An unforgettable, perpetual medical student, 1961

S. Robert Lathan, MD

Figure 1. St. Thomas Hospital: (a) in the past and (b) now.

In the spring of 1961, during my sophomore year of medical school at Johns Hopkins, I had an elective quarter at Guy's Hospital in London along with my roommate, Larry Kirkland. Shortly before that, I had encountered an old friend of mine at Davidson College, Don Stewart (now a neurosurgeon), who explained that he had spent a wonderful year at London at St. Thomas Hospital (*Figure 1*).

Don suggested that in London I should immediately contact John Ormsby-Gore at the "St. Thomas Club." I found that the St. Thomas Club was a club for medical students that had a bar and was across from the hospital, which was on Lambeth Palace Road and Southwark on the Thames River. After a few weeks in London, I decided to call John; it was fairly late, around 9:30 PM. He talked to me shortly on the phone, asked about my location, and immediately said, "I will send a taxi to you soon!"

About 30 minutes later, I found John at the St. Thomas Club enthralled several medical students with continual stories. John was also a medical student but seemed somewhat older, in his mid 30s. He was an excellent host, offering several beers (English "pints of bitter"). The time of midnight came shortly, and I was invited to go to an Indian restaurant with the group. They explained their custom: "We English never have dinner before midnight!"

I discovered that John Ormsby-Gore had been a medical student at St. Thomas for a long time—perhaps as long as 15 years—after serving in World War II as a military officer. John's father was a "lord," a former member of Parliament, and an authority

on archeology. John's brother was said to be the ambassador to the United States and a close friend of President John F. Kennedy. John had also met "JFK" but was not really in the "same circle" and called himself the "black sheep" of his family.

When I asked John about his medical school activities, he talked about spending almost every night at the St. Thomas Club and serving as manager of the St. Thomas rugby and cricket squads. He did not talk much about his experiences in his medical school courses and clinical work. When I asked about his plans for finishing medical school and the required "qualification tests," he said: "Oh, I've considered the 'qualifications,' but it's very tough and takes about 6 months' work before the test, and every time I seem to think about the test, it's at the same time as the Royal Ascot, to which I always go!" The Royal Ascot (*Figure 2*) is traditionally held during the third week in June and is England's annual display of horse racing and hat pageantry. It is also closely associated with the British royal family.

John Ormsby-Gore was always hospitable to me during my several weeks in London. He was an encyclopedia of all the important events in London and also suggested the best travel places in England, Scotland, and Wales. I recalled a special Saturday in mid June with John showing me and Larry the "Trooping the Colours" annual parade (*Figure 3*) in London, in which the

Corresponding author: S. Robert Lathan, MD, 122 Old Ivy Road, #17, Atlanta, GA 30342 (e-mail: rlathanmd@att.net).

Figure 2. Royal Ascot.

queen's personal troops honor her official birthday. This display of pageantry dates back to the time of Charles II in the 17th century. Not many tourists could find this unique event.

More than 40 years after my wonderful 10-week stay in London, I continued to try to find what had happened to John Ormsby-Gore. I contacted St. Thomas to find his address without success. Finally I decided to use the Internet and found very unusual facts about the Ormsby-Gore family.

John Ormsby-Gore (1816–1876) was the first Baron Harlech and was a British Conservative member of Parliament. He was elected to the House of Commons for Carnarvonshire in 1837. William Ormsby-Gore (1885–1964), the fourth Baron Harlech, was the father of our friend, John Ormsby-Gore. He was also a Conservative member of Parliament. David Ormsby-Gore (1918–1985) was the fifth Baron Harlech and a British diplomat and Conservative member of Parliament from Oswestry in Shropshire. He was John's older brother and had been educated at Eton College and Oxford University. David knew John F. Kennedy well from Kennedy's time in London while his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, had served as the American ambassador. After Kennedy's election as president, David was appointed Brit-

Figure 3. Trooping the Colours.

ish ambassador to the United States from 1961 to 1965. In 1965 he took his seat in the House of Lords as Lord Harlech. He also had a successful career as a television executive.

The family later had several tragedies. Of David's five children, one son died of gunshot wounds, an apparent suicide, and one daughter was engaged to rock guitarist Eric Clapton in 1969 and later died of a heroin overdose. (Another daughter had an affair with Mick Jagger during the 1960s.) Lady Harlech died in a car accident in 1967, and Lord Harlech died in a car crash near his home in 1985.

David was succeeded in the barony by his second son, Francis Ormsby-Gore, the sixth Baron Harlech. However, in 2011, this Lord Harlech and his daughter were involved in a dangerous driving incident in North Wales. He had lived in Brogyntyn Hall near Oswestry in Shropshire, England, close to the Welch border.

In the past few years I have read of several Ormsby-Gore family celebrities and also tragedies and accidents. Despite this, I was able to find very little about my good friend John Ormsby-Gore. Internet sources provided only four lines about him recently:

Capt. The Hon. John Julian Stafford Ormsby-Gore, late of the Coldstream Guards, and educated from Eton College and Oxford University, who died in 18 April, 2008, after a short illness, age 83, a son of the 4th Baron Harlech.

Unfortunately, there was no information concerning his medical experience at St. Thomas Medical School, although he was cited as a "British nobility."

My roommate, Dr. Larry Kirkland, and I still remember our kind, hospitable English medical friends. We especially remember Dr. Dick Squires, who was also in medical school at St. Thomas and invited us to spend a weekend with him in his home in Wantage, Oxfordshire, England, only a few feet away from the statue of King Alfred the Great (871–899) (Figure 4). I have had the fortune of visiting Dr. Dick Squires two other times and most recently saw his restored Lains Barn dating in part from 1750, which is now used for community and educational functions. Dick is now a member of the Order of the British Empire.

Figure 4. Statue of Alfred the Great in Wantage.