

# The Sir Richard Owen Lecture 2016 with Sir Barry Jackson

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October 24th marked the occasion of the sixth Sir Richard Owen Lecture in Lancaster. Between collecting Sir Barry from the train station and the start of the lecture I had 30 minutes to show him the old dispensary and Lancaster Castle where the young Richard Owen had developed his interest in anatomy.

Arriving at the Education centre, we were greeted by Kim Leong, President of the student's surgical society (ROSS) who had prepared a display featuring cupping, barber-surgeons and Thomas Howitt jr. We also spoke to Colin Melville, currently head of Lancaster Medical School, who had anaesthetised for Sir Barry when Colin was an anaesthetic trainee at St. Thomas's Hospital in London.

In my introduction to the lecture I mentioned Sir Barry's role as Chairman of the Plarr's Lives online editorial team. One surgeon who features on the website is Thomas Howitt jr. former Mayor of Lancaster who, in 1847, performed the first operation in Lancaster with general anaesthetic.

Sir Barry began his lecture with the famous photo of Richard Owen holding a large bone from the leg of a giant moa. He explained the role that Owen had played as curator of the Hunterian museum and leading scientist. The lecture was titled 'Famous operations and Operations on Famous people' and Sir Barry started with the latter part of the title. The first famous person was Samuel Pepys. Sadly Pepys's diary started almost 2 years after the notable operation but we were given a vivid description of 'cutting for the stone' in the pre-anaesthetic era. Removal of a bladder stone involved firstly inserting a thin silver instrument, the itinerarium, through the penis into the bladder to help control the stone. Then the surgeon then made an incision, about three inches long and a finger's breadth from the line running between scrotum and the anus, and into the neck of the bladder, or just below it. The patient's face was sponged as the incision was made. The stone was sought, found and grasped with pincers; the more speedily it could be got out the better. Once the stone was out, the wound was not stitched but simply washed and covered with a dressing, or even kept open at first with a small roll of soft cloth known as a tent, dipped in egg white. Pepys was fortunate to survive and celebrated the anniversary of the operation every year afterwards. The next famous person was Lord Nelson, who had had his arm injured during the battle of Tenerife in 1797. He was taken to a young surgeon called Thomas Eshelby who carried out an above elbow amputation using a simple circular incision, again without anaesthesia. The tradition at that time was to tie the vessels with ligatures and leave them long, dangling out of the wound. The wound was closed with skin tape. Unfortunately, one of the ligatures was tied around the median nerve resulting in severe pain which lasted several weeks until the ligature fell off.

The next famous person was Winston Churchill, who appears to have developed an abdominal hernia soon after the end of world war 2. Churchill was treated with a truss but over time this became less successful and operative treatment was indicated. By 1947, Churchill's health was starting to suffer partly because of the famous cigar

smoking habit. Sir Barry explained what was known about the operation and the surgeons involved.

Moving on to famous operations, Sir Barry started with the first operations with ether anaesthesia. Starting with John Collins Warren operating in Boston and then describing the amputation performed by Robert Liston in London later the same year (1846).

The next operation was one of particular interest to Sir Barry as it involved the gall bladder. In June 1867 John S. Bobbs was asked to see a young lady with a large right sided abdominal tumour. At operation, the tumour was incised and green bile and numerous gall stones were identified. This turned out to be the world's first cholecystotomy and was followed in 1882 by the first cholecystectomy (1882). Sir Barry informed later in the evening that he had been a prime mover in introducing laparoscopic cholecystectomy to St. Thomas's Hospital in London.

The final famous operation also had a personal link with Sir Barry as the surgeon involved had been his landlord in London. Harold Ridley was notable not only for performing the first intraocular lens replacement but also for pioneering the televising of surgical procedures. It turns out that a medical student called Steve Parry had asked Mr Ridley why, when removing a cataract, replacement for the lens wasn't inserted. Ridley had observed how well tolerated plastic foreign bodies had been in the eyes of WW2 pilots and used this as the basis for designing an artificial lens. The first such IOL operation took place at St. Thomas's in November 1949.

Sir Barry finished his lecture with a great photo taken during a recent visit to the Natural History museum in London. After Richard Owen had left the Hunterian museum he had campaigned tirelessly for the establishment of the Natural History museum and it was fitting that Sir Barry finished his lecture with a recreation of the famous photo: this time with Sir Barry himself stood beside the giant moa's leg.



Thanks: Leigh Pinches, Kim leong. Photo by Wendy Savage