

The 2014 Sir Richard Owen Lecture

Bryan Rhodes, FRCS (Orth)

This year's lecture took place on 27 October and was the fourth in the series. As a way of setting the scene for the lecture, my brief introduction was followed by a special showing of the silent movie 'War!' featuring rare footage of the Lancaster Pals and the Morecambe volunteers. Commentary was provided by Peter Donnelly, Curator of the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regimental Museum.



Thomas Scotland

Thomas Scotland is a retired orthopaedic surgeon with a passion for the poetry and surgical history of World War One. His incredible lecture was peppered with trench poetry, but also managed to convey all the key facts about the surgical history of the war. The first half of the lecture explained the complex evacuation pathway for the casualties of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Anthony Bowlby, consulting surgeon to the BEF, had realised early in the war that the conditions in France and Flanders and the pattern of injuries produced would necessitate early surgical intervention close to

the front lines. This led to the establishment of small mobile hospitals termed Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS), in which casualties were triaged and early operative treatment performed. For those who were fortunate to have operations in a CCS (about 10% in the battle of the Somme), the mortality rate was low at under 5%.

The second half of the lecture focussed on orthopaedics and the tremendous improvements that were introduced during the war. Mr Scotland emphasised the changes brought about by leading surgeons such as Henry Gray and Robert Jones. These included better splintage with the Thomas knee splint, early surgical debridement, the development of specialist orthopaedic centres in the UK and increased emphasis on rehabilitation for amputees.

As a tribute to Mr Scotland, I played a track from the new CD 'Centenary of Words and Music from the Great War' by Show of Hands, featuring a version of 'For the Fallen' by Laurence Binyon.

Poetry recited by Mr Scotland

1. 'Recruiting' by Ewart Alan Mackintosh
2. 'The Last Laugh' by Wilfred Owen
3. 'Does it Matter?' by Siegfried Sassoon
4. 'The General Inspecting the Trenches' by AP Herbert
5. 'Memorial Tablet' by Siegfried Sassoon
6. 'When you see millions of the mouthless dead' by Charles Hamilton Sorley

Further Reading

War Surgery 1914-18. Eds. Thomas Scotland and Steven Heys. Helion & Co. 2012
Understanding the Somme. Thomas Scotland and Steven Heys. Helion & Co. 2014

Coming soon in the Spring 2015 issue of the MBMJ
Military Medicine special