

Bird, Frederic Dougan (1858-1929)

Frederic Dougan Bird (1858-1929), surgeon, was born on 27 May 1858 at Richmond, Surrey, England, son of Samuel Dougan Bird and his first wife Catherine Emma, née Tate. He arrived in Victoria with his parents in February 1862. Educated at Scotch College, he studied medicine at the University of Melbourne (M.B., 1882; Ch.B., 1884; Ch.M., 1886), with experience at the hospitals of King's and University colleges, London (M.R.C.S., England, 1883). Bird was a founder of the Melbourne Medical Students' Society and the University Rifle Club and was a first-class oarsman and billiards player. Talented, witty and charming, he was tall and striking in appearance with a 'very fine physical presence'. In November 1881, while still a student, he married Lucy Clare Hopkins of Murdeduke, Winchelsea.

In 1884 Bird was appointed a part-time demonstrator of anatomy at the University of Melbourne. In 1887 he became honorary surgeon to out-patients at the Melbourne Hospital and in 1891 to in-patients, a position he held for twenty-three years. He was appointed lecturer and examiner in surgery at the university in 1895. Students found him urbane and helpful, a brilliant lecturer, an excellent clinical teacher and a careful examiner who preferred to teach from his own experience rather than from lessons 'perpetuated in textbooks'. He established a large surgical practice; his private hospital in Spring Street was one of the first to have, besides a well-equipped operating theatre, a pathology laboratory and an X-ray room. He was a highly efficient artist in his technique though neither adventurous nor innovative; he gained a reputation in the surgical treatment of hydatids, following his father's interest in the disease. His eminence in his profession was due to his personality, his social connexions, his undoubted technical ability and his conscientious care of his patients. He served for many years as surgeon to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and later as consultant to the Queen Victoria Hospital.

Bird was president of the surgery section at the Australasian Medical Congress held in Adelaide in 1904. He was sometime president of the Medical Society of Victoria, although he preferred not to become involved in council and committee meetings: he doubted the wisdom of any rigid organization of the profession. While in London in 1913 as vice-president of the surgery section of the International Congress of Medicine, he was awarded an honorary fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Bird volunteered for service with the Australian Imperial Force in 1914 and, bearing the cost of his own team of nurses and equipment, he accompanied the first contingent to Egypt. He soon transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps and in February 1915 was appointed consulting surgeon to the British forces in Egypt with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He served at Gallipoli and in Macedonia; after appointment to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, he was posted to Southern Command, England. He was three times mentioned in dispatches and for his part in the Gallipoli campaign was appointed C.B.

In May 1918, while still abroad, Bird relinquished his active position at the Melbourne Hospital. After his return he was first president of the Surgical Association of Melbourne in 1920 but resigned in November from the university and in 1923 retired from his practice. From 1880 he was a member of

the Melbourne Club and was president in 1926. Widely read, he was interested in art and architecture and was a keen Dante scholar. He enjoyed bush-walking, especially in the Victorian mountains, and was an enthusiastic botanist. His publications in medical journals were not numerous, but were characterized by 'high seriousness and thoughtfulness' and an original writing style.

In his last years Bird was crippled by gout; he died of coronary thrombosis at his home in Toorak on 29 May 1929, survived by his wife, a son and a daughter, and was buried in Boroondara cemetery, Kew. He left an estate valued for probate at £45,761.

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