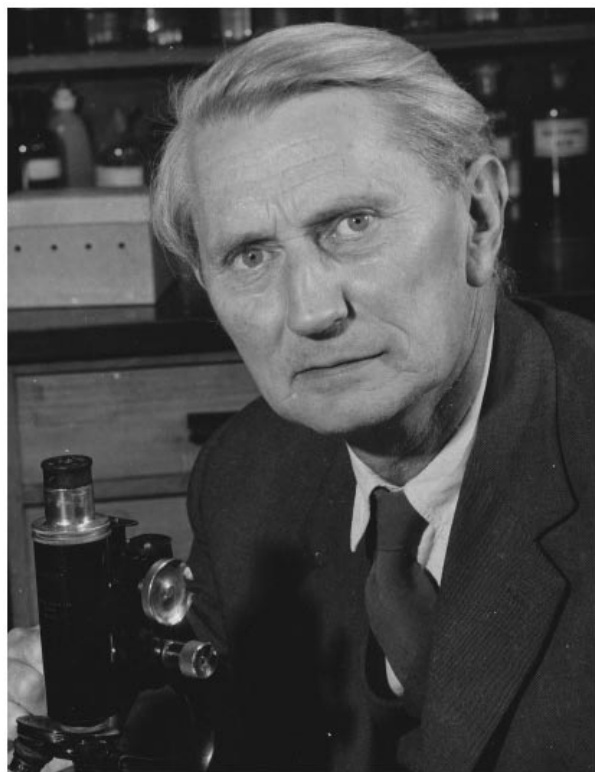


Obituary

FRANK GOLDBY, F.R.C.P., M.A., M.D.

(1903–1997)



Frank Goldby, Emeritus Professor of Anatomy in the University of London at St Mary's Hospital Medical School (now Imperial College School of Medicine at St Mary's) died at Cambridge on 20 October 1997, aged 94, fully compos mentis as those who knew him would have expected, and content enough to go when he had to, having reached the same age as his father. He became a member of the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1931, served as Secretary from 1946 to 1956 and as President from 1957 to 1959. He is survived by his wife Helen and 6 children, to whom our deepest sympathy is extended.

Born at Enfield, Middlesex, he was the eldest of 3 children of a pharmaceutical chemist noted for his skill at photography and interest in the new development of x-radiology. He attended Mercer's School at which he won a Tancred Scholarship to read natural sciences at Gonville & Caius' College, Cambridge. He obtained a First, and while originally inclined towards physics, decided to do medicine following an extra year on a college scholarship doing research in embryology. He took his clinical training at King's College Hospital Medical School, London,

where he qualified in 1926–27. After several resident house jobs at King's during 1927–28, it is clear that he had decided on an academic/laboratory career, which he embarked on as assistant clinical pathologist at King's College Hospital (1929–30), taking his Membership during this period. He then switched to Anatomy, serving firstly as chief demonstrator at University College London (1931). Elliot Smith was the head of department, and it was under his influence that Frank early became interested in the comparative anatomy of the nervous system. While here also, he met his wife, Helen, the daughter of a Lord of Appeal and a graduate of Somerville College, Oxford, taking courses in archaeology and anthropology: the spark was lit at a 'dig' on the downs of Wiltshire. She accompanied him on his next appointment as lecturer in charge of anatomy at Hong Kong University (1932–33) and they were married there. Here was aroused in both of them an early interest in chinoiserie. Returning to England he was appointed university lecturer in anatomy at Cambridge in 1934, and was elected to a fellowship at Queens' College. He was awarded his M.D. in 1936 on a thesis dealing with the comparative anatomy of the reptilian brain and in 1937 he went with wife and 2 children to Australia, to occupy the Elder Chair of Anatomy at the University of Adelaide until 1945.

This move now seems puzzling. Anatomy in Britain was beginning to escape its image as a purely descriptive and gross morphological study engaged in by fussy pedants, and to expand to include dynamic and experimental observations related to function made by scientists regarded as the equals of those in other disciplines. Le Gros Clark had recently been appointed professor at nearby Oxford. With his increasing interest in neuroanatomy, and his evident pride in his fellowship, surely Cambridge must have appeared to Frank to be an ideal situation in which to carve out a career in this expanding and exciting subject. It has been said that the department was very poorly equipped, and that he did not get on with the professor of the time, and certainly this man seems not to have been the easiest person to relate with. Perhaps he may have wanted to be in charge of his own department or there may have been a hankering to return to the East. After 8 years in Australia, he was appointed in 1945 to the chair of anatomy at St Mary's Hospital Medical School, University of London, and after a wartime voyage of over 3 months

diversionary progress dodging submarines, he and Helen, now with 5 children, arrived at Tilbury to set up home in a large rambling house in Gipsy Hill. This was his final move and he retired as Professor Emeritus in October 1970.

In later years he would look back to the time in Australia as one of pleasant memories with a growing family in a social environment and climate which suited them, though he himself remarked there was so much sun that one really longed for a dull English day. Maybe this was a factor influencing his return, though it is probable the main reason was a feeling of academic isolation and the desire to have the children go on to higher education in England. There is little real information remaining about his professional activities at this period, but he extended his research investigations to the brains of the local monotremes and marsupials on which he became an authority, and especially on the olfactory system and ‘rhinencephalon’, areas which were to become one of his main interests in the future. He published mainly in *Journal of Anatomy*. There is one experience he used to tell of, and which he recounted in an interview published in *St Mary's Hospital Gazette* in 1960. He went for 2 weeks with physiological colleagues to act as a ‘real’ white control for investigations they were conducting on aboriginals of a tribe near Oodnadatta in the scorched and barren Musgrave range. The physiologists were interested in the ability of the naked aboriginals, with little or no shelter, to withstand without damage the extremes of temperature between the burning day and the freezing night. His contribution was to lie for hours in a tent from early afternoon until after sundown beside a naked local while serial measurements of their skin temperatures were taken; he likewise was clad only in his presence of mind. The results were inconclusive and never published, and there are no photographs extant. He brought back to England with him some aboriginal artefacts, and several skulls which later provided material for practical classes on physical anthropology in the B.Sc. course at St Mary's.

When Frank Goldby arrived at St Mary's in 1945, now aged 42, the war was just ending, and the Department was somewhat run down and short of staff. The great J. Ernest Fraser had retired in 1940 to be succeeded by J. H. Gray who died in 1942 at the age of 32, apparently due to a research experiment on himself going wrong. The fort was being held by Fraser's long-time assistant and collaborator (since 1920), R. Harold Robbins, but he was anxious to hand over and retire. Recruitment of staff to help build up the department and cope with the new influx

of students, many of whom had served in the forces, must have been a priority. Jack Pritchard, affable Australian Rhodes scholar was appointed reader, with C. A. Erskine as senior lecturer, and Gordon Menzies, K. A. Swales, and Peter Davey as lecturers. Erskine left for the chair at Trinity College, Dublin after a year, followed by Pritchard to Belfast in 1952, by which time Swales and Davey had also left. There was little continuity. I was appointed lecturer in 1949, and John Gamble in 1952, Angus Bellairs being recruited as reader to replace Pritchard in 1953. The position remained stable thereafter until Gamble went to St Thomas' to be replaced by Tony Hoyes in 1964. It could be said that Frank had to deal with an essentially transient staff during his early years in charge of the department, and this must have presented difficulties for him in organising and consolidating the teaching, and getting research programmes going. In addition, money for equipment was scarce, the departmental grant meagre, and the idea of soft money support for anatomy almost unheard of. There is no doubt but that these factors prevented him from reactivating his own research for a number of years, and that by the time the position improved, he felt he was more or less past making any further major contribution. This was a great pity, since he had a questioning mind and great practical skill, and clearly foresaw the directions in which neurobiological research was developing, as can be seen from the four masterful reviews he contributed to *Recent Advances in Anatomy* (1961) of which he was coeditor. He compensated to some extent by encouraging his younger colleagues to get started by feeding them ideas and guiding their early efforts. He helped the young P. K. Thomas to prepare his first presentation to the Society, set John Gamble to work on degeneration and regeneration in peripheral nerve, and myself on the brains of aquatic mammals; a number of overseas postgraduates also successfully passed through the department, joyfully bearing PhDs back home. With one of these he pioneered the introduction of the coypu, then infesting the fenlands of East Anglia, as a laboratory experimental animal. But, due to the ferocious nature of the beasts and their formidable teeth and claws, the practice never caught on, and there was no vicuna for academic wives. He wasn't in any sense a leader of a team, and was even diffident to adding his name to papers on work to which he had significantly contributed. He found considerable satisfaction in this role of mentor, and considered it an important part of his function as Head of Department. A measure of his success is the fact that 4 of the permanent tenured staff appointed

since 1949 were eventually awarded Personal Chairs in their subject in the University of London, and one went on to succeed him. Not bad for a small department with little or no turnover of staff over a long period. He was clearly a good judge of raw material.

A premedical course in biology was still being offered at St Mary's for some years after Frank's arrival, and the reader, Charles Foster, with 2 lecturers, was also responsible for the teaching of histology for the M.B., B.S. first and second year Anatomy courses. Foster taught very good courses and was justly very jealous of this responsibility, becoming increasingly so as biology was gradually wound down, and he eventually became the sole member of his department. The arrangement meant that the anatomists had no control over what was becoming an increasingly important part of their subject, especially with advances in cell biology, an area in which several were actively engaged in research. Some thought Frank should have been more firm in bringing this situation to an end, but his innate kindness and understanding of Foster's fear of 'being taken over' led him to stay his hand. He partly got round the problem by organising additional 'anatomy practical classes' in which specimens were put out for the students to examine and comment upon; much of the material in these classes was microscopic in nature, and derived from the neuroanatomical and other researches in progress from time to time. The guiding textbook was Le Gros Clark's *Tissues of the Body*. He also organised with Angus Bellairs an 'introductory course' of lectures and practical classes on more general aspects of comparative and developmental anatomy which was very popular with the students.

Apart from these changes, and the early introduction of a small-group tutorial system for teaching of topographical anatomy, he was never directly involved in what might be termed 'innovations' which were increasingly being discussed at the newly sprouted Curriculum Committee, or with 'integration', horizontal, vertical, or in any other dimension. Other members of staff had a free hand to indulge their whims or interests in these respects within those areas under their individual control, but he contented himself with following any developments with polite interest. Throughout his tenure, students were required to dissect the entire body, and he regularly attended dissecting room sessions, so that he was in regular contact with the students, and they knew who he was. He being obviously somewhat shy and reserved in manner, none would ever think of

addressing him by his Christian name, and in fact, none of the staff apart from Angus Bellairs did either. Angus had been a tutee of his at Queens', had been actively recruited by him, and there was an indefinable special relationship between them. This did not confer any particular privileges on Angus; in fact it could at times prove a bit of a liability for him in minor situations of differences of opinion at staff meetings when his support was considered to be more automatic than that of others. This is not to suggest that Frank was a petulant head of department. In fact he was always approachable and supportive to his colleagues, and there were no tensions between the staff. The department was too small to sustain cliques. Every year in the summer he and Helen would entertain the entire staff, academic and technical, at a party at Gipsy Hill, and later when they moved, at Little Venice. These were very enjoyable occasions, and underlined the fact that the department was a pleasant place to work in. Much of the credit for such a situation rests with the man in charge, and his attitude of allowing his colleagues a wide degree of autonomy in their teaching and research activities allowed them to develop their potentials without interference from above. Staff meetings were largely for information and rubber-stamping of decisions already taken and acted upon by individuals, rather than exercises in formulating general departmental policy and strategy. The students also prospered well enough under this regime, and a steady stream took intercalated B.Sc. courses, of which Frank was an early enthusiastic supporter.

In assuming the secretaryship of the Anatomical Society so soon (less than a year) after his return, Frank Goldby immediately found himself placed at the centre of the British postwar anatomical scene. This was buoyant and expanding, with many notable characters already in place or about to become heads of departments. Among those in London were Cave at Bart's, J. Z. Young, Sholl and Jack Aitken at University College, Eldred Walls at the Middlesex, D. V. Davies at St Thomas', Mary Lucas Keene and Ruth Bowden at the Royal Free, Tommy Nichol at King's, Warwick at Guy's, and Richard Harrison at the London (reader-in-charge, 'too young' to be a professor!) and Hamilton at Charing Cross. In the provinces were Le Gros Clark and Graham Weddell at Oxford, Dixon Boyd at Cambridge, Yoffey at Bristol, R. G. Harrison at Liverpool, Solly Zuckerman at Birmingham, and G. A. G. Mitchell at Manchester. Over the northern border were Romanes at Edinburgh, and Lockhart and R. J. Scothorne at Glasgow. McConaill, poet of anatomists, presided at

Cork, and Pritchard was at Belfast. Some list, when you consider what each did for the subject. Many of these became firm friends of Frank's over the 10 years he served as secretary, the second longest term in the history of the Society since its foundation in 1887. Meetings were heavily attended with up-and-coming youngsters of the next generation making their first presentations for comment by their seniors. But there were a few of the old brigade still around. Wood-Jones could be heard arguing with Le Gros Clark over some detail of a bony fragment of an early forerunner of Man, and Brash was still putting in appearances. The load must have been fairly heavy, and Frank was a most conscientious secretary, hardly missing (if ever) an ordinary or committee meeting during his term of office, or afterwards, during his subsequent 2 years as president. There is no doubt that his interest in and devotion to the Society further restricted the time he could devote to his research, and it was one more factor that led to this gradually tailing off. He was an equally active president, and an important meeting organised under his chairmanship was one on 'The Ultrastructure of Cells' held in April 1959 at University College. A highlight was Dave Robertson on camera dismantling and stripping down a Siemens Elmiskop 1. Shortly afterwards, The Wellcome Trust donated an electron microscope to the department at St Mary's, and it is significant that Frank himself never operated the instrument. Its arrival effectively dates the end of his research career.

In addition to his services to the Society, Frank in later years became increasingly involved in administrative duties at St Mary's. Apart from serving on the usual committees which all heads of departments had to attend, he became deputy dean and a member of the school council. During Albert Neuberger's prolonged illness he took over the running of the Wright-Fleming Institute of Microbiology, which involved further meetings and dealings with several prickly characters. He became a mainstay, a kind of elder statesman within the School. In 1962 he took a rest by spending a sabbatical at the University of Illinois in Chicago, leaving the department in joint charge of the 2 readers. He expressed genuine relief to find it still functioning on his return. During his last 5 years he took a renewed interest in the dissecting room teaching, clearly enjoying being able still to instruct the young in an area in which he had not become outdated, and relieving his colleagues of a load some of them found irksome.

Just before his retirement, looking ahead to future developments, Frank Goldby remarked to his successor that he felt he was leaving at just the right time. He foresaw developments in teaching and organisation which he thought he would not find agreeable, though he was no reactionary. But he could not have foreseen the extent of the current widespread obsession with the mechanics of teaching and the processes of learning, which is in danger of stifling the very qualities of initiative and individuality amongst staff and students which it claims to foster. Neither could he have foreseen the fate of the department which he served so well over 25 years. It is to be demolished and partitioned in the process of becoming part of a conglomerate, and the school of which it was a part will no longer exist in its honoured name. (Where will they say penicillin was discovered? South of the park?) It is not alone in this fate. In the name of 'rationalisation' and 'progress', the unique arrangement which existed in London, of individual autonomous university medical schools, each associated with a teaching hospital, is being destroyed. There is a loss of esprit de corps, and a lowering of morale, which will take some time to recover. It all seems rather sad, and one can imagine Frank's quietly expressed frowning disapproval at the prospect as he drew on his, more often than not, unlit pipe. But the other institution to which he devoted so much of his time, the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland, continues to flourish, and his name will always be an honoured and respected one in its annals.

Immediately after he retired, he and Helen went to live in a cottage at Fowlmere near Cambridge, later buying a town house in the city itself. On the sound principle of 'The King is dead, long live the King' he never again set foot in the department he had headed, though he was always glad to have news of it. He was not a hanger-on. At Cambridge he renewed contact with his old college, Queens', and spent much of his time rebinding many of the books in the library there. He practised this art to a professional standard, and was also a skilled carpenter/cabinet-maker. The bookshelves with which he lined his room at Mary's still stand loaded. He left his mark on his medical school, his subject, and his professional society, and influenced a large number of people in their careers. They will always remember him with gratitude and affection. There was more to him than he revealed.

A. S. BREATHNACH