

## BIOGRAPHY ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ

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### Dr Richard Bright A reminder from a family link

Bright, born in 1789, studied Medicine at Edinburgh and Guy's Hospital. He became interested in pathology and used his artistic skills to draw organs post mortem, including a "granular kidney". He believed that "dropsy" was related to kidney malfunction—the patient with granular kidneys had died from dropsy. He published 23 cases with dropsy, most with renal failure; 17 died. Autopsies showed nephritis and the term Bright's Disease was adopted. In 1851, Bright developed aortic stenosis and later died, unexpectedly, in 1858. *What prompted this reminder of Bright? A 94-year-old lady attended my renal clinic. She introduced herself as a descendant of Bright. She had renal impairment. Subsequently she showed me a book she had authored – "The Inner Circle. A view of war at the top" – an account of her work, among much else, in the underground Cabinet War Rooms in London. Churchill spent much time there. There, she reorganised records of war events for battle leaders to update themselves when in London. She also administered domestic and technical arrangements when Churchill travelled to war conferences attended by Roosevelt and Stalin. She died aged 98, her renal function stable.*

Dr Richard Bright is one of the outstanding figures in the history of nephrology. Born in 1789, he grew up in a small village, Ham Green, south-west of the city of Bristol. As a schoolboy, his father once wrote of him, to his teacher, "although he may never show great brilliance or genius, yet he will make a respectable figure in any profession"! How wrong can fathers be? In his teens, Bright decided that medicine was the career for him, though his father had a low opinion of the profession. He studied in Edinburgh and then at Guy's Hospital. As a student, he was said to have "taught himself to smell, to listen and to feel with his hands". He always wanted to be a physician and was apprenticed to a long-standing and much revered Guy's physician, Dr Babington. Bright developed a strong interest in pathology, thanks mainly to another teacher at Guy's, Dr Astley Cooper. He studied every organ in detail *in vitro* and frequently used his not-inconsiderable artistic skills to record the post-mortem appearances. In 1811, he first drew "a granular kidney". He qualified in September 1813. In 1816/1817, he worked in an isolation hospital but contracted typhus complicated by pneumonia. The illness and convalescence occupied most of 1817. His father came to London and Bright visited him regularly at his hotel. Here he met friends of his father including Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the renowned engineer, later to become his patient.

Bright always felt it mandatory to illicit physical signs at the bedside and later, if appropriate, relate his findings to changes found at autopsy. He applied this approach to the condition known as "dropsy"—excess fluid retention— and believed it to be linked to kidney malfunction. The patient whose granular kidneys he had drawn as a student had died of dropsy. On a visit to Paris he met Dr Pierre Rayer, who was first to write of "la maladie de Bright"— *Bright's disease*.

In 1820, Bright became assistant physician at Guy's and in 1824 full physician and lecturer.

His teaching methods were often criticised by colleagues. He actually undressed his patients to examine them! He used the "suspect method of percussion" and outlandishly used a stethoscope, referred to by some as "a foolish toy"! He taught the importance of analysing all types of patients' specimens. Urine samples had to be tested for the presence of albumin by heating a spoonful of urine over a candle and observing whether it became opaque before it boiled.

In 1827, he published 23 cases, most having "renal insufficiency dropsy". Seventeen died. Each case was illustrated by his own, hand-coloured, meticulous drawings of the pathological material. Three of the original kidney specimens remain in Guy's museum. His work was met

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Dr Richard Bright

Μια υπενθύμιση από έναν  
οικογενειακό δεσμό

*Περίληψη στο τέλος του άρθρου*

#### Key words

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with a mixed response. One group believed, since the cases were from Southwark – a poverty-stricken area of south London – that the disease affected only the poorer classes. But by 1829 Bright's disease was recognised to affect all strata of society.

In 1832, he was elected Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and the next year chosen to give the three Goulstonian Lectures. The final lecture was on the renal origins of dropsy. It included reports of 296 urine analyses. He described 4 varieties of nephritis found at post-mortem; blood urea levels were high and often associated with a history of convulsions and left ventricular hypertrophy. He later showed that following scarlet fever, proteinuria and kidney damage could occur, i.e. acute, post-streptococcal nephritis as we know it today. Treatment included diet and bed rest. How little things have changed!

In 1851, Bright self-diagnosed aortic valve disease. He developed oedema and some thought him to be suffering from his own disease because he concealed the cardiac condition. But he continued seeing patients, among them royalty, Alfred Lord Tennyson, the renowned poet and Isambard Brunel whom he had met through his father. Brunel had ankle oedema and loin pain; Bright diagnosed renal failure. Brunel died of a stroke and renal failure in 1859 aged 53 but Bright had died some months earlier. His death was unexpected. The Times obituary stated "The lamented gentleman had received patients and was out in his carriage on Saturday 11th December, after which he complained of indisposition and retired to his chamber, which he was destined never to leave again." *The Lancet* editor, Dr Thomas Wakely, who had often been scathing, sometimes personally so, about Bright and his work, surprisingly wrote a glowing testimony: "...the medical profession has lost one of the most original, observant and philosophical minds...he contributed more than, perhaps, any other to form the medical opinion of his day". Bright had had a gastro-intestinal haemorrhage and died on 16th December 1858 aged 69.

*What then reminded me of Richard Bright?"*

*Dr Richard Bright of Guy's had several patients large in size.  
Their legs were swollen as could be, their eyes so puffed they could not see.  
To this oedema Bright objected and so, he had them venesected.  
He took a teaspoon by the handle, held it above a tallow candle  
And boiled some urine o'er the flame (as you or I might do the same).  
To his surprise, we find it stated, the urine was coagulated.  
Alas, his dropsied patients died. The thoughtful doctor looked inside.  
He found their kidneys large and white, the capsules were adherent quite.  
So that is why the name of Bright is associated with nephritis.*

Anon

During a renal clinic, before I retired, I called for a new patient. An elderly lady, tall and upright, came into the room and shook my hand firmly. "Before we begin, Dr Phillips, you may be interested to know that I am one of the living descendants of Dr Richard Bright". The patient, who turned out to be a great-great niece of Bright, had moderate renal impairment, but she was 94 years old! Her creatinine was 140  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ . She was normotensive and an ultrasound scan was normal. I reassured her that there was nothing of great concern. She replied "I don't mind what you do as long as you don't stop my two brandies and soda that I have each evening after supper"! Three years later the patient invited me to lunch and afterwards showed me a book she had written entitled "*The Inner Circle. A view of war at the top*". Amongst many other stories, it told of her appointment to develop an information system in the Cabinet War Rooms housed under Whitehall in Central London-Winston Churchill's main work base during the Second World War. Her boss was General Ismay, Chief of Staff to Churchill. The rooms were visited frequently by allied military leaders from around the world. The information system enabled them quickly to get up-to-date with news from different theatres of war. Her second role was to organise the domestic and technical requirements of the British contingents attending major conferences such as in Teheran, Yalta, Moscow and Potsdam. She had contact with allied political leaders including Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin. In her book, she recalls an event in Teheran at a dinner celebrating Churchill's 69th birthday. A Persian waiter carried in a large, elaborate ice cream dessert. He could not take his eyes off Stalin. The ice cream started to slide off its tray. Still not noticing, he headed towards the leaders. The dessert slid onto the head of the Russian interpreter next to Stalin, who continued without pause! So, my reminder of Richard Bright stemmed from meeting his great, great niece—a wonderful character from an amazing family. Her renal function remained stable. She died aged 98.

The following is a poem about Richard Bright for the St Bartholomew's Hospital Journal:

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

### Δρ Richard Bright – Μια υπενθύμιση από έναν οικογενειακό δεσμό

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*Αρχεία Ελληνικής Ιατρικής 2020, 37(Συμπλ 2):30–32*

Ο Bright γεννήθηκε το 1789 και σπούδασε Ιατρική στο Εδιμβούργο και στο Guy's Hospital. Ανέπτυξε ενδιαφέρον για την παθολογική ανατομική και χρησιμοποίησε τις καλλιτεχνικές δεξιότητές του για να σχεδιάσει όργανα, κατά τη νεκροτομή, συμπεριλαμβανομένου ενός «κοκκώδους νεφρού». Πίστευε ότι η «υδρωπικία» σχετιζόταν με τη νεφρική δυσλειτουργία – ο ασθενής με κοκκώδεις νεφρούς είχε πεθάνει λόγω υδρωπικίας. Δημοσίευσε 23 περιπτώσεις υδρωπικίας, οι περισσότερες εκ των οποίων με νεφρική ανεπάρκεια. 17 εξ αυτών απεβίωσαν. Οι νεκροψίες ανέδειξαν νεφρίτιδα και υιοθετήθηκε ο όρος Νόσος του Bright. Το 1851, ο Bright ανέπτυξε στένωση αορτής και αργότερα, το 1858, πέθανε απροσδόκητα. *Πώς προέκυψε αυτό το άρθρο για τον Bright; Μία 94χρονη κυρία επισκέφθηκε τη νεφρολογική κλινική μου. Μου συστήθηκε ως απόγονος του Bright. Παρουσίαζε νεφρική ανεπάρκεια. Μου έδειξε ένα βιβλίο που είχε συγγράψει – “The Inner Circle. A view of war at the top” – μία καταγραφή του έργου της, ανάμεσα σε πολλά ακόμη, στους Υπόγειους Πολεμικούς Θαλάμους στο Λονδίνο. Ο Τσώρτσιλ πέρασε πολύ χρόνο εκεί. Εκεί, η ίδια αναδιοργάνωνε τα αρχεία των πολεμικών γεγονότων προς ενημέρωση των αρχηγών του στρατού κατά τη διαμονή τους στο Λονδίνο. Επίσης, διοργάνωνε εγχώρια και τεχνικά θέματα όταν ο Τσώρτσιλ ταξίδευε σε πολεμικές διασκέψεις με τον Ρούσβελτ και τον Στάλιν. Πέθανε σε ηλικία 98 ετών, με σταθερή νεφρική λειτουργία.*

**Λέξεις ευρητηρίου:** Απόγονος Richard Bright, Richard Bright, Υπόγειοι Πολεμικοί Θάλαμοι Λονδίνο ΠΠ2, Winston Churchill

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