

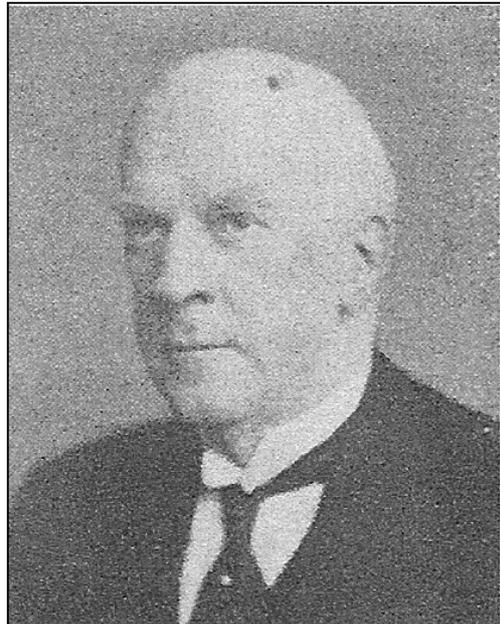
SIR HAROLD ARTHUR THOMAS FAIRBANK (1876-1961). O.B.E., D.S.O., M.B., M.S. (Lond.), F.R.C.S. (Eng.), M.Ch. (Liverpool). - The doyen of Orthopaedic Surgeons.

“My forty-five years experience of this problem leads me to emphasise the difficulty of what I would call the ‘diagnosis of prognosis.’ ”

Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery (1948).

When Sir Harold Arthur Thomas Fairbank (1876-1961) [Epsom College 1888-1893] published his monumental *Atlas of General Affections of the Skeleton*, in 1951, his reviewer wrote: “Sir Thomas Fairbank knows far more about bone disease than anyone else in the country. This not only because of his many years on the staff of an undergraduate teaching hospital and of the hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, but also because he is our orthopaedic father, whose interests we know and to whom we take all our problems and prizes.” Thomas Fairbank was the son of Dr Thomas Fairbank, a general practitioner in Windsor, and brother of Fleet Surgeon Christian Beverley Fairbank, R.N. [Epsom College 1888-1892]. He won an Entrance Scholarship to Charing Cross Hospital and, initially, intended pursuing a career in dentistry. If it had not been for the South African War, in which he served as a medical officer, he might well have become established as a West End surgeon-dentist. However, on his return from South Africa he was appointed Medical Superintendent at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street. He took the F.R.C.S. (Eng.) in 1901, and proceeded M.S. (Lond.) in 1903.

Sir Thomas Fairbank was a brilliant diagnostician. On one occasion at Great Ormond Street, on hearing the peculiar and piercing scream of an infant at the other end of the out-patient hall he remarked to a colleague: “That sounds like the cry of infantile scurvy,” and so it was. While at Great Ormond Street, Fairbank decided to concentrate on orthopaedic surgery and he was later appointed orthopaedic surgeon at Charing Cross Hospital, the first London hospital to elect a surgeon for orthopaedic work only. He developed great powers of clinical observation and began to study congenital dislocation of the hip and the less commonly described skeletal disorders of children. In 1914, he visited the United States to study the development of orthopaedic surgery in Boston and New York.



At the outset of the First World War Fairbank joined the R.A.M.C. and was mobilized with the 85th Field Ambulance to Flanders and then Macedonia, before being appointed consulting surgeon to the British Salonika Force. While holding this appointment he travelled widely on bad roads and in bad weather to help many young surgeons in the Doiran and Struma areas, and was instrumental in organizing an invaluable training centre for post-operative and convalescent patients. In the Second World War such units were known as rehabilitation centres. He was awarded the *D.S.O.* in 1918 and appointed *O.B.E.* in 1919 for his services during the First World War.

On his return to London, Thomas Fairbank was asked to take charge of the newly established orthopaedic department at King’s College hospital, and he soon came to be recognised as one of the leading orthopaedic surgeons in Britain. In addition to King’s College Hospital he worked as a consulting surgeon at Great Ormond Street, Queen Alexandra’s Military Hospital, Millbank, and at the Lord Mayor Treloar’s Hospital, Alton. At King’s he reorganised the orthopaedic department to

make it more suitable for patients and for teaching undergraduates. He inaugurated an out-patient fracture clinic, the first in London and the second in the country and, during the Second World War he accepted the post of consultant in orthopaedic surgery to the Army and the Emergency Medical Service. The University of Liverpool made him an honorary M.Ch. (Orthopaedics) in 1939, and his work for the nation during the war was recognised by a knighthood accorded to him in 1946.

Sir Thomas Fairbank was a founder member of the British Orthopaedic Association and President in 1926-1927, when he chose: "*Some General Diseases of the Skeleton,*" as the title of his presidential address. He was also a founder member, and later Vice-President, of the Second Congress in Bologna and Rome – of the International Society of Orthopaedic Surgery. He was President of the Orthopaedic Section of the Royal Society of Medicine and, in 1951 he was admitted to the honorary fellowship of that society. In 1932 he was elected Vice-President of the Section of Orthopaedics at the Centenary Meeting of the British Medical Association. In his obituary it was written: "His main interest was in orthopaedics, and there he was the master. His diagnosis was a compound of logic with an unequalled knowledge of rare and obscure conditions; and his operating was like himself, simple, direct, and extremely efficient. When he cut two bones to fit together they fitted like the work of a master craftsman."