

Sir Archibald Gray (1880-1967): an appreciation.

Archibald Gray is a towering figure in the history of dermatology, both in the United Kingdom and worldwide. He was central to establishing dermatology as a mainstream specialty in the United Kingdom of the early twentieth century. At his suggestion (in 1919), the British Association of Dermatology and Syphilology (BAD), as it was then known, was founded in 1920-21. This provided financial support to the British Journal of Dermatology, of which he was editor from 1916 to 1929. Gray's role as secretary of the dermatology section of the 17th International Congress of Medicine, held in London in 1913, had already made him an international name in the specialty.

Archibald Montague Henry Gray was born in Ottery St Mary, in Devon, in 1880. His father, Frederick Archibald Gray MRCS, was a general practitioner, and his mother, Louise Frances Waterworth, was daughter of a schoolmaster, John Waterworth, from Cheltenham. His great-grandfather, William Gray, had been a naval surgeon. Archibald Gray was educated at Cheltenham College and University College Hospital in London, from whence he graduated MB BS in 1903, with honours in obstetrics. His initial career at UCH and Soho Square Hospital for Women was in obstetrics and gynaecology. He proceeded to an honours MD in that specialty, in 1905, obtaining the MRCP London in 1907, and the FRCS England the following year. Fate, though, intervened. The death of Radcliffe Crocker in 1909 led to an opening as physician in diseases of the skin at UCH, and Gray, seeing little prospect of immediate progress in obstetrics, seized the opportunity and, after a six-month apprenticeship with Josef Jadassohn at Bern, was appointed to the substantive post, one that he held for 37 years. Gray's influence led to four five-bedded wards at UCH, with facilities at the medical school. He also developed an interest in paediatric dermatology and was on the staff at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, 1920-34.

After appointment to UCH, Gray quickly became active at the Royal Society of Medicine, where he was council member of the Dermatology Section from 1913 (President 1931-33), and he held various positions at the Society generally, including that of President of the RSM (1940-42; Figure 1). During the First World War, Gray was attached to the War Office, with the rank Lt-Colonel RAMC (TA), and after hostilities he continued an association with the forces as a member of a government committee on medical services to the navy, army and air force (1931-33).

Gray's involvement with the 1913 International Congress of Medicine at London, particularly as secretary to its dermatology section, was the springboard for an international profile. He was vice-president of the 8th International Congress of Dermatology at Copenhagen in 1930, and president when the congress was held in London in 1952, in addition to being an honorary member of twelve foreign dermatological societies. Gray was active in London medical politics, co-conceiving London University's Postgraduate Medical Institutes, out of which came the Institute of Dermatology in 1945, where he chaired the management committee until 1960. His wartime service was recognized with appointment to the CBE in 1919, and his later work by a KBE in 1946 and a KCVO in 1959. Gray was a prominent orator who had an interest in the history of medicine. He gave the Malcolm Morris lecture in 1945, the Harveian in 1951 – on 'Dermatology since the time of Harvey', and the Prosser White in 1954 – on 'Founders of modern dermatology'.

However, it is Gray's role in the establishment of the BAD for which he is best remembered. One substantive motive of his was to bring together dermatologists from the provinces with those in London, since medical affairs were then much concentrated in the metropolis. Gray was instrumental in the founding of the association and in establishing a firm financial footing. He was President 1938-39, and Treasurer 1940-60. His canny offer of a donation of £2,500 from the association, in 1957, towards the new building of the Royal College of Physicians at Regent's Park, secured the Willan Room in perpetuity at the college. The BAD honoured Gray with the establishment, in 1963, of a medal in his name, awarded for outstanding work in dermatology.

Archibald Gray is said to have been 'diminutive' in stature and 'somewhat shabbily dressed' (quoting Stephen Gold). In 1917 he married Elsie Cooper (1881-1971), daughter of Bernard Cooper, a solicitor of Newcastle-Under-Lyme, and matron of St George's Hospital before her marriage. They had a son, John, who became professor of physiology at UCH, and a daughter, Sybil, who married into a medical family in Dorset. Gray died after a disabling illness, in Hampstead, on 13 October 1967 at the age of 87. He always will be remembered by dermatologists for his outstanding contribution to establishing dermatology as a mainstream specialty.

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Figure 1: Archibald Gray in the office of President of the Royal Society of Medicine (from Bewley, Levell, Dowd, 1997, who reproduced it with permission of the Royal Society of Medicine).

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Figure 1



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