

THOMAS, WILLIAM THELWALL (1865 - 1927), surgeon

Name: William Thelwall Thomas
Date of birth: 1865
Date of death: 1927
Spouse: Anabel Thomas (née Spence)
Parent: Elizabeth Thomas (née Hughes)
Parent: John Thomas
Gender: Male
Occupation: surgeon
Area of activity: Medicine
Author: Emyr Wyn Jones

Born at Liverpool in February 1865, the second child of **John** and Elizabeth Thomas. The parents at that time were members of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist chapel in Rose Place, but fourteen days after his birth the family transferred their membership to the newly opened chapel in Fitzclarence Street. Thelwall Thomas was closely associated with that chapel as member and Sunday school teacher for many years, until the pressure of hospital duties prevented his regular attendance. Thomas was ever conscious of the essentially Welsh background of his upbringing, and of the great debt that he owed to his parents. It is recorded that his decision to become a doctor was made at the age of 14 whilst walking with his father in Cwm Bowydd, Ffestiniog. He retained his interest in Welsh affairs throughout his life; he spoke Welsh fluently, and in 1925 he was one of the presidents of the Royal National Eisteddfod at Pwllheli. Until the day of his death he was a consultant to the Welsh C.M. Foreign Missions, and he was also consulting surgeon to the King Edward VII Welsh National Memorial Association.

After receiving his early education at Liverpool Institute, he entered upon his medical course as a student at Glasgow and took the Scottish triple qualification and the M.R.C.S. (Eng.) in 1886. After graduation he took up resident posts at Liverpool royal infirmary and was appointed assistant surgeon there in 1892, having been admitted F.R.C.S. two years previously. In 1907 he became full surgeon and in 1913 he was elected professor of Regional Surgery at the University of Liverpool - he held these two posts until his retirement in 1923. To these offices Thomas brought brilliant intellectual gifts. He was a lucid, imaginative, and forthright clinical teacher, and was recognised as being one of the most dexterous surgeons of the day. He possessed executive ability of the highest order and introduced many original and often revolutionary ideas into the operating theatre; and at the same time his conscientiousness was proverbial. His administrative abilities were devoted to the establishment of the new University Medical School on a firm basis and he was undoubtedly one of its foremost architects. His hard struggle during the early days gave him a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties of students and he was much beloved by them.

At the outset Thomas made a brave decision to devote himself to consulting practice. There was no surgeon in Liverpool before his day who entirely restricted his practice to surgical patients, and he needed all his courage and determination to sustain him through the difficulties of the early days. Success, once it came, was overwhelming and spectacular; but Thomas, when he attained his full stature, remained unspoilt and unembittered. He remained a friendly, genial, and hardworking man, and rendered innumerable kindnesses - generously and secretly - to colleagues and patients.

Among the many posts of distinction held by Thelwall Thomas, special mention may be made of his presidency of the section of surgery at the British Medical Association meeting in 1913; his presidency of the Liverpool Medical Institution in 1918-19; his membership of the council of the Royal College of Surgeons of England from 1921 until his death, and membership of the General Medical Council in 1926-27.

In 1892 he married Anabel, daughter of Alexander Spence of Huntly, Aberdeenshire; they had no children; she died in July 1927, and Thomas died suddenly whilst reading in his study at Allerton, Liverpool, on 10 September 1927.

Author

Emyr Wyn Jones, (1907 - 1999)

Sources

The Liverpool Daily Post, 12 and 17 September 1927

British Medical Journal, 1927, ii, 520 (with portrait)

The Lancet, 1927, ii, 632 (with portrait)

Y Brython, 22 September 1927

Plarr's Lives of the Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons, 1930, ii, 404

address delivered at the memorial service in Liverpool cathedral by the Rev. D. Francis Roberts, printed privately in 1927

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [William Thelwall Thomas](#)

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