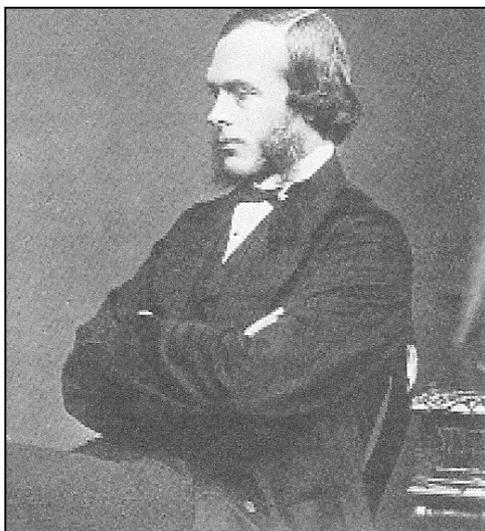
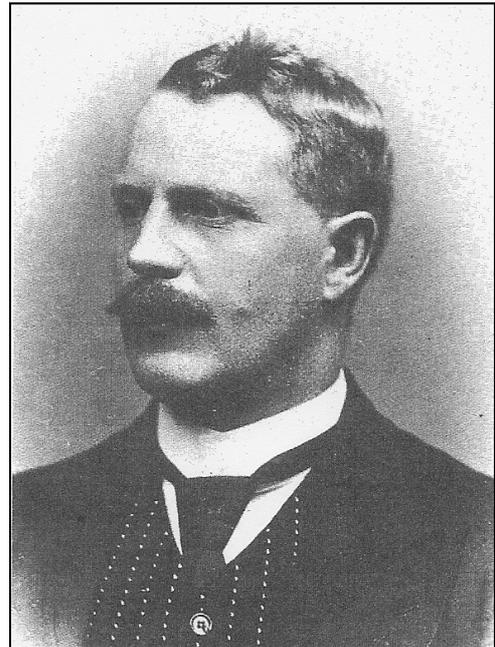


**ROBERT BOXALL (1858-1915). M.B., B.Ch. (Cantab.), L.R.C.S. (Eng.), M.D. (Lond.), M.R.C.P. (Lond.), M.D. (Brux.). - Pioneer of Antiseptic Surgery.**

*"He was the best taker of notes I ever knew – they were always to the point, accurate, terse, and complete."*

*Sir Francis Champneys, British Medical Journal (1915).*

Robert Boxall (1858-1915) [Epsom College 1870-1877] was born at Horsham, Sussex, the son of Henry Boxall, F.R.C.S., and brother of Frederick Boxall [Epsom College 1872-1877], and Dr Frank Boxall [Epsom College 1880-1882]. He was also a nephew of Albert Napper, the founder of the Cottage Hospitals. At Epsom College he won the Brande Good Conduct and French Prizes, and was a prominent member of the Rugby XV. He studied medicine at Downing College, Cambridge and University College, London, taking the M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. in 1882-1883, and the Cambridge M.B., B.Ch in the following year. Following this he was appointed obstetric assistant at University College Hospital and then at the General Lying-In hospital, Westminster, where he ultimately became Obstetric Physician. In 1889, he was appointed Obstetric Physician and lecturer in practical midwifery at the Middlesex Hospital, a position that he held until retirement. It was said of that "from first until last he worked incessantly. While occupied with his duties at the General Lying-In Hospital he took the M.D. of Brussels University, so that his clinical and scientific labours were complicated by much travelling." Robert Boxall was a pioneer of antiseptic surgery. It was at this time that he made his most celebrated and important contribution to medical science. He drew up an impressive clinical and scientific monograph on scarlatina during pregnancy. This work was based on the investigation of 16 cases of scarlatina amongst 432 patients under his care at the time of the epidemic of that infection in South London during 1884. From his study of the scarlatina epidemic, Boxall postulated that the agency of scarlet fever as a cause of puerperal, or childbed, fever had been greatly over-rated, and that scarlatina bred true in the pregnant and puerperal woman, producing not puerperal fever but typical scarlet fever, which ran the ordinary course of the disease.



Robert Boxall's researches also testified to the priceless value of antiseptics in midwifery. His research included statistical tables, the compilation of which must have involved the examination of enormous masses of detail, and it was said of him that "there was no more painstaking, practical, and scientific obstetrician at that time than Dr Boxall."

This research proved to be a landmark in the history of the treatment of puerperal infections, and closely followed the pioneering work on antiseptics of Sir Joseph Lister, F.R.S., (left) who coincidentally was a Vice-President of Epsom College at the same time.

Robert Boxall showed that although the death-rate from puerperal sepsis across Britain in general was increasing, the death-rate in London since he started using antiseptics in midwifery had shown a steady decline. He addressed the Obstetrical Society of London in 1905 with the statement that “provided antiseptic precautions were efficiently carried out and asepsis maintained during labour and afterwards, the possibility of autogenic infection need have no terrors for the obstetrician.” Today we take antiseptics for granted but in 1905 it was Robert Boxall’s pioneering work that paved the way for modern obstetric practice. Sir Francis Champneys added the following appreciation to his obituary: “In pursuing an investigation for others he was unsparing of his time and trouble, his only object being to elucidate the problem and arrive at the truth. It was during this period that he wrote his paper on scarlatina and the puerperium – a paper which has let light and common sense into a subject which was until then confused and obscure.” In his student days Robert Boxall was a member of the United Hospitals Rugby XV. He retired in 1903, owing to ill health. In retirement he was a keen fisherman and for many years used to holiday in France, where he knew of a good trout stream.