

Samuel Dougan Bird (1832-1904)

Samuel Dougan Bird (1832-1904), physician, was born on 4 November 1832 at Lichfield, Staffordshire, England, son of William Guest Bird, a banker who died nine months later, and his wife Clara Dornet, née Dougan, whose father had business interests in the West Indies and had been associated with Wilberforce in the struggle against slavery. Samuel went to school in Liverpool until 1848 when he became apprenticed to a general medical practitioner at Lowestoft, Suffolk. He passed on to a distinguished course at King's College Hospital (L.R.C.P., 1851; M.R.C.S.E., 1854). As a student he was an active athlete and one of the first Englishmen interested in Swiss mountaineering. In 1851 he was resident physician's assistant at the Hospital for Consumption, Brompton, and later had a private practice in Richmond, Surrey. He took the St Andrews M.D. in 1859. In 1854 he accepted a post as divisional surgeon and next year served at Sebastopol. Whilst at Varna in charge of a depot for more than five hundred wounded he was asked to command the medical staff for the Turkish expedition to relieve Kars. For this service he was awarded the Imperial Order of Medjidie by the sultan.

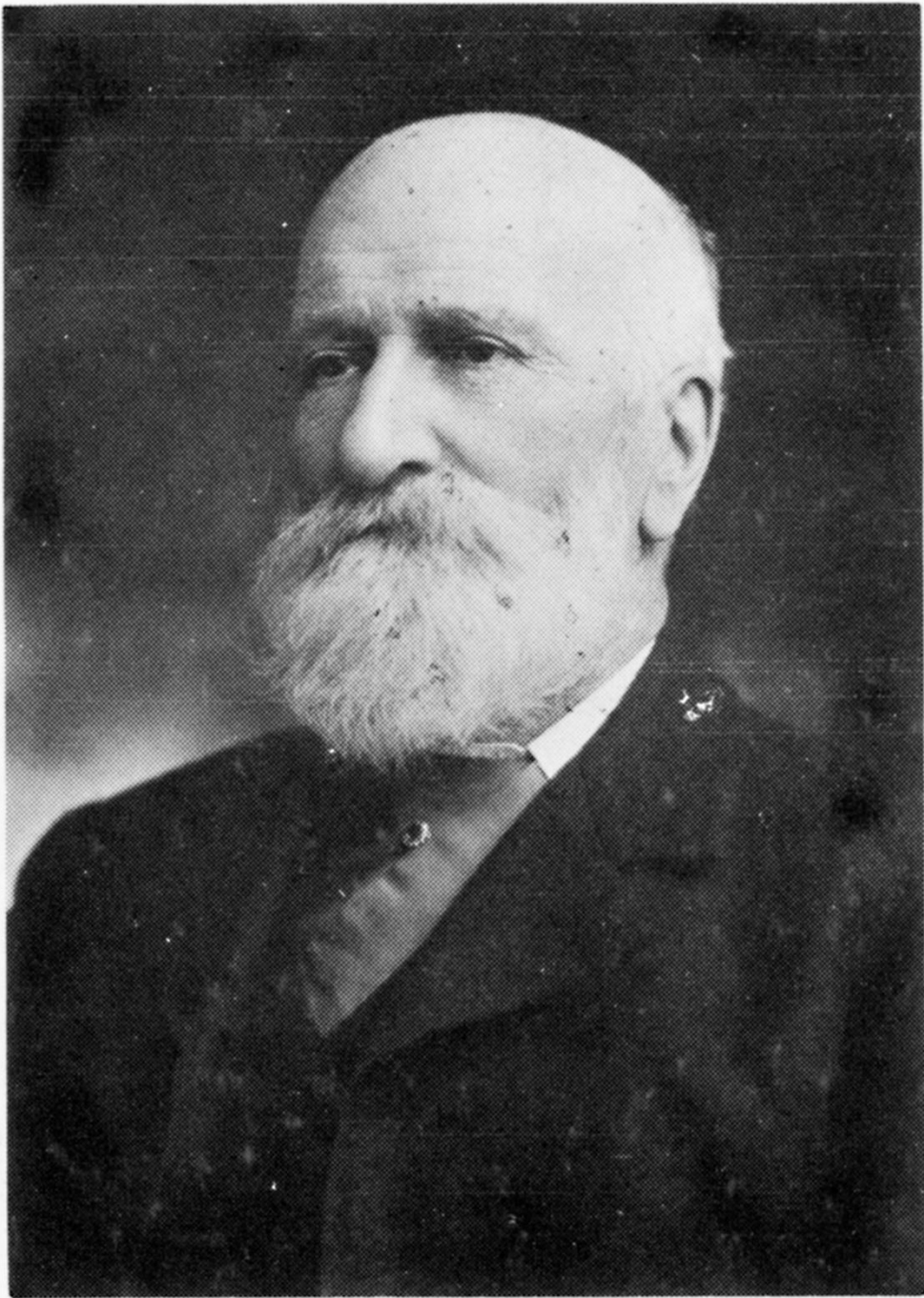
In 1856 Bird married Catherine Tate and returned to his successful Richmond practice. There his own tuberculous infection first became apparent in 1860. A long sea voyage was the fashion in treatment so Bird went to Melbourne where he benefited greatly from a few months stay. His condition relapsed when he returned to Richmond so he decided to migrate to Melbourne and arrived with his wife and infant son in February 1862. They settled in Collins Street East.

With his health restored, Bird's ability as a physician soon placed him among the leaders of his profession. He was president of the Medical Society of Victoria in 1869 and physician to the Benevolent Asylum and the Immigrants Aid Society. In the 1865 election for the Melbourne Hospital honorary staff Bird had failed, but was the first honorary physician elected to the Alfred Hospital when it opened in 1871. At the University of Melbourne (M.D. *ad eund.*, 1862) he became lecturer in materia medica in 1869 and in the theory and practice of medicine in 1881-87, and was a university councillor in 1889-92. For thirty years he was chief medical officer to the Australian Mutual Provident Society in Victoria. His lectures were said to be lucid and forthright and the same qualities can be seen in his medical writings. Two of his major contributions reflected his interest in chest disease. *On Australasian Climates and Their Influence in the Prevention and Arrest of Pulmonary Consumption* (Melbourne, 1863), written after only one year in the colony, gives a good account of the voyage to Port Phillip and the climate and life of Victoria in the 1860s but the medical content is biased by his personal experience. On the other hand his *Hydatids of the Lung* (Melbourne, 1874) expounded the diagnostic criteria for unbroken lung cysts and is one of the milestones in the story, largely written by Australians, of the disease.

Bird returned to England in 1869 and 1879. His first wife died there in 1869, leaving two children, Frederick Dougan (1858-1929) and Clara (b.1863). In 1872 he married Susan Brown of Melbourne; she died in 1882 leaving one child, Helen (b.1873). He then married Eleanor Rossiter, who survived him with their daughter; a son had died in infancy. Bird worked until a few weeks before his death on 14 May 1904 from carcinoma of the oesophagus from which he had suffered for more than a year. Although an Anglican in earlier life he was buried in the Roman Catholic section of the Kew cemetery; perhaps he was converted late in life or at the time of his third marriage.

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Samuel Dougan Bird, lecturer in
materia medica and later in medicine.