

ROWLANDS, ROBERT PUGH (1874 - 1933), chief surgeon of Guy's Hospital

Name: Robert Pugh Rowlands
Date of birth: 1874
Date of death: 1933
Spouse: Alice Maude Rowlands (née Piper)
Parent: John Rowlands
Gender: Male
Occupation: chief surgeon of Guy's Hospital
Area of activity: Medicine
Author: Melfyn Richard Williams

born at Tywyn, Meirionnydd on 27 Sep. 1874, the son of John Rowlands. When he was two years old the family moved to Abaty Cymer, Dolgellau. He was educated at Llanelltyd school and at Dolgellau grammar school. At the end of his time there, he succeeded in securing a place for himself as an apprentice for a year with Dr. Hugh Pugh Rowlands. He went up to Guy's Hospital medical school, London, in October 1892. He had an exceptionally brilliant career there. In his first year he won the Arthur Durham prize, the Michael Harris prize for anatomy in 1894 and the first prize in 1895 and 1896. The following year he was awarded the Treasurer gold medal for surgery and medicine. After further training as a house surgeon in the hospital he resolved to obtain surgical qualifications. After obtaining a place at the University of London he went on to win the gold medal in anatomy at the end of his first year. In 1902 he graduated with an M.B. and he was awarded the University scholarship and gold medal in medicine. He became an F.R.C.S. in 1901; he obtained a B.S. degree in 1902 and an M.S. in 1903.

Throughout the whole period of his studies for his examinations in the University of London he was also teaching in the medical school. In 1899 he was appointed a demonstrator in anatomy and biology, in which post he remained until 1905. In the same year he was promoted to become a surgical registrar and in 1906 to become a lecturer and demonstrator in practical surgery and Professor of pathological surgery. Before the end of the year he fulfilled his lifelong dream when he was appointed assistant surgeon at the hospital.

During the years leading up to World War I his reputation as a surgeon grew and in 1914 his work and responsibilities increased markedly. As he was a member of the Territorial Army, he was attached as a surgeon to the second London general hospital and he also took the post of surgeon to Hall Walker hospital and the Russian hospital in the city. He had to work exceptionally hard during the war years and this affected his health. During one air raid he walked from Queen Anne St to Chelsea, and having arrived at the hospital, he worked throughout the night. Having finished his work there, he walked back, and performed twenty-seven operations the following day.

In July 1918, aged only 44 years, he was promoted to become a full surgeon at Guy's Hospital and a lecturer in surgery. In 1922 he was elected to the council of the Royal College of Surgeons and in 1927 he was the co-editor of the seventh edition of Jacobson's work, *Operations of Surgery*. He had already co-edited the volume in 1907 and 1915. In 1929 he was appointed Bradshaw lecturer to the Royal College of Surgeons and his chosen subject was surgery to the bile duct and gall bladder. In July 1930 he was appointed vice-president of the Royal College of Surgeons which appointment he held until July 1932. For his work in his profession he was awarded the O.B.E.

He developed exceptional speed in his craft by perfecting his surgical style, an essentially simple technique, based on his instinctive and thorough knowledge of anatomy and his firm judgement. He was always ready to confront the unexpected by rearranging the normal pattern of parts of the body. He believed firmly, contrary to the practice at the time, that not too many bandages should be used after surgery and he encouraged his patients to sit up in bed very soon and to get up as soon as it was possible. He was the most talented and well-known surgeon of Guy's Hospital. He contributed extensively to medical journals on a variety of subjects: e.g. ' When and how to operate for appendicitis ', *British Medical Journal*, 1910; ' Time in Surgery ', 1916; ' Cancer of the colon ', 1927; ' The surgery of the gall bladder and bile ducts ', 1929; and ' Cancer of the stomach ', 1933.

According to his contemporaries, Robert Pugh Rowlands was born a Welshman and died a Welshman, because he himself confessed to thinking in Welsh while speaking English. He married Alice Maude, the daughter of Edward Piper, Bodiam Manor, Sussex in 1905 and they had two children. He died on 6 December 1933 after a short illness.

Author

Melfyn Richard Williams

Sources

Guy's Hospital Gazette, 47 (1933)

Guy's Hospital Reports, 84 (1933)

H. C. Cameron *Mr. Guy's Hospital, 1726-1948* (London 1954)

Who was who?, 1929-40, 1176

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