

## THOMAS BEVILL PEACOCK: QUAKER PHYSICIAN

**T**homas Bevill Peacock (1810-1882) was born in York into a Quaker<sup>1,2,3</sup> family – his parents were Thomas and Sarah Peacock. He was educated at a school in Kendal (under Samuel Marshall) and became apprenticed to John Fothergill, an apothecary/surgeon in Darlington. He came to London and became a medical student at University College but also attended St. George's Hospital for surgery. He qualified L.S.A. (Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries) in 1835 and became M.R.C.S. (Member of the Royal College of Surgeons) the same year. Following the Apothecaries<sup>4</sup> Act of 1815 Licentiates of the college were permitted to practice medicine (although initially this was opposed by both the physicians and surgeons). He was always a traveller and after qualification he became a ship's surgeon and visited Ceylon – he also studied for a time in Paris.

On return to England and for a short time he became a House Surgeon in Chester. However, in order to gain further qualifications he worked at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh where he acquired his M.D. in 1842. He then returned to London and became L.R.C.P. (Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians) in 1844 and F.R.C.P. in 1850. In London he was appointed physician to the Aldergate Dispensary in 1845<sup>5</sup> and also to the Royal Free Hospital at the same date.<sup>6</sup> (The Dispensary movement<sup>7</sup> is now a forgotten service but was in its time a major step forward in the provision of health care for the poor).

A Dispensary had been provided by the Royal College of Physicians from 1696 until 1725 when it faded out and John Wesley had started one in 1746 but this had lacked medical support and it was left to Dr. John Coakley Lettson (a Quaker) to pioneer the formation of the Aldersdate Dispensary in 1770. This Dispensary founded by local gentry (friends of Lettson) employed a physician, a surgeon and an apothecary, offered out-patient treatment and home visits to the local population. It is true that usually the patients had to have a letter of introduction from one of the governors (so that the very poor were still excluded) but, at a time when hospitals were still developing, the service was, as Loudon<sup>8</sup> had said (quoting Buers) "The Crowning glory of 18th century medicine is that it first attempted to bring such knowledge as it had, to the service of the





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mass of the people. The new figure was the Dispensary Doctor risking his life in the disease ridden hovels of the poor". Further, many rising physicians used the Dispensaries as a stepping stone to employment in the hospitals. Following the establishment of the Aldersgate Dispensary many more were started in the East End of London (often at the instigation of Lettson) and many big cities in the United Kingdom and abroad followed suit. Indeed many continued into the twentieth century and some (changing their function) have continued to the present time.

Peacock was, at this time, the only physician and sole medical voice on the Governor's Committee at the Royal Free Hospital.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup> He is recorded as caring for 80 children with cholera at the hospital referred from Tooting and only 4 died. In 1849 he was appointed assistant physician to St. Thomas' Hospital and when he left the Royal Free Hospital he was presented with a silver salver and the governors wished him well in his future career. At the same time he resigned from the Aldersgate Dispensary.

### **The City of London Chest Hospital<sup>13,14,15,16</sup>**

On March 13th 1848 certain gentlemen, perceiving the need for the provision of accommodation for patients with chest diseases, met at the London Tavern. At the meeting it was decided to form a sub-committee to "prepare a prospectus and mature plans" for such a project. This sub-committee met on April 11th 1848 at the same place.

Mr. Henry Edmund Gurney took the chair and the members of the committee were Mr. J.G. Barclay, Mr. J. Tucker, Mr. Samuel Gurney, jnr., Henry Tucker, Joseph Tucker, William Smee, Charles Gilpin, John Barclay, Edwin Fox, Richard Bentley, J. Williams, F. Fowler, Richard Trevs, John Pryer, John Fletcher, J.J. Purnell, Dr. H. Jeaffreson, Dr. Benj. Guy Babington, Thomas Bevill Peacock, Edward Bentley and Mr. Chas. Aston Key, surgeon. Of the committee thirteen were Quakers and so the importance of the Society of Friends in the foundation of the hospital can be seen. It has been said that Drs. Peacock and Bentley were the prime movers in the formation of the committee and Dr. Peacock particularly so through his contacts in the City.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Henry Gurney undertook the duties of Treasurer of the Institution and Messrs. J.G. Barclay and J. Tucker were elected Trustees. At the meeting it was agreed:-

- 1) To establish a hospital in some salubrious locality near the City.

- 2) That this hospital shall have for its main object the provision of accommodation for persons suffering from chest diseases who, although in rank above the very poor, are yet poor enough to be received in a charitable institution.
  
- 3) That until a hospital can be provided, a public dispensary in the City shall be maintained for the treatment of people affected with Chest disease. (It will be noted that still the very poor were not catered for – and this seems to have been the same at other dispensaries - they had to go to the workhouse). A house (No. 6 Liverpool Street) was purchased and opened as a dispensary on June 13 1848. Dr. Jeaffreson and Dr. Babington were Honorary physicians. Mr. Aston Key was the consulting surgeon, Dr. Peacock and Dr. Edward Bentley the acting physicians. Dr. Peacock and a small sub-committee were also delighted to find a suitable site for a hospital. Eventually this was found near Victoria Park and the Hospital settled here. The foundation stone was laid by the Prince Consort in 1851 and wards were opened in 1855. In all this Dr. Peacock exerted a major influence. When the hospital opened he remained the leading personality and was practically its controller. He served on nearly all the committees, he visited the hospital nearly every day and inspected and directed every detail, even to the position of every piece of furniture, including those in the sisters' rooms. His punctuality was legendary and it was said that a nurse would be stationed at a window to watch for his coming so that all would be ready for him. He was so particular about cleanliness that the mere scent of tobacco smoke was enough to upset him for a whole afternoon. He considered the Pathology workroom of the Hospital to be his own and resented any intrusion there. In spite of his strictness and austerity he was very kind hearted and spared no trouble if he could do any good. His patients at the hospital considered it an honour to have been treated by "the Doctor" remembering it even after twenty or thirty years.

Even though he was autocratic and fixed in his views he was the ideal man for the hospital at this stage in its development to establish it as a leading institution. Although he was physician to St. Thomas' Hospital it was said he always regarded the Chest Hospital as his special care. – These details are taken from a History of the Hospital<sup>13</sup> written in 1893 when his memory must have been still fresh.

**At St. Thomas' Hospital<sup>9,10,11,12</sup>**

In spite of his work at the Chest Hospital there is no doubt that he wielded considerable influence at St. Thomas' Hospital. At this time it was said that the hospital was "governed" by the Treasurer, the matron and the Apothecary and that Peacock had "the ear" of them all. He visited the wards, often at 8.30 a.m., and took copious notes on his patients. He was also much concerned in teaching both students and nurses. He lectured initially on Medicine and Materia Medica and was created Dean in 1855-6. His lectures were rather dry, although he is remembered as a quiet reserved man but kind. His students nick-named him "the Bird". He was created a full physician in 1860 and retired from work there in 1877 and was made a consultant physician, an honour not given to all physicians.

Apart from his hospital work he was a founder member of the Pathology Society<sup>18</sup> in 1846 and contributed many communications to the Society and publications in the *Transactions of the Society* – his publications were copious both in the *Transactions* and elsewhere. Many were concerned with diseases of the heart and lungs.

He was Secretary to the Pathological Society in 1850 and President 1865-1866. He delivered the Croonian lectures to the Royal College of Physicians in 1865 on "Some Causes and Effects of Valvular Diseases of the Heart".

Other publications included:-

Different Forms of Pulmonary Consumption – London 1870.,

French Millstone makers Phthisis – Rowland Brown – London 1862.,

Malformations of the Human Heart – Churchill – London 1866.

He was founder with Sir Jonathan Hutchinson and Dr. Saunders of the New Sydenham Society. He was always friendly with Jonathan Hutchinson and with Thomas Hodgkin, Joseph Lister, William Fox and Daniel Tuke formed a group of Quaker doctors who were prominent at the time.

In his private life he married Cornelia Waldick in 1850, the marriage was childless and she died in 1869. He was much upset by her death and the absence of children was said to have accounted, to some extent, for his rather cold demeanour – he had few intimate friends. Outside his work, his one passion was travel and on his annual holiday he visited North and South America and the Mediterranean Countries – some of the photographs he took still exist. He lived at 20 Finsbury Circus where he also ran a private practice – this was not large and devoted mainly to members of the

Society of Friends. In 1877 he suffered from a mild, left sided, stroke. He recovered from this only to suffer a recurrence on the right side in 1881. He collapsed in May 1882 while showing visitors around St. Thomas' Hospital and died in George ward. He was buried in the Friends Cemetery, Bruce Grove, Tottenham. He left an enormous library of some 500 books which he bequeathed to the Chest Hospital and which have been catalogued recently. It was suggested that a memorial should be erected to him in the grounds of the Chest Hospital, but it was felt that the Hospital was his memorial and that he needed no other monument. In 1998 the Chest Hospital celebrated its 150 year anniversary and this provided an opportunity to pay special tribute to Dr. Peacock and his work.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- <sup>2</sup> Munks Roll, *Royal College of Physicians*, (London, 1882), vol. IV, p.61.
- <sup>3</sup> *Lancet* obituary, 1882 (1), 1013.
- <sup>4</sup> C.R.B. Barrett, *History of the Society of Apothecaries*, (London: Elliot Stoke, 1905).
- <sup>5</sup> J.J. Abraham, *Lettsom*, (London: Heinemann, 1933).
- <sup>6</sup> The Archives of the Royal Free Hospital.
- <sup>7</sup> Sir Z. Cope, 'The History of the Dispensary Movement' in *The Evolution of the Hospitals in Britain*, ed. F.N.L. Poynter (London, 1964).
- <sup>8</sup> I.S.L. Loudon, 'Origins and Growth of the Dispensary Movement', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1981), p. 322.
- <sup>9</sup> E.M. McInnes, *St. Thomas' Hospital*, (London: Allen, 1963).
- <sup>10</sup> F.G. Parsons, *History of St. Thomas' Hospital*, (1936).
- <sup>11</sup> *St. Thomas' Hospital Reports*, 1882, N.S. XL, p.179.
- <sup>12</sup> *St. Thomas' Hospital Gazette*, June, 1891.
- <sup>13</sup> Anon, *A Short History of the City of London Hospital for Diseases of the Chest, Victoria Park*, (a pamphlet published privately), 1893.
- <sup>14</sup> *The London Chest Hospital*, (Transcript of annual report for 1848), written circa 1940.
- <sup>15</sup> Lady Butterworth, *The Story of a City Hospital*, (1928).
- <sup>16</sup> *The London Chest Hospital (1848-1948)*. From Centenary report for the year, 1947.
- <sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford, 1970), Ch. VIII.
- <sup>18</sup> See *Transactions of the Pathological Society*.

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