
“Twining had a whimsical notion of a ‘thinkograph.’ This was to be a machine that typed out in masterly English all one’s great sweeping thoughts while lying in a bath.”


Edward Wing Twining (1887-1939) [Epsom College 1897-1905. Carr Exhibition] came from a medical family, both his grandfather, uncle, and father, Dr A. H. Twining, being in practice at Salcombe in Devon, and he was the brother of Dr Daniel Owen Twining [Epsom College 1895-1903]. He had a distinguished career at Epsom College, being a prefect, member of the Rugby XV, and winner of the Engledue, Brande, Watts Science and Modern History Prizes. It was while he was a medical student on a surgical unit that he contracted osteomyelitis from an infected needle and this crippling condition delayed his qualification and handicapped him throughout his life. He eventually completed his medical training at University College Hospital where he qualified M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. (Eng.) in 1913. He died in 1939, as a direct result of the infection, tragically at a time without recourse to modern antibiotics, and at the peak of an outstanding career. At the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 Twining was rejected as physically unfit for service in the R.A.M.C., but in 1915, he was placed in charge of an x-ray and electrotherapeutic unit at Netley Hospital, Southampton. It was there that he began his lifelong interest in diagnostic radiology.

After the War Edward Twining underwent a period of study at St Thomas’s Hospital and successfully passed the newly instituted University of Cambridge Diploma in Medical Radiology and Electrotherapeutics (D.M.R.E.) in 1923. This was the first formally established radiological qualification in the world. Twining was the most outstanding candidate of the examination and so impressed the examiners that it is recorded that “the viva became a friendly talk,” and afterwards he was invited to join the honorary staff of Manchester Royal Infirmary to fill a specially created post in the X-Ray Department. In 1928 he was appointed lecturer in radiology to the University of Manchester. At that time the Manchester Royal Infirmary had little money with which to purchase new equipment. When the authorities were deterred by the cost of £ 800 for an x-ray tomographic unit, Twining simply designed and built an add-on attachment to a standard piece of equipment at the cost of £ 1. This ingenious device enabled tomography to be applied widely in many x-ray departments around the country and in many clinical situations, not least in the investigation of cranial and spinal disorders. It was from this that he made important and ground-breaking x-ray studies of the cerebral ventricular system.

When the Christie Hospital and the Holt Radium Institute were being rebuilt, Twining was invited to become its honorary radiologist and to advise the Board on the lay-out of a new x-ray department. In 1936 he was awarded a Hunterian Professorship at the Royal College of Surgeons and he immediately gained international recognition as a pioneering neuroradiologist. In preparation for his Hunterian Oration he went to the Manchester Royal Infirmary for two hours or so every Monday evening for nine months with neurological friends discussing and working at the problems of imaging the cerebral ventricles. His address was illustrated by rotating lantern slides, which he had made
himself, containing mercury within hollow ventricular shapes to simulate the movement of air through the ventricular system during the investigative technique of pneumoencephalography. These slides, which made such an impression on the audience, were on display again in the historical exhibition during the Röntgen Centenary Congress held in 1995. Edward Twining wrote numerous papers published in the medical journals but his great section on diseases of the chest, which occupied almost an entire volume of the three-volume *Textbook of Radiology* (1938) edited by British authors, is considered to be the best account of radiology of the respiratory system ever written.

Shortly before his death, Twining was chosen as President-elect of both the Faculty of Radiologists (later to become the Royal College) and the Section of Radiology of the Royal Society of Medicine. At the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association in Manchester in 1929 he was Secretary of the Section of Radiology and Radiotherapeutics, and at the Belfast Meeting in 1937 he was Vice-President of this Section. His name is commemorated by the Twining Medal of the Royal College of Radiologists and by the Presidential Medal of the British Society of Neuroradiologists. Experienced visitors from over-seas who saw him at his research work expressed their opinion that he was one of the best of the younger radiologists that they had met, and time has shown that they were not in error. In his obituary Edward Twining is described as “the father of British neuroradiology.” There is no doubt that the work in which he took the greatest pride and which made the greatest contribution to medicine was that on the brain and spine, in particular his studies of the cerebral ventricular system. For this he gained international recognition as a pioneer neuroradiologist.