

Sir James Cantlie KBE FRCS KStJ



The 28th of May is the centenary anniversary of the death of Sir James Cantlie (1851 - 1926). He is undoubtedly one of the superheroes of a previous generation who, as a surgeon and physician, dedicated his life to public service.

Born in Mortlach, Banffshire in Northeast Scotland, he often remembered as a child attending church and noticing the squint (small window) through which lepers of earlier centuries would watch the service from outside, the congregation being fearful of contamination. He carried this pain of exclusion with him all his life. It was to be a motivating influence in his later work with lepers in Hong Kong and the Canton colonies.

He trained at Charing Cross hospital and became a Fellow of the Royal College of surgeons in 1877. After much heart-searching, he resigned from his post at Charing Cross to go to Hong Kong where he founded the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese. Up until this point the practice of western medicine had been the jealously guarded prerogative of Europeans; Cantlie was at the forefront of breaking this taboo. His most famous student was a young Chinese, Sun Yat-sen. Sun would go on to become the first president of modern-day China. He was saved from certain death when kidnapped in London by the Chinese Legation because of Cantlie personally organising a media campaign to secure his release. They were to remain friends for life. The Hong Kong College of Medicine would later transform into becoming Hong Kong University.

Two years after returning to England, in 1898 he started the Journal for Tropical Medicine and went on to found the London School of Tropical Medicine – now one of the world's leading public health universities.

Arguably, his greatest work was in promoting what we now call First Aid. He wrote the first manual for St John Ambulance, *First Aid to the Injured*, which became a crucial reference when dealing with those injured during World War One. The work brought together for the first time up-to-date instruction on bandages, anatomy, treatment of wounds and how to move the injured, amongst much else. What became known as the 'ambulance movement' owes much to him. It wouldn't be too far-fetched to describe him as the first modern-day paramedic. He often used a farm cart to demonstrate how to load and unload stretchers when carrying the injured from the front.

He married Mabel Brown in 1884, and they went on to have four sons, all of whom went on to have distinguished careers of their own. 'The Kennels' in Cottered became the Cantlie's country home, a place to retreat to at weekends, but also a place of constant fun, intellectual rigour and hospitality.

Cottered Church is hosting a display throughout the year commemorating the huge achievements of Dr Cantlie. The Church is open each day. Pop in and be inspired!

God Bless.

Revd Mark Bailey