

**SYDNEY HARRY STEPHENSON (1862-1923). M.B., C.M. (Edin.), L.S.A., F.R.C.S. (Edin.), D.O. (Oxon.). - An Ophthalmic Surgeon with a World-wide reputation.**

*“Stephenson had a famous memory, he was able to read through an article and then repeat it word for word...In speaking in public he had a gift of oratory and this coupled with a beautiful voice and ready wit made him always worth hearing.”*

*British Journal of Ophthalmology (1923).*

Sydney Harry Stephenson (1862-1923) [Epsom College 1875-1879. Rugby XV] was the son of Dr Thomas Appleby Stephenson, President of the Nottingham Medico-Chirurgical Society, who had much to do with the founding of the Nottingham Eye Hospital. He received his medical education at the Middlesex, St Mary's and the London Hospitals, and at Edinburgh University, where he graduated M.B., C.M. in 1884. He then returned to London and worked in the Royal Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital under the tutelage of Mr Adams Frost, an honoured master. Within a few years he was appointed Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon at the Evelina Children's Hospital; King Edward's Memorial Hospital, Ealing; the Queen's Hospital for Children, and Queen Charlotte's Hospital.



Apart from his hospital appointments and a large private practice, the main features of Sydney Stephenson's life revolved around medical journalism and his work with school children suffering from contagious eye disease in the metropolitan area. In the summer of 1886 and again in 1890, an epidemic of trachoma occurred in a number of schools and Stephenson was delegated to control the infection in the Poor Law Schools of Norwood and Hanwell. He worked there for several years and by segregating those afflicted with trachoma he achieved enormous success in reducing the infection, while ensuring the children's education. An isolation block, designed to accommodate 400 children was built, and as a consequence the percentage of trachoma cases in Hanwell declined from 33% in 1889 to 0.6% in 1896. In 1890 Stephenson was invited by the Local Government Board to make an inspection of all the children attending the Poor Law Schools in the Metropolis. He found a percentage of 5.7% affected with trachoma, and his advice that these infected children be housed in two hospital schools on the 'cottage' or 'small block' plan was adopted by the authorities.

Sydney Stephenson's work as a medical journalist was highly significant. He won the Middlemore Prize of the British Medical Association for his monograph on *Ophthalmia Neonatorum* (1907), and it was said that "the language of the essay was likened to that of Macaulay." Indeed, the *British Medical Journal* stated that it "was a veritable encyclopaedia of knowledge, leaving little else for anyone to add at that time." In 1903, he founded *The Ophthalmoscope*, and this journal ran to fourteen volumes under his editorship before it was incorporated with the *Royal Ophthalmic Hospital Reports* and the *Ophthalmic Review* in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* (1917). By 1913, *The Ophthalmoscope* had become by far the most important and widely circulating journal of British ophthalmology. As editor, Stephenson commanded the respect and, indeed, the affection of eye specialists throughout the English-speaking world. Those fourteen volumes of *The Ophthalmoscope* together with the first seven volumes of the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* form his best memorial. In 1909, he co-founded the Oxford Ophthalmological Congress, which meets yearly in Oxford, and followed Robert Doyne, his co-founder, as Master of the Congress. He also co-founded the Society for the Study of Disease of Children which later became merged with the Section for

Diseases of Children of the Royal Society of Medicine. He was a member of the Council and Vice-President of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom. The *British Medical Journal* described Sydney Stephenson as "an ophthalmic surgeon of world-wide repute." As an undergraduate he was Captain of the Edinburgh University Rugby XV, and a member of the Nottinghamshire County Rugby XV.