. Bill wrote:

At some stage...you cross a boundary, and I think I crossed it that night. You begin to understand what it's like to be black, to be the underdog, to have no rights, always to be a victim of a ruthless and implacable oppressor. Once you crossed the line, things were different.

In some ways, as important as the Hoffenbergs' intellectual and political influence was their provision of a safe haven. Their home was a place students knew they would be welcome, even when they were not being wise or sensible. I know this probably better than anyone: in 1963, when in my capacity as President of NUSAS I came back from a long and exhausting visit to Europe and the USA. I was sleeping on the floor of a friend's flat while I tried to sort out accommodation. The Hoffenbergs invited me to dinner. After dinner, when I got up to leave, Margaret said, 'I've made up the bed in the spare room for you'. I stayed for three months, nominally in return for occasional babysitting. Eventually, Margaret said to me, 'You are planning to go home for Christmas, aren't you? We'd quite like to have our spare room back again'. It was after a farewell party the Hoffenbergs gave for me in August 1964 that the security police arrested me and, five weeks later, returned me to their house. I left two days later on a plane for London; Margaret paid for the ticket. She had also organised the rota of friends who provided me with meals and clean clothes while I was in solitary confinement; I recognised her special touch, in that she always sent chocolates filled with alcohol.

In 1965, shortly after the family returned from a European holiday, Bill's South African passport was confiscated. The loss was a blow for anyone; for a scientist dependent on international connections, it might have been intellectually crippling. Worse was to come. In June 1967 Bill became the 683rd person to receive a banning order. This forbade him from attending any meetings (defined as a gathering of more than two people); confined him to a magisterial district away from the hospital; and forbade him to enter any educational institution or to have anything to do with students anywhere. He thought hard about staying – after all, his friends Brown and Paton had made the decision to stay even when they lost their passports or were banned; but Bill was a doctor and a university teacher. He had been forbidden to practise his profession. After much heart searching, he and Margaret decided to leave the country with their sons in March 1968, Bill on a one-way exit permit.

Bill felt that the reason for the banning might have had less to

do with his influence on students or his work for the Defence and Aid Fund than with the fact that he was beginning to have a strong influence on foreign journalists and diplomats. He was already someone of intellectual and professional distinction, calm and wise, with an international reputation as a scientist, and clearly worth listening to. He could also provide introductions to black leaders at a time when even diplomats had trouble meeting them. Certainly, the 3,000 university students who turned out at the airport to say and sing their farewells knew what they were losing.

My remit is to write about Bill's South African days; but they did not come to an end with his departure in 1968. Bill and I talked often about the damage that exile had done to some of our South African friends. We agreed that the best way to serve our home country – or at least what we believed that country should and could be – was to be as successful outside the country as we could be. To repine in exile, to bemoan the fates, to bewail the injustice done to us, would be of no use to anyone. I was only 25 when I left. Bill was 45. He and the family left South Africa on 28 March 1968. He was elected President of the Royal College of Physicians on 28 March 1983, fifteen years to the day.

Bill was once described, not entirely in jest, as 'the physician to the African National Congress (ANC) in exile'. He was particularly close to the family of Oliver Tambo, who as acting president kept the ANC united. Other South Africans relied on Bill's enormous range of medical information and contacts. It is true that Bill enjoyed a good argument and, sometimes, expressed unpopular opinions just to be ornery. However, if one ever needed rational advice, he would always provide it, calmly measured. He was a source of strength to fearful people in bad times, even when, as in 1964, he was under great threat himself. He was a man of integrity, if he gave his word, he would stick to it, but he was not judgemental. Most of his friends ended up as lifelong ones, even when there was disagreement or even quiet disapproval. It is in keeping with everything else he stood for that his ultimate concerns as a doctor were with compassionate ethics, not with science.

When apartheid came to an end, Bill was delighted, not only, of course, because he was now able to return regularly to his home country. His sons had settled in Australia, which drew Bill and Margaret in that direction; but they also began to spend part of each year back in the Cape. One of Bill's most admired ex-students was then the Minister of Health, and he offered his services, as a consultant *pro amico*, to the ANC and the new government. His advice on how medical education should be developed was apparently disregarded – sad for him, sad for the country – but he tried hard to understand why distrust of the whites should outlive apartheid. He wanted to believe that the ANC could govern the country well, and he tried always to be both optimistic and positive. Certainly, for all the problems, many of them unresolved, South Africa is a far better place now than it was in 1948, 1958, 1968 – and, if it had not been for people like Bill, it might be something infinitely worse. However, whatever the judgement of history turns out to be, we should celebrate not so much an important and influential

public figure, but (to put it like a proper South African) a 'lekker oke', Bill Hoffenberg, husband, father, friend and mentor.

David London

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I first met Bill shortly after he arrived in England from South Africa where he took up a clinical post working in the thyroid clinic at the Royal Free Hospital, London. I got off to a bad start by addressing him as Raymond. I think I detected a scintilla of a wince but he, ever gracious, did not correct me. After that we ran into each other from time to time at endocrine meetings. But it was not until he accepted the William Withering Chair of Medicine at Birmingham University that I really got to know him. I was also, actually, a candidate for the chair. Now knowing what I do about Bill, it was impertinent for me to apply and I didn't really stand a chance. I was recently told, when discussing Bill with someone who was on the search committee, that it was very fortunate Bill came along because none of the other candidates were any good. I thanked him for this, reminding him that I was one of them.

For the first few months of Bill's professorship we were rivals. I had arrived as an NHS consultant a few months before him with a brief and an ambition to establish a major endocrine unit in the West Midlands. He then arrived with the same idea. After nine months we simultaneously decided that wasting our energies competing with each other was ridiculous and that it would be far better to work together which from then on we did.

Bill inherited a department with a reputation in cardiovascular medicine and lung disease and it was natural enough that Bill wished to change direction towards his own special interest, endocrinology and in particular thyroid disease. He began by introducing colleagues who had worked with him at the National Institute for Medical Research, London, Elizabeth Black and David Ramsden. They formed the nucleus of a team, joined later by Michael Sheppard and Jayne Franklyn, that has gone on to gain a worldwide reputation in the field, as well as spawning a diaspora of individuals who have become eminent in their own right.

Such was Bill's breadth of vision that he extended the range of the academic department first to embrace other areas of his own specialty – including providing me, who had endocrine interests other than the thyroid, with an academic base not usually available to an NHS clinician – and to appoint chairs in other specialties such as cardiology, rheumatology, neurology, geriatric medicine, general practice, and occupational medicine, with much of the money being raised from charitable trusts as well as private individuals. He was a very persuasive person.

I was recently told by someone who was Bill's house physician and his patient that he was a marvellous boss and a knowledgeable, thoughtful and caring doctor. Certainly he had the reputation of being a first-class clinician, whose opinion was sought far and wide, and a popular and highly regarded teacher, as well as

a farsighted organiser of medical education. Among the new ideas he pioneered while at Birmingham University was the extension of clinical teaching outside the originally recognised teaching hospital. This move was a manifestation of his desire and his ability to bring colleagues 'within the tent', rather than pursuing a selfish and self-regarding ambition to maintain exclusivity. Indeed, as his powers of leadership became increasingly recognised and his own professional responsibilities increased, he happily handed on to others some of the influential positions he was holding. It was not empire building, just the pursuit of a vision to do the best as he saw it.

A further innovation during Bill's time in Birmingham was at the suggestion of his Reader, David Heath, to introduce medical audit where doctors reviewed with each other the detailed conduct of cases, with particular reference to the examination of outcomes and of the procedures that led to them. In instances where things had gone wrong there would be a detailed examination of the notes to ascertain where matters had gone awry and whether there were lessons to be learnt for the future.

The respect that Bill gained locally was a significant factor in his successful election to the role of President of the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), although he was already becoming well known as a national figure. I well remember the grace of the brief speech he made after the election. He talked of the generosity of this country in honouring him, a man who had arrived first as a political refugee, with election to one of the highest offices in the medical land.

It was while he was at the RCP that he came into the public limelight. This was during one of the many crises that the NHS never seems to be without. The serious nature of the funding crisis prompted a letter from Bill and the Presidents of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Surgeons to *The Times*. Bill and his colleagues were summoned to see the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The response of her government was to introduce the internal market, an idea put forward by an American health economist but never previously tested. Some years later when a review was set up to see how successful the changes had been Bill wrote another scathing letter to *The Times* questioning the whole exercise, pointing out that while it was usual practice to 'get ready, take aim, fire', the government, instead, had got ready, fired and was now taking aim. The Withering Professor had a withering wit.

Another example of Bill intervening politically was when Alan Milburn, the then Secretary of State for Health, inflated for political purposes the revelations that came out of the Alder Hey scandal as a stick with which to beat the medical profession. Bill published an article ridiculing Milburn's statement that these were the most shocking events that he, the minister, had ever read about. Bill mused, 'One wonders how he missed descriptions of the Holocaust, atrocities in Rwanda, Bosnia, Sharpeville, Bhopal, etc, etc, etc'.¹

The last 15 years or so have seen a political onslaught on the medical profession, of which the fallout from Alder Hey is but one example. I have already given a couple of instances where Bill spoke out, probably to his own detriment as a man of his stature would surely have found himself in the Lords had he kept

quiet. But that was not in his nature. I have no doubt that had he remained in this country and had he lived to see the shambles that went under the name of Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) he would have made public his concern. More than this, and as we all know, he was a person of immense courage who put himself in physical danger when acting against injustice, ever in support of the 'huddled masses'.

Another area in which Bill importantly contributed was in the field of medical ethics. At the RCP he established a committee that examined and reported on ethical issues in medicine under the chairmanship of former President, Douglas Black, with a wide representation that included lawyers, philosophers, theologians, civil servants and members of the informed general public. The work of this group became widely respected and was used extensively as a source of advice by the body politic and indeed, to this day, continues to be consulted over sensitive ethical issues. Bill's interest and expertise in the area received formal recognition when, on going to live in Australia, he was appointed Professor of Medical Ethics in the University of Queensland. Well into retirement he continued to publish on the subject.^{2,3}

A particular topic that engaged Bill was the care of the terminally ill, one that has long aroused controversy and public debate. Bill, as might be expected of the man, took the humane view that suffering and distress should be palliated as far as possible even if it meant putting the patient's life at risk. Indeed, he went even further, publicly supporting Lord Joffe's attempt to bring forward a bill promoting assisted dying, a humanity linking these two eminent South Africans.

There are other examples of Bill taking a lead in ethical matters. During his time as President, the RCP reported on the use of healthy volunteers in medical trials and experimentation and on the relationship physicians should have with the pharmaceutical industry, ever a delicate matter. This led to the formation of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine and almost 20 years later to the recognition of pharmaceutical medicine as a specialty in its own right.

I could list many other causes that Bill espoused, from the parochial (the RCP extending its activities out of London and into the regions, or his defence of that threatened species, the medical academic) to the global (his stance against nuclear weapons, his support of the Medical Foundation against Torture or the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics). Many organisations sought his leadership as chairman or advice as committee member, and many institutions, in the UK and overseas, honoured him with their degrees or diplomas. Hardly surprising, given his stature.

Bill was a remarkably generous man, both with his time and with his hospitality. He had an enormous capacity for work so that, even with all his professional obligations, he always seemed to have time to give his full attention to the problems that were brought to him. His social generosity and hospitality were limitless. It was always a pleasure to be entertained by Bill and Margaret at their beautiful house near Alcester. The evenings were relaxed, the food delicious, and the conversation flowed as did the wine.

There is no denying that Bill was tough. He knew what he wanted, was determined to get it, and usually succeeded. He was a decisive, indeed formidable, chairman of a committee. He was well informed about the topics and issues to be discussed and quick and articulate in advancing the arguments. He had a rule that no meeting should last for more than two hours. There was one exception to this, meetings of Council at the RCP. These to ordinary council members could be interminable, as much of the agenda was devoted to procedural matters and everything else had largely been sown up in advance by the senior officers, Bill, the Registrar and the Treasurer. It was not for personal gain but as a matter of supporting the causes and achieving the objectives in which he passionately believed that Bill deployed his strengths. Indeed personally he was a most modest man. Never once did I hear him use his position or title to advance his own interests, nor did he ever boast of his personal achievements.

I do, however, recollect Bill taking great delight when, as President of the RCP and never having risen higher than the exalted rank of lance corporal, he found himself advising top military personnel who hung on his every medical word.

I've referred in passing to Margaret in the context of Bill as a host. I cannot close without a mention of Madeleine who, after Margaret's death, became his partner and then his wife and who looked after him during his mortal illness. I met Madeleine and Bill when we had dinner together in November 2006. Bill was still Bill, albeit 20 kg lighter, talking about himself dispassionately as though he was one of his own patients. She was clearly giving him great happiness despite all his medical troubles, and I wish for both their sakes that they could have had more time together. Nor can the Goughs go without mention. With true love and charity they took Bill in and gave him and Madeleine succour during his last days. One could not have better friends, but then this is how people felt about Bill.

There are a number of ethical principles which are the basis of medical practice. I would like to pick out just two, Justice and Beneficence. It was these that Bill applied in spades to those around him and which informed his medico-political life. This is the man we knew and whose life we celebrate – courteous, warm, generous, loyal, courageous, able – incredibly so. A big man and a true leader. I and countless others have had their lives enriched in one way or another by knowing and working with him. A friend of mine, and also a colleague of Bill's in Birmingham, remarked when we were discussing his death, 'It was a privilege to have known him'. To which we would say, 'Amen'.

References

- 1 Hoffenberg R. Medical arrogance. *Clin Med* 2001;1:339–4.
- 2 Hoffenberg R. Assisted dying. *Clin Med* 2006;6:72–4.
- 3 Hoffenberg R. Advance healthcare directives. *Clin Med* 2006;6:231–3.

John Penney

Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford

One of the more tangible mementos of the Hoffenberg years at Wolfson College, Oxford, is the built barbecue, a parting gift

from Bill and Margaret chosen by them to be something that the whole college, including the families, could enjoy. Indeed, it has given great pleasure over the years since its first inauguration at Bill's farewell party for the whole college community, held on one of those long English June evenings, when the drizzle sets in at 5.30 pm and continues unrelenting until after midnight. The establishment of this barbecue was no straightforward matter. Bill had chosen a site on a wide patch of open lawn not far from the punt harbour. Unfortunately this turned out to be just outside the room of one of the grumpier fellows, who strenuously objected, and a new site had to be found near the tennis courts (not in itself inappropriate in view of the regular appearances of Bill on those same courts in matches against the Bishop of Oxford). No sooner had this been resolved than a dispute arose over Bill's proposed design. The English take a fairly relaxed view of barbecues, being grateful for any device that will enable the charcoal to stay alight long enough to cook steaks on both sides rather than one, but Wolfson is an international community, and the moment a barbecue was known to be in prospect, graduate students from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the USA, countries with a more vigorous tradition of outdoor cooking, all began to insist vociferously on modifications to the design – the modifications being, of course, mutually incompatible – and it took considerable effort to reach any sort of compromise. This was life at Wolfson in microcosm, and Bill's reaction to this episode, as to many others, took the form of amused exasperation. By then he had long become used to the idea, startling to him when he first arrived from Birmingham, that the fellows of Wolfson were not as biddable as junior doctors and graduate students perhaps even less so, the hierarchies of medical schools being quite foreign to the Wolfson ethos.

Bill commended himself early on to the governing body by his brisk chairing of meetings. After some years of meetings meandering over two hours or more, we suddenly found ourselves despatching the business in half the time, without any loss of opportunity for discussion, and were able to move the start time forward by 30 minutes. Bill was not a timewaster. But when it came to coping with individuals, especially graduate students, there was all the time in the world. I saw this often enough during the three years when I was Senior Tutor. I had only to mention to Bill that I was worried about a particular student and he would spring into action to seek the student out, quite informally if that seemed the best tactic, explore the problem in the course of a casual chat, perhaps make a phone call or two, and a solution would be found. One of these interventions that I would dearly love to have witnessed (I have the story on excellent authority) concerned a student from a foreign country with an oppressive regime. In the final throes of finalising his thesis, this student became so overwrought that he was convinced that his government was spying on him, and he started ripping the tiles off his bathroom walls to find the concealed microphones. Bill invited him in to his office. As the young man ranted away about the iniquities of his government, Bill was able to throw a tranquilliser pill into the student's mouth every time he opened particularly wide. This worked to excellent effect: the young man calmed down, successfully completed his thesis, and in due

course left for home all smiles. And the bathroom was retiled, so everyone was happy.

Bill and Margaret really cared for the graduate students and their families. Margaret's Christmas parties for the children of Wolfsonians were legendary, and there were regular supper parties in the lodgings for groups of students. Then there were evening parties for the staff, or for fellows, and summer lunches for fellows and their spouses in the gardens. When one recalls that Bill and Margaret also had an incredibly busy social life in London, in connection with the RCP, then it seems extraordinary that they could have the stamina for this constant entertainment, but they appeared to take it all in their stride, treating the whole college as a sort of extended family. One should not underestimate the importance of this: if it is true that 'malt does more than Milton can to justify God's ways to man', it is surely also true that for promoting social cohesion within a college a successful buffet supper is worth a dozen interdisciplinary seminars.

Bill often professed a firm belief in alcohol as a social lubricant; he enjoyed a drink himself and was interested in wine. (It was later to be a great sadness when his best clarets did not survive the voyage to Australia.) It may seem ironic then that the nastiest wine I have ever tasted was served to me by Bill, as an apéritif before lunch, but it soon transpired that it was intended as a joke and we were asked to guess the provenance of the wine: none of us passed the test – it was Welsh. The most memorable piece of practical advice that I was given by Bill also concerned wine: how to open a bottle when you have no corkscrew. This was something he had learned in his student days. The trick, apparently, is to hold a cushion against a wall, then to bang the base of the bottle on it until the pressure forces the cork out. Bill assured me that this was extremely effective, though it did, as he put it, 'tend to fizz the wine up a bit'. I have never had the nerve to try it for myself.

But of course there was more to the Hoffenberg years than parties. A number of features of Wolfsonian life that we now take for granted were established during Bill's presidency: the regular progress reviews for graduate students (again evidence of Bill's concern for this constituency), the annual Isaiah Berlin lectures (given by eminent speakers ranging from Stephen J Gould to Tom Stoppard), and the annual Syme Lectures (delivered by an impressive array of Roman historians). These lectures are now firm fixtures in the college's, and indeed the university's, calendar and help to secure Wolfson's position in the academic world. It was also under Bill that we began to elect creative arts fellows for a three-year period. The first was a composer, Helen Roe, and the second a painter, Karen Forsyth. They have been followed by several writers, a potter and a singer. This has contributed enormously to the texture of college life, which otherwise too easily comes to revolve around libraries, laboratories and boat clubs.

Art was a special interest of Margaret's, and during these years we were lucky enough, through the Hoffenbergs' London friends and contacts, to be lent a marvellous selection of paintings and sculptures. Bridget Riley lent a large painting which used to hang outside the hall, and there are still some smaller pictures of hers in the common room; Anthony Caro lent, and

later gave, the sculpture that stands on the landing of the marble stairs; and striking pieces from the Rosenberg collection could be seen in the common room and the corridors. As part of the celebrations for the college's 25th birthday, there was a competition for young artists and an exhibition of the short-listed works, where Karen Forsyth, Bridget Riley and Peter Palumbo acted as judges. This was, naturally, followed by a splendid dinner for all concerned, which the winner, alas, was unable to attend; although his picture had been short listed, he had not come down from London for the event because, living in South London in true artistic penury, he could not find the bus fare. A telephone call was made, and the train fare promised, but by the time he got to Paddington Station, it was too late to make dinner in Oxford.

Things have a habit of going slightly wrong at Wolfson, which is one of the more charming things about the college. In the gardens there is a stone pinnacle that came from Merton College, and one of the fellows of Merton composed a suitable Latin couplet to be inscribed on the base. To mark the installation of this inscription, a party was arranged for 5.30 pm one autumn afternoon, and a deputation of fellows of Merton duly invited. For fellows of Merton, it seems, crossing the High Street to the Bodleian is already a northern adventure, and they certainly seem to have been taken entirely by surprise when they encountered the Banbury Road and the Oxford rush hour. The party began as scheduled in the President's dining room – a good party, with excellent wine and canapés – but the fellows of Merton arrived 45 minutes late. Given that the daylight had virtually gone, it was decided to proceed with the ceremony forthwith, so raiding the lodge for the night porter's torches, we stumped off through the heavy dew and duly stood around the monument and listened to the speeches. When we returned to the dining room, we found that the staff had completely cleared away the food and drink, thinking that the party was over, and replacements had to be rustled up in a great panic. Another occasion for Bill's look of amused exasperation.

Bill was never terribly good at completely concealing his reactions, but I never saw him openly lose his temper. You could tell when he was angry only by a tightening of the jawline, and a slightly strangulated vocal delivery. The jaw at all times revealed that Bill was a man of great determination, and this was wonderfully caught by Elisabeth Frink in her portrait bust of him.

I still find it immensely impressive that at a time when he was engaged with national affairs in London, Bill could still find time to give his full attention to the parochial minutiae of Wolfson life. But it was the sense he gave that whoever he was talking to really mattered to him, that made him such a wonderful college president, and his genial presence achieved far more than any more overt attempt at leadership could ever have done. Thinking back on Bill's time at Wolfson, one feels the glow of affection, mingled with an immense admiration for his character and achievements. How lucky we were in our choice and how proud we can be that he accepted the Presidency of our college. He left behind a flourishing and friendly Oxford community, a more lasting memorial, one hopes, than even the most ravishingly designed barbecue.