

Dr Tharpe Mountain Girdlestone

Tharpe Mountain Girdlestone (1823-99) was born at Oxford. He was a student at Norwich and later house surgeon at St Bartholomew's and at York Road Lying-in Hospital, both in London. Girdlestone was a dedicated hospital practitioner. He qualified M.R.C.S. in 1845 and F.R.C.S. in 1849. It is not certain when he arrived in Victoria, but he registered with the Medical Board of Victoria in 1854. He went first to Maryborough where he was Coroner and surgeon to the hospital.

In 1858 he transferred to Ararat where he was also Coroner. He bought property at the first land sale in Ararat in 1858. He was elected trustee and committee member of the hospital in 1859, and was the medical attendant until a permanent resident could be found. Thereafter, he was an honorary until controversy in 1861 caused his resignation. In November 1861 he was elected chairman of the Ararat Council, but he resigned in April 1862 after his election as M.L.A. for Ararat. He was defeated in the parliamentary elections of January 1866.

He transferred his residence to Melbourne in 1862, joined the Medical Society of Victoria in December 1863, was elected to the Melbourne Hospital committee in 1866 and was President of the Medical Society of Victoria in 1867.

In 1868 he joined the committee for the establishment of a new hospital south of the Yarra to commemorate the Australian visit of Royal Prince Alfred. The design of the new hospital and notes on its modern facilities closely followed a book owned by Girdlestone containing details of the Herbert Hospital in Woolwich, UK. Although not on the staff of the new hospital he was elected to the Board. In 1870 he was elected as an Honorary Surgeon of the Alfred Hospital and served from 1871 -76. He was Chairman of Medical Staff in 1876.

He was appointed Honorary Assistant Surgeon at the Melbourne Hospital in 1876, later as Honorary Surgeon 1883-87. He was medical officer to the City of Melbourne from 1868 to 1885. He served a second five-year term on the Melbourne Hospital committee from 1879 to 1882.

Described as a capable surgeon, slow and safe, but not brilliant, he was appointed university lecturer in Surgery in December 1880. He pioneered the use of kangaroo tendon as a suture material and furthered the cause of antiseptic surgery. One biographer said of him that 'he was a much pleasanter man than was generally supposed'—which indicates a man of curt address. Certainly, events proved that he had an aggressive nature which quite frequently led him into public controversy. He suffered heavy financial losses during the booming eighteen-nineties and returned to Britain in 1894 to live with a brother. He died on 8 August 1899.

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