

THE NATIONAL HEART HOSPITAL 1857–1957

A hundred years have passed since the National Hospital for Diseases of the Heart, to use its older title, was founded by Dr. Eldridge Spratt, and for some years he was the only Physician and often Treasurer and Secretary as well. The first eighteen years were more like a Victorian melodrama than a history of a Victorian hospital. On many occasions, almost from the time a Committee was first appointed—and there were many of them for few members stayed long—there was trouble between the Committee and Dr. Spratt. At one meeting attended only by Admiral Burney (Chairman, 1869–1874) and Dr. Spratt, a resolution was passed and recorded that “the entire management should be under Dr. Spratt.”

Mention should be made of Captain Dodson, late Royal Marines, who became Secretary in 1868 for he advanced money from his own pocket and collected enough to pay off many of the old debts of the Hospital—some for the original equipment bought in 1857. And in 1872 he found a Treasurer, his friend the Earl of Glasgow, who was Chairman from 1875 to 1881 when the Hospital was really finding its feet.

In 1874, a fine house in a corner of Soho Square was found and became the home of the Hospital for forty years. It had been the home of the Linnean Society and had been built by the Adam brothers for Sir Joseph Banks, who was President of the Royal Society from 1778–1820 and a great botanical collector and one of the founders of Kew Gardens. He travelled to Australia with Captain Cook in the *Endeavour* (1768–71) and Botany Bay was so named because of the many botanical specimens he collected when he landed there. His life has been recorded by H. C. Cameron in *Sir Joseph Banks, K.B.* (1952: The Blatchworth Press, London).

But the difficulties had not yet been overcome. These became so acute that after some financial irregularities Dr. Spratt, the founder, was asked by the Committee to resign. He refused but the Committee was now made of sterner stuff, and in 1875 a meeting presided over by Colonel Robertson-Aikman, V.C. (Vice-Chairman at the time, and Chairman, 1881–1890) removed his name from the list of Physicians. The Committee left the Hospital, but Dr. Spratt in the middle of the night returned with a furniture van and removed many of the contents of the Hospital.

1875–1914. Gradually under the guidance of the Earl of Glasgow (1875–1881) and his successor Colonel Robertson-Aikman (1881–1890) the finances of the Hospital were put on a firmer basis and the medical staff were able to carry on their work without interruption. Out-patient sessions were held regularly and the physicians, now four in number, saw an increasing number of out-patients with heart disease and did all they could for them. Perhaps the treatment was not very different from that obtained elsewhere and no great discoveries seem to have been recorded by the medical staff. Their publications, recorded in the medical directories of the time, show that they did not confine their interests to heart disease, for they include *Hints on Men and Women* by Dr. Ambler (1875), *The Effect of Education on the Industrial Classes* by Dr. Duncan (1878), and *Cycling as a Cause of Heart Disease* by Dr. Herschell (1893).

Dr. R. O. Moon (1902–30), a classical scholar and a medical historian, was the first Physician of the hospital to be elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, though Dr. Aldis who was appointed a Consulting Physician in 1872 had been a F.R.C.P. since 1838. Moon thought that the advance to a more modern approach was first made by Dr. Charles W. Chapman (1893–1914), who died at the age of ninety-seven, as late as 1940. Chapman wrote a book, *Heart Disease in Childhood and Youth* (Medical Publishing Company, London, 1900), and the introduction by

Sir Samuel Wilks also emphasizes that he had “arrived at more favourable conclusions than have generally been suspected.”

The last years of the Hospital at Soho Square were, however, marked by great progress, for under the stimulus of Dr.—later Sir Sydney—Russell-Wells (1905-1924), M.P., and later Vice-Chancellor of London University, a pathological department was opened in an iron shed in 1910, and an X-ray department in another shed. The first electrocardiograph had a curious history for it was purchased in 1911—a half share by the Hospital and a half share by the famous Professor A. D. Waller, whose researches from 1887 onwards recording the electrical activity of the heart with a capillary electromanometer laid the foundations on which modern electrocardiography has been built. As there was no room at the Hospital, it was housed in his physiological laboratory at South Kensington, and the patients were taken there by cab. During this partnership which lasted for two years, Dr. Waller, F.R.S., became Consulting Physician to the Hospital, joining Sir Frederick Taylor (P.R.C.P., 1915-1918) who had been appointed in 1910.

In 1912 plans were made for a new hospital in Westmoreland Street. Sir James Harrison, K.C.V.O. (Chairman, 1913-1921), Sir Sydney Russell-Wells, and Captain Whitney, who had just become Secretary of the Hospital—and still is—deserve the main credit for this. The new buildings were opened in 1914—a striking commentary on what could be done with energy and initiative in those days by the voluntary hospitals, even by a small hospital with no endowments. Since then progress has been uninterrupted.

1914-1957. Almost at once the war intervened. The Hospital became one of the main centres for examination of the hearts of recruits who were referred by army medical boards. Ten thousand were examined and some conclusions were published by the medical staff in 1918 (*Brit. med. J.*, 1, 556 and 2, 248). Sir Sydney Russell-Wells in address on *The Aim and Use of Special Hospitals* (*J. Laryng.*, 1923, 38, 173) showed his foresight by urging many developments of postgraduate teaching that have since taken place, though unfortunately, we have not reached his vision of a quiet square with the different special hospitals and a residential college for the postgraduate students built round it. He thought that under-graduates should be taught in the special departments of general hospitals, but that the special hospitals were ideal for postgraduate teaching, and that they should be federated to constitute a London Postgraduate School.

Dr. Frederick Price (1914-1937), known throughout the world for the *Textbook of Medicine* he edited, and Dr. Strickland Goodall (1914-1934), a popular teacher, showed by the large consulting practices they developed that the public wished to benefit from the growth of cardiology as a branch of Medicine. The reputation of the Hospital was widened by the work that was done under the leadership of Sir John Parkinson (1920-1950) in association with the late Dr. Parsons-Smith (1920-1947) as Dean and Dr. Thomas Cotton (1924-1949).

Regular out-patient teaching and special courses were started in 1919, although some postgraduate teaching had been discussed by the Committee as early as 1874. The Hospital has always been a small one and much of its reputation was built on the teaching at the large out-patient clinics, where electrocardiograms and X-rays were available, a form of teaching that could then cover most aspects of cardiology. Nevertheless, the work for in-patients was important and the Hospital was fortunate in having many distinguished resident medical officers: those from overseas included H. L. Heimann of Johannesburg (1922), E. F. Gartrell of Adelaide (1925), G. A. Elliott of Cape Town and Johannesburg (1932), and Clive Fitts of Melbourne (1933); and those from this country, Robert Marshall (1914)—the first in Westmoreland Street—C. W. Curtis Bain (1923), K. Shirley Smith (1927), P. H. O'Donovan (1928), J. R. H. Towers (1931), Paul Wood (1934), Evan Jones (1935), E. P. Sharpey-Schafer (1936), and Graham Hayward (1936).

The annual St. Cyres Lecture has been the most important outside occasion of the Hospital. It has been delivered by many men famous in cardiology, including K. F. Wenckebach (1928), John Cowan (1930), Thomas Lewis (1931), John Hay (1933), Paul White (1935), Charles Laubry (1937), Samuel Levine (1948) Pierre Duchosa (1951) and Lewis Dexter (1955).

Registrars were appointed for the first time in 1946, though Clinical Assistants had been

working in the Out-patient Department for a long time. In 1948 a real Pathological Department was made in the mews at the back of the Hospital—spacious compared with its old quarters for a part-time pathologist, but sadly cramped for the valuable work it now does under the direction of Dr. Reginald Hudson.

With the coming of the National Health Service in July, 1948, the Hospital became a Post-graduate Teaching Hospital with its own Board of Governors. The Medical School, which has been growing since 1919, was reborn as the Institute of Cardiology. This was established in 1947 under the auspices of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation in the University of London, and owes much to Sir Francis Fraser and to its first Chairman, Lord Brabazon of Tara, now succeeded by Mr Michael Perrin. It has led to a much fuller teaching programme for whole-time students as well as the shorter special courses. Equally important, it has acquired some new premises so that there is more room for laboratories, and the physicians and registrars have been able to widen the range of their research work from the purely clinical.

For some years the policy of the Governors of the Hospital has been to assemble on the medical staff physicians from various teaching London hospitals who have shown by research and teaching their special interest in circulatory diseases. Thus all the physicians on the present staff are physicians of other teaching hospitals in London—Maurice Campbell (Chairman of the Medical Committee), Evan Bedford, Paul Wood, William Evans, Graham Hayward, and Wallace Brigden, and last but not least as cardiac surgeon, T. Holmes Sellors, who will have facilities for his surgical work in the hospital that is to be rebuilt in the near future. This has led to a friendly exchange of ideas and has been a powerful factor in making the Hospital and the Institute a national centre for research and postgraduate teaching in cardiology.

There is no reason to think that Dr. Eldridge Spratt was an outstanding physician. Certainly he was quarrelsome, egotistical, resentful of control, and financially irresponsible if not worse. But we cannot forget that at a time when little interest was taken in diseases of the heart, most of which were thought to have a grave significance and to be incurable, he had the foresight and driving energy to found a hospital for their study, the first in the world devoted solely to the study and treatment of the heart.

MAURICE CAMPBELL

I am indebted to Captain Whitney (Secretary, since 1912) for the notes about the early history and for most of the dates. The first annual report that is extant is that of 1864 and since 1871 most have been preserved. Captain Whitney has been through these and the old minute books and has recorded the history of the Hospital in two small books that have been privately printed—*The Place of Hearts, 1857-1937* and *1938-1957*.

To celebrate the Centenary of the Hospital, a dinner was held in the Hall of the Society of Apothecaries, by kind permission of the Master and Court, on Wednesday, October 2, to which many distinguished guests were invited. On Thursday, October 3, the Medical Staff of the Hospital and of the Institute of Cardiology invited a small number of guests to take part in a symposium on some aspects of congenital heart disease. An account of this will be published in the next number of the British Heart Journal.