

From a Row and a Row to the presidency of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons
The story of Henry Simpson Newland
By
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Many feel that history has doubtful value and prestige and is indulged by the retired or senescent. But knowledge of the past helps us to manage the present and prepare for the future. Ortega Gasset the historian said;

“To excel the past
 We must not lose contact
 We must feel it under our feet.”

History may offer neither benefit, appeal nor solutions but we do get the opportunity to examine alternative. It is exciting. We must constantly seek what is closest to the truth, but at the same time not throw away the best of the past. The word history is derived from the Greek “enquiry”. Our enquiry must be meticulous in order to enjoy the labour of others wisdom.

And so to Newland. His grandfather was taught in a Congregational Church College by Dr Simpson whose name was given to his son. He was unhappy with the power of the Church of England and migrated to South Australia where he was advised to take up land at encounter Bay where Matthew Flinders had met the Frenchman Nicolas Baudin.

The 1896 Intervarsity Boat Race was a great race won by Adelaide and a crew of mostly medical students most of whom were highly successful. Both pronunciations of the Row and Row played significant influences on Newland’s life. On one hand it was the Adelaide Hospital row of 1896 that changed his life and on the other hand it was his association with rowing that helped him to succeed.

He was born in Kensington in Adelaide in 1873. His life should have been a ‘dream run’. His grandfather was a founder of South Australia his father was a Member of Parliament with considerable properties. Newland attended St Peters College with a year off in Europe to broaden his education. His scholastic life was not distinguished. He won a prize in Scripture but little else. His classics master was JH Lindon whose daughter diverted his studies to the effect that he married her 20 years later. Lindon’s son married the daughter of Dr Marten who was Newland’s partner in private practice. Adelaide society was tight!

He struggled to matriculate to enter the Adelaide University Medical School in 1892. He only just passed his early university examination and struggled to hold his seat in the university rowing eight. He was taught anatomy by Archibald Watson who was also involved in the ‘black birding’ of South Sea Island Natives to Queensland.

His physic teacher was Sir William Bragg who was involved the the early work in X-rays. Both he and his son were awarded Nobel Prizes in Science. The son Robert was injured in Gallipoli his surgeon was Henry Newland. His [Newland] surgical teacher was Benjamin Poulton who removed my father’s toxic goitre in 1908. He was a final year in 1896 and looking forward to graduating and becoming a house surgeon at the Adelaide Hospital.

Fate intervened. Two years earlier there had been a difference of opinion in the appointment of the Night Matron [at the Adelaide Hospital]. The hospital Board backed by the nursing and medical staff made a recommendation which was rejected by the Chief Secretary whose niece was another

applicant. The hospital was in turmoil. The Nursing Committee resigned and was backed by the Medical Staff committee which also resigned.

Teaching of students ceased. Fortunately for the final year students AA Lendon and the Adelaide Children's hospital agreed to the tuition for their final term. They graduated but there were no House Surgeon appointments because the consultant staff had resigned. It was the end of the hospital and the Medical School for 6 years.

He continued to row in the successful eight which did not win another intervarsity for 40 years. Adelaide had little to offer Newland.

He had read about the great surgeon Treves at the London Hospital and decided to 'give it a go'. When he arrived his Adelaide degrees were not accepted so he had to become a medical student again and became MRCS.LRCP. but told he would be unlikely to get a house surgeon appointment.

He learnt that Treves was the President of the Rowing club and so turned up at training and was selected for the Inter-hospitals race. The London was leading when a seat broke and they were passed by St Georges in whose boat was Dr Edward Wilson later medical officer to Scott of the Antarctic. Treves recognised Newland and he obtained the coveted position of House Surgeon.

At this time ether was displacing chloroform and oxygen and nitrous oxide became available and blood transfusions were attempted, as they were in Melbourne by Julian Smith, a member of Newland's' Adelaide rowing eight.

In the back garden of the London was an X-ray machine in a tin shed occupied by Roentgen the founder of X-rays. Newland told me of pleasant Sunday morning walks when Roentgen said to him "X-rays will revolutionise medicine. 70 years later I was to have similar Sunday morning walks with Sir Henry when he discussed the future of surgery.

Newland worked the Treves who later operated on King Edward 7th – the first appendicectomy. He also worked with HP Dean who did his ward round with a beadle and a tray with scalpels for abscesses, trochars for tapping hydroceles, catheters and urethral dilators. Hands were scrubbed with Lysol and soap followed by immersion in carbolic and biniodide of mercury.

Next Newland studied and passed the fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England enabling him to attend the Centenary dinner in 1900. Fifty years later he attended the 150th anniversary dinner the only surgeon to attend both dinners. He was still unable to obtain a surgical registrar appointment so became an ophthalmology registrar. He did further studies and worked at the Great Ormond Street Hospital for sick children and in Europe with some of the surgical giants such as Kocher and Hartmann.

It was time to return to Adelaide but on the way he worked with Crile at the Cleveland Clinic in America. On departure he was presented with one of Crile's handmade needle holders.

In Adelaide the row was over and he expected with all his training and qualification he would be immediately appointed as a surgical consultant. Such was not to be. He went into private practice with Dr Marten who was interested in Neurosurgery. It was 2 years before he was appointed an assistant surgical consultant at the Adelaide Children's Hospital and another 5 years before he became a senior.

Newland wanted to work at the Adelaide Hospital. Initially he accepted an appointment as Honorary Radiographer and 10 years after his return to Adelaide was appointed a visiting Surgeon. He had worked and waited.

Came 1914 and he enlisted in the Army and sailed to Egypt in the first Australian Stationary Hospital. Initially he served on Gallipoli and then around the corner at Lemnos where he looked after the Gallipoli casualties. He worked tirelessly. After the Gallipoli evacuation he went to France in the First Australian Casualty clearing Station.

He was promoted to LTCOL and awarded the DSO in 1918 and CBE in 1919. He had become interested in tissue repair and helped to develop the science and art of plastic surgery. Prior to returning to Australia he spent time in the College of Surgeons of England and rowed for the Leander club. Rowing has twice played a large part in his future.

In Adelaide he was at the peak of his career and resumed his senior appointments at the Adelaide Children's and the Adelaide Hospitals. He was 46 and there followed 20 years of intense activity as a surgeon teacher and administrator. He drove his staff and he drove his students. He expected everyone to work day and night.

I first knew him during the war years [WW2] when he came out of retirement and was acting Dean of the Faculty. He was still menacing in spite of the fact that he had retired from the Children's Hospital in 1928 and the Adelaide Hospital in 1933. He had a large private practice and operated in several hospitals including the Memorial which had previously been his father's home. I was able to go through the hospital records which initially simply referred to 'Medical' or 'Surgical' to 'hernia', 'bowel' etc. Individual medical folios were not introduced to the Adelaide Hospital until 1925.

Newland operated frequently at the Calvary Hospital and it was there that "the explosion" occurred. Sir Henry had a new diathermy machine which sparked off the ether machine which was blown to pieces which lodged in the ceiling and the door. Fortunately neither patient nor the anaesthetist was injured but Sir Henry was deafened for life and had great difficulty in communication.

He had a long association with the British Medical Association having joined in London then became the Secretary of the South Australian Branch and finally president of the BMA in Australia. He was also involved in the College of Surgeons. Dr William Mayo offered membership of the American College and many surgeons considered it. This was forestalled by surgeons from all states and New Zealand and the Australian College of Surgeons was formed in 1926. Newland was made president in 1929 and worked hard to establish it [the College] to become the teacher and the examiner [of students].

He was knighted because of his tremendous influence in the BMA and the College of Surgeons. Sir Henry had recommended Wood Jones in London to become Professor of Anatomy in Adelaide. He repaid the compliment by giving the now Royal Australasian College of Surgeons an oration entitled 'the Master Surgeon'.

No-one in Australia deserved the title more.