IN MEMORIAM

WALTER BAHAM FOLEY
1889–1979

“Peter” Foley died on June 9, 1979, at the age of eighty-nine. He was born in Bridgewater, Somerset, the son of a local businessman and although there was no previous family interest in medicine it is said that by the age of eight he had already made up his mind to become a doctor and he never deviated from this resolve. He received his early education at Sherborne where among other things he obtained a scholarship in German. He also obtained many cups for athletics, gymnastics and rifle shooting as well as playing rugby football and cricket for the school. He later played rugger for St Thomas’s. In 1907 he went to St Thomas’s Hospital for his medical training and qualified M.B., B.S. in 1912 and F.R.C.S. in 1922.

After completing routine house appointments for eighteen months he took up the post of medical officer to a construction company which was engaged in building the Zambesi River railway. After completing his two-year contract he returned to England and joined the R.A.M.C., being attached to a casualty clearing station on the Somme from where he was shortly transferred to Macedonia. Here he was involved in the organisation of hospitals in the wake of the devastation left by the retreating Bulgars; having to treat not only wounded British but also the wounded left behind by the enemy. For this he was mentioned twice in Despatches and on return to this country in 1918 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire, Military Division.

On resuming civilian life he returned to St Thomas’s Hospital and joined Mr Rowley Bristow’s orthopaedic unit which included working at St Nicholas’s Hospital, Pyrford. After serving for two years as the first house surgeon to the orthopaedic department he became assistant surgeon there. In 1927 he was appointed assistant orthopaedic surgeon at the Wingfield Morris Orthopaedic Hospital in Oxford where he joined G. R. Girdlestone. At the same time he was appointed assistant surgeon to the Radcliffe Infirmary and later orthopaedic surgeon to this hospital. He was also appointed orthopaedic surgeon to the Royal Buckinghamshire Hospital in Aylesbury and honorary consulting surgeon to King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor.

It would be difficult to imagine two people whose personalities differed more than Foley’s and Girdlestone’s. Where Girdlestone was forceful, dogmatic and often abrasive, Foley was quiet, unassuming, often retiring but always most courteous. It was perhaps this great difference which enabled the two to work together for nearly twenty-five years in an atmosphere of calm and mutual respect. Foley’s great contribution to the present Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre was the major part which he played in the development of the clinic system which had already been started by Girdlestone. It was Foley who set up many more clinics and throughout the partnership carried the major clinical load at the periphery. The system for which he was so much responsible has stood the test of time well and is flourishing to this day, relatively unchanged.

He was a man who disliked the limelight and found speaking at meetings a great effort. All his inclinations were towards the clinical application of orthopaedics rather than to research. Nevertheless he was the pioneer in this country of osteotomy of the neck of the femur for the correction of deformity in severe slipping of the upper femoral epiphysis. This work led the way to the development of the successful procedures which are possible today. He also developed a method of ischiofemoral arthrodesis which combined the safety of Trumble’s operation and the flexibility of Brittain’s, thereby making the latter operation safer. He was an excellent teacher and those who had the privilege of working with him will always remember the many truths which he passed on to them, always based on such profound common sense. Above all he taught by
example the meticulous care in diagnosis and treatment and the importance of treating the patient and not just the disease.

In 1946 he was elected President of the Orthopaedic Section of the Royal Society of Medicine and after his retirement an Honorary Member of the Section. He was also elected an Emeritus Fellow of the British Orthopaedic Association.

Throughout his professional life he retained three hobbies—golf, dancing and painting. He continued to play golf until he was almost eighty and whenever there was a fifth Tuesday in the month would take part in a golf match against the orthopaedic surgeons of Heatherwood Hospital, a custom dating from the days of G. R. Girdlestone. He was a most enthusiastic dancer, with great energy and a most flamboyant style apparently quite out of keeping with his usual character. He was an excellent artist and found much pleasure in landscape painting in watercolours. Perhaps his greatest interest, however, was in birds, a subject on which he was very knowledgeable, and he was a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

In 1919 he married Miss Phoebe Hickling, an almoner at St Thomas’s, and they had two girls both of whom inherited from him his strong artistic sense. His wife died in 1947. In 1955 he married Mrs Margery Miller, his secretary for many years, who survives him. It was in keeping with Peter Foley’s whole life that he should have had two ideally happy marriages.

Peter Foley or “Pop” as he was affectionately called by almost everyone in the hospital, was in every sense of the word a gentle man. He was one of those rare people who never had anything bad to say about anyone and about whom nothing bad was ever said. Although in his later life he had much personal tragedy, life seemed to run smoothly, leaving him quite unruffled. He will always be remembered with pleasure by all who knew him and in the hospital his name will be perpetuated by the ward which is called after him. E.W.S.

I came to the Wingfield Morris in July 1947 and found myself appointed as Pop Foley’s house surgeon. I spent six very happy months with him during which time he started his work on the operative treatment of slipped upper femoral epiphysis and on ischiofemoral arthrodesis, so that I saw him developing his techniques in these two operations. He was a very skilful operator but he had some slightly individual techniques, such as using a gouge for soft-tissue dissection when the going got difficult! This never seemed to do any harm and was often very effective.

I remember the occasion of the death of his first wife only too well. She died of leukaemia. He had asked for a white-cell count to be done thinking she had pneumonia, and when we came back from our round of the tuberculosis wards at the Churchill he was confron- ted by an excited technician who told him the figure; he never flinched, making only some quiet comment. Later he stopped me giving her a transfusion of fresh blood as it would only prolong her agony. In this tragedy his judgement, as always, was sound and his common sense never left him.

He was the imperturbable and lovable person who provided a stabilising influence in the hospital and to whom everyone turned when difficulties arose. The nurses especially loved him, and the other staff added their admiration for his sterling qualities.

He taught me a lot, both in orthopaedics and otherwise. I remember my time with him very gratefully indeed. Both my wife and myself offer our sympathy to Margery, his widow, and to his family. M.P.McC.

CHRISTOPHER GEORGE ATTENBOROUGH
1922–1979

An example of courage is an edification to us all, and so when Christopher Attenborough died on June 13, 1979, at the age of fifty-six after a long illness he left behind a great sense of achievement and an uplifting respect. At one stage of his illness he made a determined recovery; against all difficulties he returned to his clinical duties and to operating, including his total knee replacements. This epitomises Christopher’s life because no problem or difficulty was too great to overcome; throughout his career he was a steadfast courageous surgeon on whom others could lean for advice, encouragement and strength.

Born in 1922 into a medical family he was first

THE JOURNAL OF BONE AND JOINT SURGERY