

Geevestown, Tapestry & Tasmanian Rain Forest - A Visit To Dr Richard Geeves FCFP(Hon)

By A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean President, CFPS and A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, Censor-in-Chief of CFPS

Thirty years ago on the 13th of April, Dr Richard Bank Geeves was conferred Honorary Fellow of the College together with the late Sir Gordon Arthur Ransome, Datuk (Dr) Lim Kee Jin and Professor Wes Fabb. Dr Geeves was recognized for his role as an External Examiner in the College Inaugural Diplomate Examination in 1972. He was then the Censor-in-Chief of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP).

After an illustrious career as the medical director of a home medical care service in Sydney, he retired in the late 1980s to Geevestown, a settlement started by his great-grandfather, an early pioneer farmer of Tasmania. The town is in the outskirts of Hobart, the capital city. Geevestown was traditionally the marketplace from where apples grown in large plantations in the Huon Valley were shipped down the river by barges to Hobart and thence to Great Britain. The apple trade collapsed with the advent of the European Common Market a decade ago. Controlled logging of the pristine primitive Tasmanian rain forest, salmon husbandry in the unpolluted waters and eco-tourism are now the main-stay of the local economy.

Dr Geeves invited us to his



Figure 2. A/Prof Goh and Dr Geeves with Tapestry

hometown when we attended the Annual meeting of RACGP in Hobart October 2003. Geevestown is a small town where every inhabitant seems to know each other and Dr Geeves, the town's namesake. Cars in the town do not have to be locked and you pay for bags of apples in stalls outside the orchards by putting money into unattended coin boxes (Figure 1). Dr Geeves lives in the house built by his great-grandfather, now lovingly restored. The house is a picturesque wooden house with a garden of pretty blooming flowers by a postcard lake.

He showed us a tapestry with the College Crest (Figure 2) on it which was presented to him by Prof BR Sreenivasan, the first President of our College during his 1972 visit. He has fond memories of his two-week stay in Singapore then as guest of the Sreenivasans and other founders of our College.

Photographs taken with Dr Wong Heck Sing and Mrs Wong (Figure 3) at that time are displayed in a collage on the wall of his study. The Singapore College Fellowship Diploma awarded to him thirty years ago is proudly displayed with his other professional diplomas and

awards at the landing upstairs, a bit of Singapore in Geevestown.

Dr Geeves remembers the late Prof BR Sreenivasan, the founder President of both the Singapore Medical Association in 1959 and the College in 1971 and also the first Asian Vice-Chancellor of the University of Singapore as an erudite gentleman well schooled in both Western and Eastern philosophies. 'Sreeni' brought him one morning to his clinic on the first floor of a shop house in Serangoon Road where he saw throngs of patients and in the afternoon to his town practice in Orchard Road with a well-heeled patient base. He was impressed that 'Sreeni' was equally at home in both practices.

Of Dr Wong Kum Hoong, the College first Censor-in-Chief, he remembers for the admonition "We must have STANDARDS". Indeed, even before Prof Wes Fabb and him had time to unpacked their bags on reaching Singapore, they were wished off to be 'examined' by Dr Wong Kum Hoong before they passed muster to be External Examiners.

We verified with Dr Geeves that his first encounter with Dr Wong Heck Sing was indeed across the garden fence in the backyard of Dr Wong's brother, Andrew in Sydney. Dr Geeves had just passed the RACGP examinations and arranged the



Figure 1. Honesty Box for apples



Figure 3. From L-R: Mrs Geeves, Mrs Sreenivasan, Mrs Pat Wong & Dr Wong Heck Sing

Commemorating 3 decades of close ties between the Australian and Singapore Colleges

- FRACGP(Hon) awarded to A/Prof Goh Lee Gan

In the 2003 Annual meeting of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) in Hobart Tasmania, the close ties between the Australian and Singapore College were further strengthened.

A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, Censor-in-Chief of our College was awarded the Honorary Fellowship of RACGP (Figure 1) in the Convocation Ceremony on 9th October 2003. A/Prof Goh who is presently also the President of WONCA, the world organisation of family doctors for the Asian-Pacific Region was honoured for his outstanding achievements in the world stage and also for developing the close ties between the two Colleges. The last Singapore doctor to be so honoured by RACGP is a past president our



Figure 1. A/Prof Goh receiving the FRACGP from Prof Kidd

Royal College of General

College, Dr Wong Heck Sing, almost 30 years ago. The College and the FM fraternity congratulate A/Prof Goh on his conferment. A/Prof Goh also holds honorary fellowships from WONCA and the

Practitioners (RCGP).

Also honoured at the ceremony with life fellowships of RACGP were Prof Wes Fabb, past CEO of WONCA and Dr Richard Geeves (Figure 2), past Censor-in-Chief of RACGP. Three decades ago in 1973, both Prof Fabb and Dr Geeves were conferred Honorary Fellows in Singapore for their contributions in building up our College.



Figure 2. From L-R: Prof Fabb, Mrs Fabb, A/Prof Goh, A/Prof Cheong & Dr Geeves

They were the external examiners sent by RACGP for the first Diplomate Membership (MCGP) examination conducted a year after the College was founded in 1971. Prof Fabb was also the MOH HMDP visiting expert for Family Medicine in 1988, external examiner for the Mmed examination on a number of occasions and lately, the external interviewer for the 2003 Fellowship exit interview. Dr Geeves visited the College earlier this year and was our keynote speaker at the launch of the 1st Family Medicine Skills Course on Home medical care.

When our College was founded, the RACGP not only provided advice but also presented the College with gifts of the Presidential Gavel (1971) and the Presidential Chair (1972). The

three decades of close ties between the two Colleges were marked by an exchange of gifts (Figure 3) between Prof Michael Kidd, President RACGP & A/Prof Cheong Pak Yean, President CFPS. Addressing the RACGP Council, A/Prof Cheong acknowledged the role of RACGP in the formation of our College, outlined areas of further co-operation and look forwards to even closer ties in future.



Figure 3. Gifts - Left: Pewter Vase to RACGP Right: Clock to CFPS

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meetings that led to the considerable role played by RACGP in the founding of our College.

With all these interesting snippets of the early days of our College, the hour-long drive to the Tasmanian rain forest certainly passed quickly. Dr Geeves was very thoughtful. Sensing that we may be weary after an overnight flight from Singapore, he asked the manager of the park to take us by motorized buggy up the hill from the park entrance. From

the top, we had a panoramic view of the forest before we trekked down the valley via steel suspension bridges hundred of meters above ground, walking on air so to speak on the top of the canopy of Tasmanian forest trees - the Huon Pine, Celery-Top Pine, Myrtle Beech, and the Stringybark Eucalyptus.

The quick tour took about 4 hours after which we returned to Hobart for the afternoon opening reception of the conference, convocation

ceremony and dinner that night. After a night's sleep we attended the joint Council meeting the next morning. We then boarded an overnight flight back to Singapore and went back to work straight upon arrival after a two-day absence.

We have not only attended the formal ceremonies in Hobart but were taken back in time to the founding of our College amidst the tapestry of the Singapore College Crest and rain forest of Tasmania.