

Sir Charles Hastings

Those of us who need hospital treatment or to visit GP surgery take for granted that the person who we see will be qualified to a recognised standard and we will feel confident that any treatment we receive will be right for our complaint. However 200 years ago this was not necessarily so. There were twenty one ways in which you could become medically qualified, often these qualifications were of dubious standard and not recognised from one part of the country to another. Much of this changed during the life time of Charles Hastings who was born in nearby Martley but lived most of his life in Worcester. You can still see the house in Foregate Street where it is marked with a blue plaque.

Charles Hastings came to Worcester in 1810 and at the age of sixteen he became apprenticed to Jukes and Watson apothecaries in Stourport. Shortly afterwards he was elected House Surgeon at Worcester Royal Infirmary. He was only eighteen and had no formal medical qualifications. It is said that he was voted to the position and won by only one vote. His youthful exuberance and keen attitude convinced the panel.

He did become medically qualified in 1818 at Edinburgh University and in November of that year returned to Worcester where he remained in practice for over forty years, always believing that it was important to administer medicine in the city even though his passion and enthusiasm to create a national structure for the medical profession took him regularly to London and other parts of the nation.

When he became medically qualified the three branches of the profession were well established. The surgeons, the physicians and the apothecaries all had their own views, their own standards, and frequently argued amongst themselves. So when in 1832 Charles Hastings pioneered the formation of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association it represented a major breakthrough. It soon had over one thousand members and in only one year changed its name from Provincial to British, and some twenty five years later became the British Medical Association and the regulatory body the General Medical Council as we know it today was born. The standards for modern medicine that we accept today became a reality.

He never lost faith with the City of Worcester. His house had been originally owned by Dr John Wall, the founder of the Worcester Porcelain Factory and amongst other things he carried out research into the chemicals and their effects on the workers. He also tirelessly strived to seek for cures to the dreadful diseases of typhus and cholera frequently rampant in the poor areas of large cities.

He was also fascinated by what we now call alternative medicine. At school he had apparently not been keen on academic study but preferred to do sport or take nature walks into the local countryside. From these early beginnings he listened to old folk remedies and started to research into things like the effects of opium as a pain killer, the use of coltsfoot for the cure of coughs, and camomile as a sedative.

It is said that he was a man of boundless energy, although he had problems with his hip which often made walking very difficult, but as well putting the health of his fellow men high in his list of priorities he also realised that poor health was directly related to social conditions of the time. He became involved in local politics and was elected to the City Council for St Nicholas Ward in 1835. As a councillor he was instrumental in the building of better dwellings using much of his own money to finance the work. The results showed a 45% drop in the death rate.

Controversially he was elected Lord Mayor, but felt that such office would not allow him to fulfil his medical obligations. He declined the office but archive records show that because of this he was fined £50 by the council. City archives show a fascinating plea for mitigation because he had not actually been present when elected and therefore could not speak to the motion.

He was also knighted by Queen Victoria in 1850 for his pioneering contributions of the medical profession. He retired from specific medical practice in 1862 and moved a short distance away to Barnards Green near Malvern but died a few years later aged 76 in 1866. His funeral in the City attracted huge crowds and he buried in Astwood Cemetery.

His work on national medical standards as well as his local connections were commemorated by a window in Worcester Cathedral in 1932, one hundred years after the foundation of the Provincial Medical Association. This was mainly paid for by subscription from the British Medical Association, but in memory of his devotion to Worcester there is a medical museum in the Royal Worcester Hospital, and of course you are reminded of his contributions to the city by the road into the hospital being named Charles Hastings Way.

To The Chairman and Members of the Local Board
of Health constituted in Worcester

This Memorial sheweth - That in consequence
of the re-appearance of Epidemic Cholera in this
Kingdom, we, the Members of the Medical Profession
residing in this City, unanimously resolved (at a
meeting held on Wednesday last) to form a Deputation
for the purpose of representing the urgent necessity
there is for the immediate adoption of efficient mea-
sures for the removal of nuisances, and the general
cleaning of the Town - And, as it has been proved
by long experience that the liability of a neighbourhood
to suffer from the insidious influences of Cholera
bears a striking proportion to the want of cleanli-
ness that is permitted to exist, we earnestly beg
that no further delay may be allowed, but that
the most vigorous exertions may at once be

commenced for the protection of the lives of our
fellow-citizens.

Signed on behalf of your Memorialists by

Jonas Malden M.D.
Charles Hastings Esq.
R.D.

Philip S. Williams M.D.
Hon. Secy.

Worcester September 25th
1853.

**Memorial from the Medical Profession,
1853 [496.5 BA9360/Cab 17/Box 2/27]**

A memorial to the Local Board of Health signed by Worcester Infirmary doctors Jonas Malden and Charles Hastings of Worcester. Although it had not reached Worcester, cholera had re-appeared in Britain and the medical profession was urging that action be taken to improve the cleanliness of the streets to minimise the spread of the disease.