

Medicine in Bloemfontein — anecdotes from the turn of the century

Presidential address to the Free State
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During the first year of the 1899 - 1902 Anglo-Boer War many doctors and patients arrived in Bloemfontein. One of these, Lord Denman, a grateful patient, donated an instrument cupboard to the Volks Hospital which survives to this day. In the later years of the war, Dr George Pratt Yule founded the Orange River Colony Medical Society, which eventually led, by a very roundabout route, to the founding of the Medical Association of South Africa, while Ella Scarlett became the first woman medical practitioner in the Free State.

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Although Bloemfontein was founded in 1846 it was only in 1854, the year of the signing of the Bloemfontein Convention, that the first doctor settled in the town. He was Carl Johan Gottlieb Krause. In 1850, at the age of 25, Krause had settled in Bethany near Wurasoord as a missionary, and because he had attended lectures on medical subjects at a military establishment near his theology seminary, the Volksraad allowed him to be registered as a medical practitioner. In 1854 he left the mission and settled in Bloemfontein where, for the following 9 years, he was the only medical practitioner, until his brother-in-law, Bernard Otto Kellner, MD, arrived from Germany in 1863.

Bloemfontein grew and prospered and the number of medical practitioners increased. The war that broke out on 11 October 1899 brought a number of other medical personnel. Noteworthy among these, according to Professor Kay de Villiers, were the following: Daniel John Cunningham was the author of dissection manuals; and Herman Kuttner, who later became Professor of Surgery in Bresslau, passed through Bloemfontein with the German Field Ambulance Service on its way to Jacobsdal. He brought with him one of the first X-ray apparatuses in the Free State. Dr Arthur Conan Doyle was on the staff of Langham Private Hospital, which stood in what is now the Ramblers sports grounds. Sir David Bruce and his wife came from Natal, where Sir

David had been researching sleeping sickness; he was a member of a commission on dysentery and typhoid. Howard Tooth, a neurologist from Queen's Square Hospital in London, marched with Robert's forces from Modderivier via Paardeberg to Bloemfontein. Tooth wrote daily to his wife and, fortunately, these letters were collected and are now in the possession of Professor Kay de Villiers. Sir Thomas Fairbank was a surgeon at No. 9 General Hospital, which was in close proximity to the Volks Hospital.

The war also brought casualties, and one of them presented the Volks Hospital with an instrument cabinet (Fig. 1). A brass plate had the following embossed on it.

To the Volks Hospital
from Lord Denman
Capt 11th B Imperial Yeomanry
In grateful remembrance of the
great kindness shown him by
Dr Kellner and the hospital staff
May 1900

A plate attached indicates that the cabinet was

Manufactured by
The Surgical Department
A & NCS Ltd
London

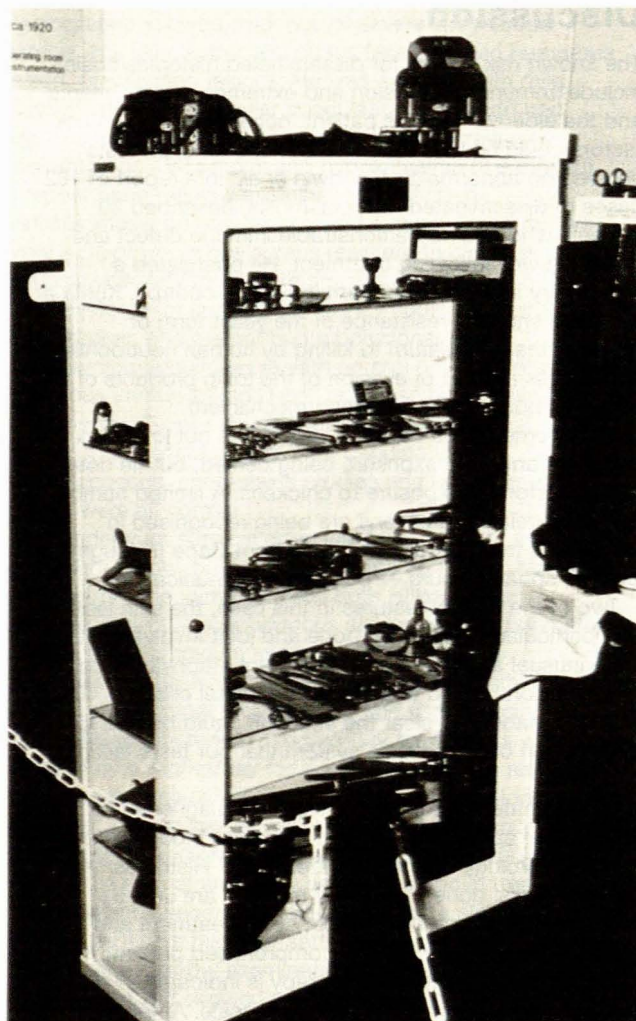


Fig. 1. Instrument cabinet presented by Lord Denman, 1900.

38 York Road, Waverley, Bloemfontein

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This cabinet has fascinated me since I first saw it in 1952 when a houseman at the National Hospital (to which the British had changed the name of the Volks Hospital in 1901). In 1960 the theatre matron, Elizabeth Schoeman, agreed to my suggestion that she keep it in her office. She kept her textbooks in it. Thus the cabinet from the English lord was looked after for the next 20 years. The brass plate was regularly polished by Florina and now one can barely read the inscription.

In 1993 I discovered that Lord Thomas Denman was the 3rd baron, which title he had inherited from an uncle in 1894. He was 27 years of age when a patient at the Volks Hospital and was treated by Dr Kellner, who later became the first president of the first medical society in the Free State. On recovery, Denman rejoined his regiment, the 11th Battalion of the Imperial Yeomanry. He was wounded at Cornelis Spruit near Harrismith and returned to England. I now know that he was Lord Denman of Dovedale and his residence was at Stoney Middleton, 8 miles from Sheffield. A letter to the postmaster of Sheffield was answered by Mrs Jennifer Edley with the following address: General Store and Post Office, Main Road, Stoney Middleton, via Sheffield. She said that there were no longer Denmans in the village, but that the local butcher had given her the address of the solicitor who handled the family's affairs. She had posted the letter to him and hoped that the current Lord Denman would reply. Lord Charles Denman, the 5th lord, did answer the letter and from the information supplied I learned that Thomas Denman, on his return from South Africa, had married Gertrude Mary Pearson in what was then described as the 'marriage of the year'. They had a son and a daughter. A liberal, Lord Denman was chief government whip in the House of Lords in 1907 - 11. On 31 July 1911, Denman arrived in Australia as Governor-General. On 12 March 1913, Lady Denman announced that the new capital of Australia would be Canberra. The event was described as follows: 'Lady Denman, tall, slim, with an aquiline nose and red hair, wearing an extravagantly feathered hat, outshone her husband, his own plumes notwithstanding' (*Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, p. 285). Today, there is a very small town named Denman in Australia. The Denmans left Australia under a cloud on 18 May 1913. Lord Denman's opinion that the Australian fleet should be under Australian command was too presumptuous for the Home Office at that time, while the Australians thought that he was taking up the duty of Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces too literally. Denman's health had been poor while in Australia and the pollen from the eucalyptus trees had aggravated a nasal complaint. Back in England, Lady Denman was very active in community activities and Lord Denman took up his seat in the House of Lords. There is no evidence that the Denmans ever returned to South Africa. Both died in 1954, Lady Denman on 2 June and Lord Thomas on 24 June.

The year 1902 brought another doctor to Bloemfontein (Fig. 2). Dr Ella Scarlett had worked at the concentration camp in Norvalspont, and later served in the British administration in Bloemfontein. A special appointment was subsequently created for her, which has never again been filled — that of doctor to Normal College and the Dames Instituut (now Eunice High School for Girls). In the minute book of the first Orange River Colony (ORC) Medical Society, founded in the Free State, it is recorded that 'she

said'. This was the first intimation that Dr Scarlett was a woman. In 1901 she was the first woman doctor to practise in the Free State. Scarlett, in a letter from the Queen's Hotel, Sea Point, dated 14 December 1901 states: 'Lieutenant Synge and I were married at Durban Saturday last.' On the marriage certificate it is noted that Ella Campbell Scarlett was from Inverloch and that Percy Hamilton Synge was a lieutenant in the Imperial Yeomanry. It was later ascertained that he worked for the railways in Durban. They were married in St Cyprian's Church, Durban.



Fig. 2. Dr Ella Scarlett, November 1901.

I wrote to the postmaster of Inverness, Scotland, enquiring if there were any Scarletts in Inverloch. This letter was redirected to the Registrar of Births and Deaths at Fort William. The Registrar replied that the telephone directory listed only one Scarlett in the Highlands, and that my letter had been redirected to him. In due course, Mr James Scarlett of Milton of Moy, Moy, Inverness, answered the letter. He stated that Ella was a descendant of Sir James Scarlett, the first Baron Abinger. However, Burke's *Peerage and Baronetage* does not mention an Ella Campbell as issue of William Frederick, 3rd Baron Abinger, and his wife Helen (née Magruder).

However, with the kind assistance of Dr Aileen Adams of Cambridge, Ella Campbell Scarlett's entries in the Medical Directory were traced. In 1901 she was registered as living at 46 Cornwall Gardens, London, the same address she gave when she left the Free State in 1904. During a visit to London in 1994, I contacted Dr Edith Gilchrist, honorary

archivist of Royal Free Hospital, where the London School of Medicine for Women was established. Dr Gilchrist found Ella's original application for admission as a medical student. The form is dated 21 July 1894 and gives her age as 29. She signs herself as the Hon. Ella Campbell Scarlett, born at Abinger Hall, Surrey, and gives her mother as Lady Abinger, residing at 46 Cornwall Gardens, London.

With this information, an application for her birth certificate was made at the General Register Office, which is near the Royal College of Surgeons in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Ella was born on 22 November 1864 at Abinger Hall, Dorking, Surrey; her father was William Frederick Scarlett, Baron Abinger; her mother was Helen Scarlett, Lady Abinger, neé Magruder, and the registration is dated 22 March 1865.

While working at the concentration camp in Norvalspont complaints were made to the authorities in Bloemfontein about Scarlett's work but this did not prevent her from obtaining an appointment in Bloemfontein, probably because of her good connections. Her brother, the 4th Baron Abinger, was also in South Africa at this time as a captain in the 2nd Battalion of Cameron Highlanders. A further reference to Ella is made by Danie Olivier in an unpublished thesis on the Bloemfontein concentration camps. He states that Ella was a member of a 6-member committee appointed by the British Minister of War to investigate conditions in the concentration camps. Other members were Millicent Garrett Fawcett (sister of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first woman to qualify as a medical doctor in England), Katherine B Brereton, Alice Knox (wife of General Sir W G Knox, Jane E Waterston (the first woman medical practitioner in South Africa, from Cape Town) and Lucy A E Deane.

Ella left Bloemfontein abruptly without resigning her post and the government had trouble in eventually obtaining her resignation. According to the medical register she was at various times in Canada, the USA, on war service in Serbia, and in Germany; in 1927 - 1931 she was living in retirement at Pensione Castri, Piazza Indipendenza, Florence, Italy.

She had been 38 years old when she arrived in the Free State, 15 years before Dr Anna Petronella van Heerden. Dr Van Heerden, later of Harrismith, obtained her first medical qualification in Amsterdam and was an intern at the Volks Hospital in Bloemfontein in 1915, while Millie Krause, who also started her medical studies at the London School of Medicine for Women, qualified at London Hospital in 1923.

In 1901 George Pratt Yule, the 27-year-old 'enteric officer' attached to the Edinburgh and East of Scotland Hospital at Norvalspont, came to Bloemfontein (Fig. 3). He had obtained his degree from the University of Edinburgh and then earned his MD with his thesis 'Perforation in typhoid fever'. Because of this additional qualification his examiners asked him to consider going to Norvalspont in South Africa. He accepted, but a few months after his arrival the hospital was closed and for a short time Pratt Yule found himself stationed at the No. 8 General Hospital in the Willows area of Bloemfontein. On 3 November 1900 he became a health officer for the ORC. This post later became that of MOH ORC. In 1904 the salary for this post was £800, plus a yearly allowance of £50. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Hamilton Goad Adams, received £4 000 and an allowance of £1 000. There were 16 000 residents in Bloemfontein at the time, 5 000 more than before the war.



Fig. 3. Dr George Pratt Yule.

On 25 July 1902 an important event occurred. Yule wrote to all 11 doctors in Bloemfontein and suggested the formation of a medical society. The answers he received were in favour, and the first meeting was held in the public health offices on the second floor of the government buildings in President Brand Street. At this meeting Bernard Otto Kellner was elected the first president of the society. Kellner was in Berlin when he received the notification and replied that he would be pleased to accept the honour bestowed upon him; he stated, however, that unfortunately he was not going to hurry back as he intended to study while in Berlin. This letter took 23 days to reach Bloemfontein. He further stated that he had previously considered a similar society in the Free State but could not obtain enough support from the profession or the Volksraad.

On 17 August 1908, Yule contracted typhoid, and was granted 10 weeks of sick leave by Dr S M de Kock, who later became the first president of the newly formed South African Medical and Dental Council. Yule had much to do with new health legislation proposed by the new government, and was also responsible for the first population census. In 1912 Yule left the ORC, not by choice, but because he was declared redundant as a result of the formation of the new Union Department of Health. He had impeccable testimonials and worked as MOH in County Fife, Scotland, until his retirement and death in 1955 at the age of 81.

An obituary appeared in the *SAMJ* of 6 August 1955, 44 years after he left Bloemfontein. (I am indebted to Professor Kay de Villiers for this information.) The obituary stated that Yule had a son who had become a medical practitioner in Cumberland. He also had two daughters, one of whom had become Professor of Psychology at the University of Natal. She had married Dr Reg Lawrence, a zoologist, who was for many years the Director of the Natal Museum. They had two sons, one of whom, Mr Alastair Lawrence, attended the MASA Free State Branch dinner in February 1994 with his wife, Judith, 92 years after his grandfather had founded the first medical society in the Free State.

I gratefully acknowledge the help I received from the following people in finding the information used in this article (the information gathered on a visit to England was all lost when the *Achille Lauro* sank, but fortunately was replaceable). Dr Aileen Adams, Cambridge; Drs Edith Gilchrist and Lynne Amidone, Archivists at the Royal Free Hospital, London; Mrs Jackie Jennings, Royal College of Surgeons, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London; Mrs Jennifer Edley, Stoney Middleton, Sheffield; Professor Kay de Villiers, Cape Town; Professor Ray Rutherford Smith, Edinburgh; Dr Reg Roos, Durban; Mr and Mrs Alastair Lawrence, Pietermaritzburg; Miss Philippa Higgs, South African Embassy, Canberra; Mr James Scarlett, Milton of Moy, Moy, Inverness; the Registrar, Births, Deaths and Marriages, Fort William; Mrs M Stroub, the State Archives, Bloemfontein Depot; the State Archives, Pretoria; Mrs Hazel Carter, Bloemfontein; the photographic department, Medical Faculty, UOFS.
