

GOUGH, JETHRO (1903-1979), Professor of pathology

Name: Jethro Gough
Date of birth: 1903
Date of death: 1979
Gender: Male
Occupation: Professor of pathology
Area of activity: Medicine
Author: Alun Roberts

Born 29 December 1903 at Woodland Street, Mountain Ash, Glamorganshire, one of the eleven children of Jabez William Gough, trader and proprietor of a bus company, and his wife Ellen (née Mortimer).

Determined to pursue a medical career from an early age and having excelled at Mountain Ash grammar school, Jethro Gough entered the Welsh National School of Medicine (then part of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire) in 1921. Having won the Alfred Sheen Prize and a distinction in physiology during his preclinical training he obtained the MRCS LRCP qualifications of the Conjoint Board in 1926 before graduating with the MB BCH of the University of Wales a year later, with distinctions in several clinical subjects.

Keen from the outset to pursue an academic career Gough's first substantive appointment was as a demonstrator in the Department of Pathology at the Welsh National School of Medicine in the autumn of 1927. At this time there was growing tension between the authorities of the School and some of the clinicians at the Cardiff Royal Infirmary over the clinical teaching arrangements, and relations deteriorated to such an extent that clinical teaching ceased for the 1928/29 session, forcing a whole cohort of Cardiff students to complete their undergraduate training elsewhere. Jethro Gough, like some other academic staff, found the situation uncongenial and he chose to take up a junior post at Manchester University. As he explained to the School Secretary in January 1929, 'I deeply regret the circumstances which have led me to take this step, but I feel that I can make better progress elsewhere'. Fortunately for all concerned normal service at the School was soon restored and by the autumn of 1929 Gough was back in Cardiff having successfully applied for the post of assistant lecturer in his old department. The report of the selection committee to the School authorities could not have been warmer in its tone. 'His work while on the staff of the pathology Department of this School was characterised by such originality and promise as to stamp him a man of outstanding merit and one who will go far; thus confirming the indications given by his brilliant undergraduate career'. In 1930 he became the third person (after Daniel T. Davies and J. W. Tudor Thomas) to obtain the MD of the University of Wales, for his thesis on 'Mitochondria', and three years later his status was upgraded from assistant lecturer to lecturer in pathology.

During the 1930s Gough's main research interests related to the metabolism of Vitamin C and the histology of brain tumours, but as his post mortem work brought him into constant contact with the health problems of the south Wales miners, he became increasingly interested, from the late 1930s, in the study of pulmonary pathology in general and coalworkers' pneumoconiosis in particular. The war years were extremely busy for the Department of Pathology. It took on substantially increased responsibilities, overseeing the development of new pathological laboratories in the main hospitals throughout Wales and providing suitable training for their staff. From 1944 the department also became responsible for the distribution of penicillin to hospitals in Wales and training hospital doctors and general practitioners in its use, particularly in the treatment of those wounded in battle.

At the end of the war, while John Bright Duguid, his head of department, pursued pioneering studies on arterial disease, Jethro Gough continued his own research into pneumoconiosis. During the 1930s it had been generally accepted that silica, encountered underground, was the cause of pneumoconiosis among workers in the coal industry. However, Gough's studies into the working conditions of coal trimmers in the docks of south Wales, who never went underground, led him to conclude that it was coal dust rather than silica which caused pneumoconiosis among workers in the coal industry, a discovery which gained Gough an international reputation. Indeed, his work in relation to coalworkers' pneumoconiosis would prove to be the basis of workmen's compensation legislation in Britain and abroad, especially in the United States, where he gave evidence to various bodies on the issue. He was particularly proud of his appearance before the Committee on Labour and Public Welfare of the United States Senate in 1969. The National Union of Mineworkers in Britain celebrated Gough's pioneering work by establishing, in the Welsh National School of Medicine, the Jethro Gough Prize in Pathology in 1974 'in acknowledgement of the contribution made by Jethro Gough to the wellbeing of the miners of the world'.

In 1948, when J. B. Duguid moved from Cardiff to take up the chair of pathology at the University of Durham, Jethro Gough was appointed in his place, becoming the first former student of the Welsh National School of Medicine to occupy one of its professorial chairs. In the same year his research credentials led to his appointment as a member of the Industrial Pulmonary Disease Committee of the Medical Research Council. In the years that followed he enhanced the standing of his department in other ways too. In collaboration with J. E. Wentworth, a senior member of his technical staff, he developed what came to be known as the Gough-Wentworth large lung section technique, a major advance in the study of pulmonary pathology, which again earned for the department a world-wide reputation. Indeed, the School's annual report for 1949/50 proudly stated that 'the work of the department on pathological aspects of pneumoconiosis and large section technique continues to attract wide interest and brought visitors during the year from many distant parts of the world'. During the 1952/53 session for instance the department welcomed visitors from Australia, Canada, South Africa, the United States, Norway, Rhodesia, New Zealand, Holland, India, New Guinea and Switzerland. Gough was equally in great demand as a speaker at overseas conferences during the post-war years, being a particularly regular visitor to Harvard and other universities in North America.

His high standing in the profession and, indeed, his forceful personality, soon established Jethro Gough as a leading member of the School of Medicine, in the mid fifties being referred to by Provost Trevor Jones in his diaries as 'a first-class fellow ... achieving a reputation and also bringing credit to the Medical School'. He served as Vice-Provost between 1954 and 1956 and was one of a small group of colleagues to whom Trevor Jones looked to for advice on matters relating to the development of the School. He was undoubtedly a major influence in the advance of his speciality in post-war Wales and was one of the founders of the College of Pathologists in 1962 (it was awarded a royal charter in 1970). Elected as a member of the Council of the College from 1963 to 1966 he served as one of its vice-presidents from 1966 to 1968 when he resigned due to ill health. In 1967 he was made an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of London, and two years later he finally retired from the Welsh National School of Medicine.

In 1934 Jethro Gough had married Ann Thomas, a fellow pupil at Mountain Ash Grammar School and, a strong support during his professional career, she provided devoted care during his last years of failing health. After his death on 16 February 1979, he was cremated at Thornhill, Cardiff following a service conducted by the minister of Bethel Baptist chapel, Whitchurch where his wife was a member. They had two sons, one of whom followed in his father's footsteps as a pathologist at the Welsh National School of Medicine.

Author

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