

## ERNEST WILLIAM HEY GROVES

We move on now to someone whose name still endures at the BRI- Ernest Hey Groves. His direct and practical approach made him an excellent communicator and writer of great clarity.

He looked upon life as an adventure and whatever opportunities arose, his industry ensured that those opportunities were taken.

He was born in India at Coonoor on 20th June 1872.

His father, a civil engineer, retired three years later and settled in Bristol.

Even at that early age, the child found a practical solution to the problem of tight shoes on the voyage home, - by threw them overboard!

From school at Redland Hill House, he went to London in 1890 to study for a B.Sc.degree in engineering. By mere chance, he saw an advertisement for a scholarship at St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

Without consulting anyone, he entered, as he put it, 'just for a lark' and won the scholarship. He had no allowance from home and although an uncle in Hampstead gave him a home, he received no pocket money.

Resourceful as always, he used to borrow an arm or a leg from the dissecting room and take it back to his basement at Hampstead, where for a few shillings, he tutored younger students and the less fortunate ones for free.

He had a great interest in politics and would on occasions sit in the public gallery of the House of Commons to listen to Mr. Gladstone and others debating for example the 'Home Rule Bill' until four in the morning and then walk back to Hampstead.

He managed to save a little money and took himself to Germany to spend a term as a physiology student at the University of Tubingen. Speaking some forty years later he expressed the view that all students should spend time in a university abroad, as part of the curriculum.

He qualified MRCS LRCP in 1895 and had taken the intermediate MB BS and the primary fellowship along the way.

He married a St. Bartholomew's sister, Frederica Anderson, in 1896.

Intent on becoming independent and wanting to leave London he completed just one house officer post in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, which as it turned out, was to prove useful experience later.

He settled at Chewton Mendip in Somerset in a country general practice to earn his livelyhood.

During his spare time there ,he completed the MB BS and MD

degrees, as he put it, for a pastime rather than to further his career. But he found life in the country too isolated and too peaceful and after a couple of years he moved to join an urban practice in industrial Kingswood.

One day, he was called to a bedridden patient with backache, who had been treated for a year for lumbago by a Clifton doctor. Hey Groves found an ovarian tumour impacted in the pelvis, which the lady insisted Hey Groves should remove personally. Initially, he thought that this was unthinkable. He had no access to a hospital bed, let alone an operating theatre and nor for that matter did he have the necessary instruments. Then he recalled his experience of gynaecological operations as a houseman and, on reflection, he felt equal to the task. He resolved to go ahead, adapted a room in his house and competently assisted by his wife successfully carried out the operation.

Between 1898 and 1902 he removed appendices, gall bladders and prostates having never previously taken part in these procedures. His reputation grew in Kingswood and in Bristol. He wrote up his cases and presented them to the Med.-Chi. Society and the local B.M.A. meetings.

When a vacancy occurred on the surgical staff at the Bristol General Hospital, he was invited to become Assistant Surgeon. For four years he retained a share in the practice at Kingswood, cycling there in the morning and returning in the afternoon to treat patients at the General.

Despite all this endeavour he found it necessary to supplement his income by coaching and taking resident students. His holidays were spent at the seaside....doing locums !

In his spare time, he continued his studies and in 1885 he passed the final FRCS and the London MS with Gold Medal.

In 1908 he published his 'Synopsis of Surgery' derived from his tabulated coaching and examination notes.

This book had the reputation of being the most stolen book in the University library. He revised the book every two years and it ran to eleven editions.

He developed his research interests, particularly in the field of fractures and bone grafting.

His experimental work involved cats and rabbits and in view of the lack of facilities in Bristol, between 1910 and 1914 he travelled to University College, London twice weekly on an early train.

He established several basic principles concerning the usefulness of indirect fixation of bones by traction, the correct use of plating and pinning and the requirements for successful grafting of bone.

In 1913 he became a full surgeon to the BGH, at the age of forty one. He saw the need for a national surgical journal despite there being three previous attempts which had all ended in failure. Hey Groves

was careful to obtain the support of at least one surgeon in every teaching centre in Great Britain and the 'British Journal of Surgery' was launched in 1913. Hey Groves was to serve as Editorial Secretary for twenty seven years in a role subsequently filled at a later date by Professor John Farndon.

1914 brought the outbreak of war and Hey Groves was commissioned into the RAMC.

He spent 1915 in Egypt in charge of a surgical division of a general hospital.

Many of the casualties from Gallipoli had gunshot fractures of the lower limbs and a cradle splint which permitted traction was developed by Hey Groves. He produced a splint to his own design and he was instrumental in setting up a splint factory with local labour in Alexandria.

In 1916 he was awarded the Jacksonian Prize of the RCS and in the same year he published 'On Modern Methods of Treating Fractures' The war brought Hey Groves into contact with Sir Robert Jones who invited him to take surgical charge of the Military Orthopaedic Centre at Southmead Hospital.

He became interested in reconstructive surgery, particularly of the knee joint.

He was invited to join the fledgling British Orthopaedic Association.

Following the war, he became convinced with the view of his physician colleague, Carey Coombs, of the need for the BRI and BGH to amalgamate. When the General Hospital declined to do so, he was bitterly disappointed.

He was an inspiring teacher and in 1922 he was appointed Professor of Surgery in Bristol and he made his point by conducting teaching rounds on alternate weeks, both at the Infirmary and the General Hospital.

Honours continued to pour in. In 1930 he was President of the British Orthopaedic Association and President of the Association of Surgeons in the following year..

At the Royal College of Surgeons he was a Council member for twenty four years and Vice-President in 1928-9.

Speaking at Med.-Chi. in 1932 he spoke of the bitter struggle to induce the BRI and the BGH to sink their differences and amalgamate. He saw this as the main obstruction to the provision modern health care and teaching units in the city.

He said; 'one almost fears that nothing short of some social cataclysm, such as Communism, bankruptcy, or war, will be strong enough to break down old prejudices.'

He was to be proved right.

He retired from the University of Bristol in 1932 and was awarded an honorary D.Sc. in the following year.

In 1935 he was President of the Orthopaedic Section of the BMA.

He enjoyed travelling and motoring ,particularly to meetings of the Moynihan Club.

A good billiards player and a strong swimmer, it was his custom to dive from the top board at Henleaze Lake, since dismantled for health and safety reasons, and swim under water for an inordinate length of time, much to the consternation of onlookers, before surfacing again.

Remembering the poverty of his own youth, he was known to assist students with financial difficulties.

He lived to see the fulfilling of his prophecy of 1932 when the eventual amalgamation of the BRI and the BGH came with the outbreak of war in 1939.

During WW2 he worked as a group officer in the E.M.S., but collapsed with a stroke which rendered him helpless for many months.

He was nursed at Southmead Hospital but he died in his own home at 16, Richmond Hill, Clifton on 22nd October 1944, aged seventy two.

Hey Groves ,despite, or perhaps because of his unusual career pathway, succeeded in everything he set out to do. Even the eventual unification of the Infirmary and the Hospital came about in a way that he had predicted.