George Frederic Still

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George Frederic Still was born in London in 1868 at 10 Wray Crescent, Tollington Park, Highbury in what his niece, Miss Trewick, described as a good solid Victorian house. His mother, Emma Andrew, came from St Austel in Cornwall where she had been a horsewoman of repute in the county, and her brother was Dr Edwyn Andrew of Shrewsbury. His father was a Surveyor of Customs working in the Irish ports and in the Port of London. One of his ancestors may have been Bishop John Still, the Bishop of Bath and Wells in the seventeenth century, who wrote Gammer Gurton's needle in 1686, one of the earliest English comedies. His mother Emma became engaged to his father when

she was visiting relatives in Dublin. They came to live in London, where all their 12 children were born. Three of them died in their first year of life, another of scarlet fever aged 4, and a much loved sister who was a nurse died of typhoid fever when aged 18. Frederic was now the only surviving son. One of his six sisters, Edith, became an Oxford University graduate and then was the first woman student to enter and graduate from Heidelberg University. At Highbury Frederic and his sisters ran their own musical evenings, and he edited a family magazine to which they all contributed. His father died when he was 17, and his sister tells how a bewhiskered Uncle Ben came to visit them. He told

Fig. 1 *Portrait of his mother, Emma Andrew.*

Fig. 2 *Boyhood photograph of George Frederic Still.*

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Fig. 3 *Family gathering in the garden of his home at 10 Wray Crescent, Tollington Park, Highbury.*

Frederic and his sisters that money was short and that they would all have to earn their own living. Fortunately Frederic had already won a scholarship to Merchant Taylor's School, from where he was successful in gaining a scholarship to Caius College, Cambridge. He achieved 1st class honours in the Classical Tripos and was Winchester Prizeman. Throughout his life he found relaxation in reading the classics and was fluent in Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and Greek. He later wrote 'Carmen Scholae Medicinae', a song sung at the centenary celebrations of King's College Hospital.¹

He studied medicine at Guy's Hospital, being taught by James Goodhart and qualified in 1893. The following year while a house physician at Guy's he became Murchison Scholar of the Royal College of Physicians. He then moved on to the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, first as house physician and then for four years as medical registrar and pathologist. It was from here that in November 1896 Dr Archibald Garrod read Frederic Still's classic paper entitled 'On a form of chronic joint disease in children' to the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, and it was published in their transactions the following year.² It was also the subject of his Cambridge MD thesis.

This paper was based on 22 cases, 19 of whom he had seen personally. He divided them into three groups. The first group had progressive polyarthritis starting in early childhood and usually before the second dentition. Ten of his 12 cases in this group started before the age of 6 and the youngest at 15 months. Lymphadenopathy and splenic enlargement were striking features. He comments on the

very early involvement of the cervical spine in most cases, and a remarkable feature was the general arrest in development, so that a child of 12½ years would easily have been mistaken for 6 or 7 years. In

Fig. 4 *Portrait taken after graduation in Cambridge where he was awarded first class honours in the Classical Tripos.*

one case he commented on the recurrent attacks of fever. In three patients measles, scarlet fever, and catarrhal jaundice had been followed by distinct improvement of the joint symptoms. He did not describe the rash, though it is recorded in one of the King's College Hospital case notes of 1913. In three autopsied cases he was struck by the adherent pericardium and he noted the absence of endocarditis. He described how the little processes of thickened synovial membrane fitted accurately into pits at the margin of the articular cartilage.

His second group was of six cases which he said resembled in all points the rheumatoid arthritis of adult life and usually began after the age of 6. He had one case which he thought was the chronic fibrous rheumatism described by Jaccoud in 1871,³ but this is now thought unlikely. In 1898 he wrote in the *Clinical Journal* on 'Arthritis in childhood',⁴ on the basis of 25 cases and four autopsies. He contributed an article on this disease to Clifford Albutt's *A System of Medicine* in 1897,⁵ and in Goodhart and Still's textbook *Diseases of Children* 1910⁶ he writes 'it is advisable to let the child get up and use its limbs as long as possible, for when once it takes to its bed the hips and knees tend to become fixed in flexion, and it is no easy matter to straighten them again so as to enable the child to get about' and of drugs 'arsenic and cod liver oil are probably the most useful'. In the King's College Hospital case notes the use of mist. sodium salicylate is recorded, and he advocated Bier's method of induced hyperaemia by a broad rubber band for three quarters of an hour twice a day. The 113 books and papers written by Frederic Still are reported by Franklin in 1941.⁷ These include a paper with Poynton in 1899 on the histology of the rheumatic nodule⁸ and two case reports of polyarthritis with scleroderma in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* in 1926.⁹

Collis¹⁰ describes the struggle of Still's early years and how he was often hungry and sometimes so cold that he had to get up and go out and walk up and down, not having sixpence for a scuttle of coal. Life was difficult for him and once the sole of his shoe had to be held on with string, but he was determined to make a career in paediatrics. In 1899 he was appointed to the honorary staff of the Hospital for Sick Children and in the same year he became Assistant Physician for Diseases of Children to King's College Hospital, which was then in the Strand. This was the first medical school in London with a children's department. Honours soon came his way. He gave the Goulstonian lecture to the Royal College of Physicians in 1902 and the following year was elected an honorary member of the American Paediatric Association. He became Pro-

fessor of Paediatrics at King's College Hospital in 1906, which was the first chair of paediatric medicine in London. He helped with the editing of the sixth and subsequent editions of Sir James Goodhart's book *The Diseases of Children*.⁶ His own book, *Common Disorders and Diseases of Children*, was first published in 1909.¹¹ In 1931 he published a 'History of paediatrics to the end of the eighteenth century',¹² and *Common Happenings in Childhood* in 1938.¹³

He never married and was always described as shy, reticent, withdrawn, ascetic in his habits, and not wearing his heart on his sleeve. Collis¹⁰ says 'he had a magnificent head, with dark eyes sunk in deep sockets below bushy eyebrows, a high forehead, dark hair and moustache turning grey, a tanned complexion, a kind mouth, and a strong chin. He always wore a short black coat, a high stiff collar, and a spotless hard shirt. His manner was always the same, courteous, yet implacably reserved. When teaching his instruction at times was touched with a Cornish burr which seemed to emphasise his earnestness. Yet on one point everyone is agreed – he had a genuine love of children.' To quote Collis¹⁰ again: 'On entering the ward a sudden transformation took place, his face lighting up, his step quickening, his eyes flashing, he would wave to the children, they would stand up in bed and wave back.' After a midnight visit to the ward Collis again writes: 'When the surgeon left, Still remained for some time, going from bed to bed talking to any of the older children who had awakened up. I looked at his face: the reserve had gone, it was happy, smiling. After midnight he left, but hearing a child wailing as he entered the lift, he again returned to the ward and stood troubled by the bed seeking some way to relieve the pain. At last he came away. As I accompanied him to his car he talked to me like a companion in arms, almost like a friend. Next day he was once more wrapped in his impenetrable reserve.' The letters and drawings which he sent to his god-daughter and which were presented to the Heberden Society in 1981 also show his understanding of children. Dr Charles Newman who was his house physician writes that his astonishing charm to children was perfectly true: he could do anything with them. This love of children was reciprocated. The present Marquess of Normanby who was one of his patients told me that Still was always his favourite doctor: 'Our relationship was a natural one, he didn't talk down to me and, of course, he had a marvellous toy cupboard in his home in Queen Anne Street'. His niece Miss Treweek says 'He loved children, but except for his own mother and the Queen Mother I never heard him say a good word for mothers in general. His weakness was for long

Fig. 5 Professor Sir George Frederic Still standing by his car.

haired little girls and when he left Great Ormond Street the nurses gave him a long haired doll.

He liked to be known by his second name Frederic. On 28 October 1939 he wrote to Sir Raymond Crawford 'in compensation for not having been consulted as to the names bestowed to my infant self, I am at liberty to choose between the alternatives. Having always been known amongst my kindred by my second name, I propose to continue to use the second of the alternatives. Out of respect, however, to my godparents I like to write myself G Frederic Still and live in hope (not very sanguine) that the public will some day learn my particular Frederic is not spelt with a K.' Dr Allan Treweek writes 'I have an early recollection of my uncle with his first car a Panhard. He had a chauffeur and always travelled with the curtains securely drawn as he hated speed and traffic.' His London home was 28 Queen Anne Street, but he was always happy in later life visiting his fishing lodge, The White House, Leckford in Hampshire where he rented a stretch of the river Test. In 1924

Still wrote in the *Journal of the Fly Fishers Club* about a time when he was ill. 'Today with my mid-day medicine, nurse has brought me a telegram. It is from the under keeper "Mayfly up". I tear it up cough and turn my face to the wall, and mutter and moan again, and nurse adds to her notes "Patient depressed and rambling at times"'.¹⁴

He gave the Lumleian lectures at the Royal College of Physicians in 1918 and retired from the staff at Great Ormond Street in 1926 after 27 years. In 1928 and 1929 he gave the Fitzpatrick lectures on 'The history of paediatrics' and in 1931-3 was elected Censor. In 1937 he was knighted KCVO being physician to Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. He retired from King's College Hospital in July 1933 at the age of 65 and the same year was president of the First International Paediatric Congress held in London.

After his retirement he went to live in Salisbury where he published his poems.¹⁵ One of these was entitled 'In my garden' - 'For my garden is the

Fig. 6 Fishing on the river Test in Hampshire with Sir Thomas Barlow.

Fig. 7 Fishing on the river Test in Hampshire with Sir Thomas Barlow.

garden of the children. Cometh naught there but golden hours, for the children are its joy and its sunshine, and they are its heaven sent flowers'. He took a class in English for one term at the Cathedral School. He died in 1941, and his ashes were buried in the East Green of the Cathedral Close.

Fig. 8 Portrait by Sir Gerald Kelly.

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