



Scots who made their mark on..... Medicine 5 : Philip and Orr



Sir Robert Philip (1857-1939)

TB Pioneer

A son of the manse, Govan born Robert Philip attended Edinburgh's Royal High School and in 1882 graduated MB CM from The University of Edinburgh in Medicine, before undertaking post-graduate studies in embryology and gynaecology in Leipzig, Berlin and Vienna.

The famous medical scientist Robert Koch had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1905 and whilst working in Vienna Philip read Koch's paper and saw images of the tubercle bacillus (TB) which Koch had managed to stain for the first time. At this point the Scot decided to make his life's work the study of the infectious killer disease pulmonary tuberculosis.

Returning to Edinburgh Philip graduated MD after a further four years' study. In the 1850's TB was causing around 15% of the deaths in the Western World and Philip was personally aware of its prevalence in his own country where the disease was endemic in the poor ventilated slums of our largest cities, yet no medication existed to tackle the disease. (An effective course of antibiotics like streptomycin would not be available until the late 1940's). People with TB or "consumption" the popular term for this phthisis were told that eating lots of fresh fruit and possibly moving to a climate where there was lots of fresh air was the best "medicine" - hopeless ambitions for pauper families.

Nevertheless in 1887 Philip opened the world's first clinic and dispensary for TB in Bank Street, Edinburgh and in the following decade this modest facility had with the support of his wife Elizabeth Motherwell and friends been reincarnated on Craighleith Road as The Royal Victoria Hospital for those suffering from advanced symptoms of TB. On the opposite side of the capital at Polton Philip built a sanatorium with a farm "colony" dedicated to supplying good nutrition, TB-free milk and scope for healthy exercise in isolated conditions, so reducing the capacity for infection. His approach came to be known as The Edinburgh Scheme and was much copied furth of Scotland.



The only known stamp for him was issued by Belgium in 1955 with a surcharge for Anti-TB funds.

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Oil on canvas portrait by Sir James Guthrie



Oil on canvas portrait by Herbert James Gunn

Sir John Boyd Orr (1880-1971)

"World Citizen"

The website of the Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health (part of the University of Aberdeen) applies the above sobriquet to its Founding Director John Boyd Orr, later Lord Boyd Orr of Brechin, CH, DSO, MC, FRS, recipient of the Nobel Prize for

Peace in 1949, the year in which he was knighted. He was the founding father of modern nutritional science.

The term is so apposite on account of Boyd Orr's work on nutrition which had a major international impact. Having founded the Rowett in Aberdeen (named after wealthy philanthropist John Quiller Rowett) Boyd Orr developed theories which first impacted on British health policy, one result of which was the provision of free school milk for primary pupils. He was the first to prove—what is now so obvious—that there was a link between malnutrition and ill health. His researches showed that in the mid 1930's one third of the population of Britain could not afford to eat a healthy diet. He masterminded the Carnegie Study of Diet and Health in Pre-War Britain which informed rationing policy once war had broken out.

Later, in the 1950's he became Director of the new U.N. Food and Agricultural Organisation where he strove to develop policies to promote the welfare of people in the poorest nations of the Third World, but he became frustrated with slow progress and advocated world government as the only way of solving the associated problems.

Born in Kilmours, Ayrshire, Boyd Orr attended Kilmarnock Academy and on graduating in Arts from The University of Glasgow in 1903 he taught for three years—an experience which first brought him face to face with child poverty. He then returned to university and graduated in Medicine in 1914, winning a gold medal for his thesis on starvation, water and protein metabolism. He then moved to Aberdeen first working in a basement lab at Marischal College. During the Great War he served as a medical officer in the trenches, for which service he was twice recognised and here again he saw the wretched health condition of many of the working class Tommies he treated.

After the war he returned to The University of Aberdeen and harboured a long held wish to create a properly funded institute which would focus on animal and human health and the Rowett Institute first opened in 1922. Its development over the next 25 years was down to the persistence and persuasion of its founding director, who so far has been honoured on overprinted Freedom from Hunger stamps in a 1972 spurious issue from Ghana and this equally spurious Nobel Prizes stamp from Liberia in 2001.



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