

# The development of Plastic Surgery in the West Midlands Region

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**Summary**—The sixth of a series of histories of Plastic Surgery Centres adapted when necessary (by A. F. Wallace and C. W. Chapman) from records forming part of the Archives of the British Association of Plastic Surgeons.

## **North Staffordshire—The Beginnings**

The first to practise plastic surgery in the West Midlands region, as in the country as a whole, was evidently none other than Sir Harold Gillies. Among his many appointments listed in the Medical Directory for 1935 (but not previously) is that of Consultant Plastic Surgeon to the North Staffs Royal Infirmary, Stoke on Trent. The appointment, therefore, presumably dated from 1934.

The North Staffs, however, cannot claim to be the first hospital in the country outside London to appoint a visiting plastic surgeon. Apart from the well-known pioneer activities during and immediately after the 1914–18 war, first at Aldershot and then at Sidcup, that honour would seem to go to the Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital at Alton, to which T. P. Kilner was appointed in 1931. Gillies's association with the North Staffs appears to have continued from 1934 until 1945/6 after which he is described as "Plastic Surgeon Emeritus."

The North Staffs also appears on the list of appointments of A. H. (later Sir Archibald) McIndoe from 1937 when he was assistant to Gillies at Bart's and his partner in private practice. His association with Stoke seems to have continued after Gillies's withdrawal from there until 1949 from which time it is no longer mentioned. It is not clear how frequently Sir Harold or Sir Archibald were able to travel to Stoke especially during the war.

However, the North Staffs may be able to claim priority in another respect, as the first hospital outside London to have its own plastic surgeon on the spot. J. Grocott was apparently a native of the area who qualified at Guy's in 1933 and, after house appointments there, returned to Stoke at first as house surgeon to the North Staffs Royal Infirmary.

He retained his appointment at Stoke until he retired at the end of 1974; but he also held others, as Consultant Plastic Surgeon to Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hospital, Mansfield from 1945 to 1950; Consultant Surgeon to the Park Hospital, Macclesfield from 1945 to 1950; and Associate Plastic Surgeon, Leicester Royal Infirmary 1948 to 1950.

After he had withdrawn from these latter appointments he was followed by D. Wynn-Williams at Harlow Wood, and Leicester appointed its own plastic surgeon in M. H. Kinmonth. Both these centres are outside the West Midlands region. Grocott continued to practise general as well as plastic surgery at Stoke for some years, but later confined himself to his chosen speciality. More will be said of Stoke and North Staffs in due course.

## **Early days in Birmingham**

The first University Teaching Hospital outside London to appoint a plastic surgeon was Manchester, to which T. P. Kilner became attached in 1935; and the second was Birmingham which also appointed him in 1937. He had already been at St Thomas's since 1934 and with Gillies at Bart's since 1930.

The debt which we all owe to those two pioneers in the years between the wars is not relative but absolute; nothing less than the survival of the specialty as such in this country. Of the immensity of their workload there is no doubt. R. J. V. Battle became chief assistant to Kilner at St Thomas's in 1938 and his private assistant also; he has told us of Kilner's regular programme at this time. In addition to his private practice, he had two sessions a week at St Thomas's, one at St Andrew's Hospital, Dollis Hill, one at Roehampton and one at the

Shadwell Children's Hospital. He spent 3 weekends out of 4 working out of London, one each at Birmingham, Manchester and Alton. This lasted until the outbreak of war.

As Grocott became the "Man on the Spot" at Stoke, so did a local man in Birmingham. J. N. Sankey was a Birmingham graduate who qualified in 1923 and took his fellowship in 1926. Apart from an interlude in London as RSO at Queen Charlotte's, he climbed the surgical ladder at his own training school, being Casualty Surgeon in 1931, Surgeon to Outpatients in 1935, Assistant Surgeon in 1940 and Full Surgeon in 1943. His entry in the Medical Directory for 1940 includes "Plastic Surgeon, Birmingham and Midland Skin Hospital." This institution also specifically figures in Kilner's list of attachments. Evidently Kilner encouraged this local graduate in the same way that Gillies encouraged Grocott, with the result that the United Birmingham Hospitals became the first teaching hospital outside London—and the third in all—to have a plastic surgeon "on the spot" (though not at this stage, one who was exclusively devoted to plastic surgery). Sankey also developed a specialist plastic surgery unit outside Birmingham, situated first at Barnsley Hall near Bromsgrove (a large mental hospital—one may note the analogy with Park Prewitt), and then at Wordsley Hospital, near Stourbridge which had been a "workhouse", in the grounds of which a hutted EMS annexe had been built.

When the NHS was formed in July, 1948 the scene was set for a regional service under Sankey based on the centre at Wordsley and the teaching hospitals in Birmingham. At this critical time Sankey had a sudden coronary occlusion and died at the age of 49. He had the reputation of a "character" and a "workaholic" who continued with general as well as plastic surgery and had a large private practice.

During the war, and just before and after it, Kilner and Sankey had not been the only plastic surgeons with interests in Birmingham. Rainsford Mowlem appears in the Medical Directories from 1938 to 1948 as "Plastic Surgeon to the City of Birmingham at Selly Oak Hospital." Subsequently he continued to take an interest in the Birmingham Accident Hospital which had opened in 1944, going there to see patients and operate when necessary, at first fortnightly, then monthly and finally on request until his retirement in 1962.

It will thus be seen that during these early years all of the "Big Four" in British plastic surgery—

Gillies, Kilner, McIndoe and Mowlem—played their part in the West Midlands.

### The NHS and after: 1948 to 1973

When the National Health Service came into existence on the 4th July, 1948 the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board covered an area defined by the five counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire. Although the Local Government reorganisation of 1974 altered the details of the counties, the area covered remained the same and the total population was approximately 5 million.

The unexpected death of Sankey in 1948 left the Birmingham teaching hospitals and the recently created Birmingham Regional Hospital Board with a gap to fill. Moreover, Sankey had been a general as well as a plastic surgeon and the teaching hospitals had to decide whether this combination should continue or whether a specialist plastic surgeon should be appointed; agreement had to be reached with the Regional Hospital Board on whether he should have commitments outside the teaching group and if so, what these should be. It is perhaps not surprising, considering the various committee decisions which had to be taken, that there was an interregnum of many months. During this time Emlyn Lewis visited from his Unit which was then situated in Gloucester, some 50 miles away, and kept things going at Wordsley.

When the arrangements were finally completed and the appointment advertised Lewis was an applicant and fully expected to be appointed, but he was not and the lot fell upon O. T. Mansfield. He had qualified from the Middlesex Hospital in 1938 and been a surgical registrar there and RSO at Great Ormond Street before going on to complete his training with Mowlem at Hill End Hospital, St Alban's, where Mowlem's Unit was situated before it moved to Mount Vernon. Mansfield took up his duties in March, 1949, with operating sessions and beds at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, outpatient sessions at the General Hospital in the City centre and at the budding Regional Centre at Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge some 12 miles out of the city to the west. In addition he had regular outpatient clinics at Coventry 18 miles east and paid a monthly visit to the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry—about 56 miles to the north-west—at which he both saw outpatients and operated. Later he also did outpatient clinics at Shrewsbury. His dental colleague at Wordsley was

J. S. Knight who had worked with Sankey. At Wordsley there was created a good dental laboratory and a small photographic department, both of which were greatly expanded subsequently.

Other facilities were to follow later as a result of much effort but at the beginning things were primitive as the present writer well remembers. Hutted adult wards were of the open plan type and heated by two enormous coke stoves which belched out fumes in the middle of the wards, and the theatre was another converted hut whose worn floor displayed strange vagaries of contour until a proper terazzo surface was laid. The children's ward in the main hospital block was shared with the paediatricians and general surgeons but was equipped with cubicles as well as open plan areas and the valuable paediatric advice on the spot was an advantage rather than otherwise. The only problem was the shortage of children's beds. Upgrading of the hutted wards and theatre was soon started and as time went by they became very pleasant to work in.

These alterations were under way, but not completed by 1952, when it was possible to appoint a second plastic surgeon. J. F. North took up this post in December 1952. He had qualified in 1941 at St Thomas's and after house appointments and 3½ years' war service with the Royal Navy, had returned to St Thomas's to obtain surgical experience and take his FRCS. This achieved, he had gone in March 1948, through the influence of Battle, to Kilner's Unit at Stoke Mandeville to train in plastic surgery. At the time of his appointment to the post at Wordsley he was employed as a locum consultant (for 3 months) in Newcastle.

North's main sessions were at Wordsley and he was also to provide a service to those outlying areas of the region where need was demonstrated. The first of these was Hereford, some fifty miles southwest of Birmingham and the centre of a large mainly agricultural area. It also drew patients from a considerable area of central Wales. These factors, and its relative isolation from the densely populated midlands, resulted in the local hospital staff being keen to offer both outpatient and inpatient facilities to a plastic surgeon and North carried out three sessions a week there with an average occupancy of six to eight beds. Later there was considerably more industrial development in Hereford and the work load increased.

Less remote hospitals offered outpatient facilities but not beds so that North took up outpatient clinics first at West Bromwich, then at Burton on Trent and then at Sutton Coldfield as well, of

course, as at Wordsley where both he and Mansfield saw the patients who tended to be drawn from the Dudley, Stourbridge, Wolverhampton and Kidderminster areas. The largest single outpatient clinic was Mansfield's at the General Hospital, Birmingham which served the whole of Birmingham itself. Selected patients from this clinic were treated at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital; the remainder and those from all other clinics except Hereford were treated at Wordsley.

The junior staff at this time consisted of senior registrars in both plastic and dental surgery. These were joint appointments between Wordsley and the teaching hospitals and had been in existence from the early stages of the NHS. There was also a lady clinical assistant—Mrs Jean Clark—who had been a senior registrar in plastic surgery with Hynes at Sheffield and was now married to an orthopaedic surgeon; she did some five sessions. After her retirement through ill health this work was carried out by Mrs P. M. Ball, FRCS. To start with there were no "middle grade" registrars and no houseman at Wordsley. At the Queen Elizabeth there was the shared use of a houseman.

A dental SHO was appointed at Wordsley soon afterwards and there was a series of temporary visitors in plastic surgery from overseas of registrar status. A registrar did not become part of the regular establishment until about 1960.

The next major development in the region was the establishment of a separate consultant post at Coventry and Nuneaton covering the eastern part of the region. Derrick Dencer, a Birmingham graduate who had been senior registrar from the establishment of that post, was appointed in 1957. For a time he retained a foothold in Wordsley with the particular object of allowing him access to dental collaboration until his own dental colleague should be appointed, but this state of affairs was relatively short-lived.

The position now was that there were two plastic surgeons at the Regional Unit at Wordsley, one of whom also had beds at the teaching hospitals and the other at Hereford, and both carried out peripatetic sessions elsewhere. There were also the two independent single-surgeon Units in the region run by Grocott at Stoke and Dencer at Coventry and Nuneaton. This was to remain the state of affairs for some years.

#### **The treatment of burns**

Mention should now be made of the treatment of burns. The pattern differed from that in most other

regions because of the establishment of the Medical Research Council Burns Unit at the Birmingham Accident Hospital in 1944. This was originally under the charge of a bacteriologist, Leonard Colebrook, who rapidly enhanced his already great reputation by the quality of the work done there. The actual surgery such as skin grafting seems at first to have been carried out by a series of different people, including W. P. Dallas Ross who later became an anatomist of note, with visits from Mowlem. The first surgeon in charge of the Burns Unit was D. McG. Jackson who was appointed in late 1948. He had been a surgical registrar at Guy's, a surgical specialist in the RAMC and a research fellow in surgery at Harvard; and he proceeded to add to the national and international reputation of the Burns Unit over a period of many years. He never claimed to be a plastic surgeon and, indeed, specifically disclaimed the title, although we were glad to elect him to full membership of the BAPS; but he was skilled in skin transplantation as well as in other aspects of the care of the burns patient. After a few years, J. S. Cason, who had been a registrar in plastic surgery for 2 years at Stoke Mandeville, was appointed as the second surgeon to the Burns Unit.

With a unit of this calibre in central Birmingham it was not necessary for the Regional Plastic Surgery Unit also to be the Burns Unit and the MRC Burns Unit acted in fact as the Regional Burns Unit.

Cases of burns which presented as localised areas of tissue destruction such as electrical or molten metal burns were accepted for treatment at Wordsley when they occurred; however, major burns tended to be treated at the Accident Hospital.

Burns were also treated at the more distant centres by Dencer at Coventry and Nuneaton, Grocott at Stoke, and North at Hereford; though in the latter case, by amicable agreement and in the interests of the patients, the worst cases were transferred at an early stage to the Accident Hospital in Birmingham.

### Other developments

Other developments at Wordsley in the late 1950s and early 1960s included the appointment of a consultant orthodontist to the Unit in 1957 and of a second consultant dental surgeon, or oral surgeon as they were shortly to be called, in 1962. The orthodontist was A. G. Huddart who, in addition to providing the orthodontic service to a number of

hospitals in the region, took a special interest in the treatment of cleft lip and palate. This interest had developed when he was working with Burston in Liverpool; before long his plastic surgery colleagues at Wordsley realised the great contribution which he was able to make and were glad to take advantage of it. Regular joint clinics became established and much work was done on the use of pre-surgical dental orthopaedic treatment in cleft cases. Huddart's published work bears witness to his tireless and meticulous follow-up of these children into adult life. In co-operation with his plastic surgery colleagues he was also a leading light in the formation of the Cranio-Facial Society, the first meeting of which was held at East Grinstead and the second at Wordsley.

The second oral surgeon was M. S. Jones, a Birmingham graduate who had worked for a time at the Eastman Clinic in London before returning to the senior dental registrar post in Birmingham and Wordsley. He had been in his consultant post for only a little over a year when his senior colleague, J. S. Knight died prematurely in 1964. This was a sad loss because Knight's colleagues had found his helpful co-operation and team work of immense value. It was a compensation that Jones was already in post and the second oral surgeon's post was shortly filled by C. L. Brady. The contribution made by Jones and Brady to the Unit in subsequent years is not only to be measured by the extremely high quality of their own work but in their enthusiastic help in maintaining the team atmosphere. The present author has, indeed, been fortunate in his colleagues.

During this period the senior registrars in plastic surgery had been D. Dencer, already mentioned, who became consultant at Coventry and Nuneaton; K. C. Condon, who came from Ireland and returned there to establish plastic surgery in Cork; I. A. Omari from Baghdad, who returned there and is a leading plastic surgeon in Iraq; B. V. M. Corps who obtained a consultant post at Dundee and Bridge of Earn; and D. F. Cort. Of these last two more will be said.

Meanwhile the senior registrars in Oral surgery had been A. F. Hamilton, who became a consultant at Gloucester and Cheltenham; J. R. Moore, who became Professor of Oral Surgery in Manchester; M. S. Jones, who has already been mentioned; B. H. Jackson who subsequently became a consultant in Bedfordshire; M. R. Bromige, later consultant in Nottingham; D. Allen, now consultant in Hull; and I. D. Campbell, now consultant in Wigan.

### The last ten years: 1973–83

In early 1973, O. T. Mansfield was ill and off work for some months. He decided that the time had come to retire and though he was able to return to work until the arrangements for his replacement had been completed, his activities were necessarily limited. Fortunately D. F. Cort had already been in post as senior registrar for several years, was fully trained and ready to accept the increased responsibility that resulted, without the need for an outside locum. He had qualified in 1959 at St George's Hospital where he had been surgical registrar, later received his early training in plastic surgery at Roehampton. He had come to us as senior registrar in 1969.

At the United Birmingham Hospitals the relevant committees decided that it would be possible to increase the sessions devoted to plastic surgery; there was even talk of a possible appointment of a plastic surgeon to spend his whole time within the teaching group. North was consulted and strongly pressed the view that to detach the teaching hospital from the regional centre would downgrade both and that if additional sessions were available in Birmingham they should be divided between two surgeons both of whom would also have duties at the regional centre. Fortunately this view prevailed and the opportunity arose for further development on a regional basis. The Birmingham Regional Hospital Board, shortly to be merged into the West Midlands Regional Health Authority in the "re-organisation" of 1974, were co-operative. North took up sessions at the teaching hospitals at the beginning of 1974 and Cort was appointed to the other joint post in May, 1974. North had to give up his peripheral commitments and an additional post was created for a surgeon to take over these and also to have sessions at Wordsley. To this third post J. H. Goldin was appointed and started work in November 1974. He had qualified in Capetown in 1962 and had held appointments at Groote Schuur Hospital before coming to this country. He then worked with D. N. Matthews in London, at first on a supernumerary basis, then becoming senior registrar at St Thomas's. He had a particular interest in the surgery of congenital deformities including cleft lip and palate and craniofacial deformities. At Great Ormond Street he had been closely associated with Matthews's work on the Tessier approach to craniofacial deformities, and in Birmingham he was able to carry out a number of operations of this kind after establishing links

with the neurosurgeons, in particular A. D. Hockley. In the meantime, Cort had continued and expanded the collaboration with the ENT surgeons at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, especially G. A. Dalton, and much radical ablative and reconstructive work was done in cases of malignant disease of the head and neck.

An Advisory Committee in Plastic Surgery and Burns was set up by the West Midlands Regional Health Authority, of which North was the first chairman. This committee put forward a strategic plan for the future development of the speciality in the region in which the first priority targets were the expansion of the consultant establishment of the Regional Centre to four, of the Accident Hospital Burns Unit to three and of the peripheral centres at Stoke and at Coventry/Nuneaton to two each.

The additional post at the regional centre materialised towards the end of 1979 and D. S. Murray was appointed. Murray was an Edinburgh graduate who, after house appointments, had a rotating appointment at Liverpool which gave him his early experience of plastic surgery. He had come to Wordsley as registrar and had been with us in this capacity for 2 years before being appointed to the senior registrarship when Cort vacated it in 1974. Murray had sessions at Wordsley; this provided an opportunity to rationalise the earlier system whereby one surgeon had at the same time commitments in the centre, at Hereford 50 miles to the south-west and at Burton on Trent 40 miles to the north-east. The system had persisted since 1953; it was partly corrected by Murray's taking over Goldin's sessions at Hereford. Murray also started an outpatient clinic at Wolverhampton. Goldin continued his other sessions and established new ones at the East Birmingham Hospital, later also expanding his activities at West Bromwich (now known as Sandwell since the "reorganisation" of both the NHS and local Government); he was able to start in the newly built Sandwell District General Hospital with operating sessions as well as an expanded outpatient service.

At the end of April 1982 North retired. His place at Wordsley and the teaching hospital was taken by J. D. Nancarrow who also took over Goldin's commitments at Burton on Trent. Nancarrow was a graduate of St Thomas's Hospital who, after house appointments, had been SHO in plastic surgery at Nottingham. He then obtained further experience in general surgery followed by another SHO appointment in plastic surgery at Bristol.

From this he came to Wordsley as registrar, succeeding to the senior registrarship when Murray left it at the end of 1979.

There were other changes in the region after 1973. In late 1974 Grocott retired from Stoke on Trent and was replaced by B. V. M. Corps, who has been previously mentioned as senior registrar and who had gone as a consultant to Dundee. For a few years after his formal retirement Grocott continued to carry out some sessions at Oswestry.

The plan was that when accommodation could be found for an additional consultant at Stoke the newly established two-man centre could cover and expand the commitment to the service at Oswestry. Unfortunately this expansion at Stoke has not yet materialised. Grocott finally retired in 1980 and went to live in the Isle of Man. After Grocott's final retirement Corps managed to provide a limited service to Oswestry in addition to his commitments at Stoke.

The long-awaited third consultant post at the Burns Unit was approved in 1978. Unfortunately this coincided with the retirement of D. McG. Jackson and it proved difficult to find one suitable person to assume an exclusive commitment to burns, let alone two. A. R. Groves was eventually appointed. He was an accredited plastic surgeon who had been senior registrar at Chepstow and a locum consultant for a while at Norwich. Later still the third post was filled by J. P. Gowar, also an accredited plastic surgeon who had been senior registrar at Roehampton.

In 1982, the planned second appointment in Coventry/Nuneaton was approved (after a prolonged struggle) and in October Groves moved to take it over. Cason, who had been due to retire, extended his appointment while a successor could be sought but sadly Cason died in March 1983, leaving Gowar the sole consultant at the Burns Unit for the time being.

The last three senior registrars in plastic surgery have taken part in an exchange for 6 months with a registrar from the Burns Unit, in order to give them additional experience of burns. The present senior registrar at the time of writing is A. Bracka, who took up his post in May 1982. Both the senior registrar and the two other registrars work with their consultants at the teaching hospitals and at

other hospitals also, which gives them a breadth of experience of great value in their training as well as contributing to the efficiency of the service.

#### **Stop Press: 1983-1986**

Since 1983 there have been developments at the Regional Centre at Wordsley Hospital providing increased ward and theatre accommodation. With greater facilities, microsurgical work has expanded as has hand work, links being established with the rheumatologists. Murray and Nancarrow have taken special interests in these aspects, while Cort has continued to expand his malignant work and Goldin his paediatric and craniofacial interests.

A third oral surgeon, Mr K. Lavery (formerly senior registrar at East Grinstead), has been appointed and started work in October 1986.

At the Burns Unit at Birmingham Accident Hospital, Mr Gowar was joined by Mr P. L. Levick in March 1984, and the filling of the third post is under active discussion.

#### **External activities**

O. T. Mansfield served for some years as a member of the Editorial Committee of the BAPS.

J. F. North served two terms on the Council of the BAPS and one as its representative on the Board of Surgical Specialties of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

M. S. Jones has served on the Council of the British Association of Oral Surgeons, later the British Association of Oral and Maxillo-facial Surgeons and was its president in 1983.

P. L. Smith has been chairman of the Institute of Maxillo-facial Technology, and this gave an opportunity to recognise the fine work done by this department at Wordsley, particularly in the prosthetic field.

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