



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Eldred Wright Walls, MD, FRCS, FRCSE, FRSE - Obituary

Citation for published version:

Findlater, GS, Gillingwater, TH, Kristmundsdottir, F & Parson, SH 2008, 'Eldred Wright Walls, MD, FRCS, FRCSE, FRSE - Obituary', *Journal of Anatomy*, vol. 213, no. 3, pp. 230-231. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7580.2008.00923.x>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1111/j.1469-7580.2008.00923.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7580.2008.00923.x)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Journal of Anatomy

Publisher Rights Statement:

Available under Open Access.
Copyright © 1999–2013 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



that Professors of Anatomy would attend all the meetings of the Society, and to give a paper in front of Le Gros Clark, G. A. G. Mitchell, the Harrisons (Ronald and Richard), Hamilton, Yoffey *et al.* was an intimidating experience.

Eldred was a fine orator, and he was called upon to give eponymous addresses to various Royal Colleges and to the Society of Apothecaries. He was also a skilled writer, and in 1950 he edited a new edition of John Hilton's *Rest and Pain*, and in 1958, together with Sir Gordon Gordon-Taylor, he wrote a biography of Charles Bell. He was also one of the section editors of the 'big' *Cunningham's Anatomy*.

But as notable as all these achievements were, Eldred Walls' major contribution was as a teacher and as an innovator in anatomical and medical education. As a classroom lecturer and dissecting room teacher he was peerless. His tall, almost cadaveric, figure combined with his military bearing, sonorous voice, meticulous manners and formal dress (he often wore a black coat and striped trousers, and even when 'relaxing' in a three-piece suit he still wore a stiff collar) commanded (he never had to resort to demanding it) respect. He was a consummate, ambidextrous, black-board artist who could in an hour, with a combination of vivid imagery (his use of himself and his white coat to portray the uterus, uterine tubes and their peritoneal relationships was a 'show-stopper') and clear, logical exposition, bring clarity to the parotid and its relationships, or to the thalamus and its connections, or to the pelvis, its viscera and their nerve supplies. He could have 'stippled' for Scotland, and if there had been an Olympic event in the lost art of 'stippling' he would have been a serial Gold Medalist. His lectures remain the most vivid memories of my medical education, and I suspect the same is true for my colleagues. He was equally at home with four or five people (but that number would soon swell to several dozen) around a dissecting table in the dissecting room, where he would attend as often as his Deanly duties would allow. His ability to take a scruffy student dissection and turn it into a work of art never failed to astound and impress us students.

Yet it would be wrong to equate Eldred's outward formality and respect for tradition with a disdain for modernity, for anatomy teaching in the 1960s at The Middlesex Hospital Medical School was as up-to-date as any at that time. Surface, radiological and clinical anatomy were, as US politicians are prone to say these days, 'in the DNA' of Middlesex students, and I am confident they maintain that

tradition whenever it is their turn to teach. Eldred was also a champion of an appropriate anatomical education for Physiotherapists, and was President of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy for seven years, and President of the Blind Chartered Physiotherapists from 1967 until his death, for they refused his entreaties to 'find a younger man'.

Given his talents, and his evident love of anatomy teaching, few of us were surprised when after six weeks of retirement in Edinburgh, Eldred was to be found teaching anatomy to Edinburgh medical students, which he did for eight years, until he was 70. But his second attempt at retirement was no more successful than the first, for this time in *less* than six weeks he was to be found in the bowels of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh where he worked for a decade as a Prosector, until he stood down aged 80 to care devotedly for his wife. He was particularly proud of his Fellowship of that College, and of its Farquharson Award, because as he liked to put it, 'I think they know I come from Glasgow'.

This brief chronicling of Eldred Walls' professional life is a reminder of both how fast things have changed in Anatomy, and how in another sense, nothing has changed. The research skills Eldred acquired early in his professional life saw him through a whole research career. But think how their long half-life contrasts with the half-life of the skills that are needed to remain competitive in research today. Yet Eldred's teaching skills are timeless, and his emphasis on clinical and functional anatomy is as important now as it was then.

We were privileged to have been Eldred's students, but we did not bargain on his exceptional 'after-sales service'. For via letters written in his handsome copper-plate handwriting and couched in his inimitable prose, he maintained a correspondence with many of his students, dispensing, where appropriate, advice, encouragement, commiseration and congratulations. He treated us as his professional equals when we were students, and he continued to do that until his death.

It was my privilege to follow in his footsteps at The Middlesex Hospital Medical School and in the ASGBI. But I was even more privileged to count him as friend and advisor, and to have been one of the many recipients of his kindness and wisdom.

Bernard Wood

E-mail: bernardawood@gmail.com

Eldred Wright Walls, MD, FRCS, FRCSE, FRSE

The distinguished anatomist Professor Eldred W. Walls died in Edinburgh on 24 March 2008, aged 95.

Eldred undertook medical training at the University of Glasgow before moving to Cardiff and subsequently to

the Middlesex Hospital Medical School as a Reader in Anatomy in 1947. In 1949 he took up the S.A. Courtauld Chair of Anatomy at the Middlesex before serving as Dean of the Medical School from 1967 to 1974. He retired in

1974, but continued to play an active role in Anatomical and Surgical training right up until his death. In his final years post-retirement, he contributed to teaching postgraduate students at the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh and undergraduate medical students at the University of Edinburgh. An active member of the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland since 1936, Eldred served as Treasurer from 1955 to 1963 and as President from 1963 to 1965. Many eminent anatomists and clinicians currently or previously filling leading academic and clinical posts around the globe have been inspired at one point or another by Eldred, thereby leaving a bequest that is impossible to overestimate.

We fondly remember his later years, teaching anatomy classes to undergraduate medical students in Edinburgh right up until the year before he died. His broad knowledge of anatomy, boundless enthusiasm, razor-sharp mind and friendly demeanour made students hang on to his every word. His approach to teaching students in the

dissection room never failed to create a sense of wonderment, where ladies ('my dears' as he affectionately called them) were asked to be seated in a line with the gentlemen standing behind. From there he would deliver a treatise on the subject in hand, of which any Shakespearean actor would surely be envious. Eldred's warm humanity and humility meant he always found time to encourage and motivate students and colleagues alike, an attribute that endeared him to all who had the fortune to come into contact with him.

He is survived by two children, Andrew and Gwyneth.

Gordon S. Findlater

Thomas H. Gillingwater

Fanny Kristmundsdottir

Simon H. Parson

College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine,

University of Edinburgh, UK

E-mail: t.gillingwater@ed.ac.uk