



COMMEMORATE: Sandgate Society unveiled a plaque to Dame Sheila Sherlock

Doctor's plaque is unveiled

A NEW plaque to commemorate the life of a world-renowned physician has been unveiled in Sandgate.

Dame Sheila Sherlock moved to the village in 1929 and attended the Folkestone County School for Girls.

When she attended Edinburgh University in 1936 she faced great resistance to the idea of a woman working in medicine. But she went on to excel in her chosen field of disease of the liver, writing more than 600 medical and scientific journals over her career.

She died in 2001, aged 83.

A blue plaque in her honour was unveiled by Sandgate Society at 99 Sandgate High Street, close to her former home, Devonshire Terrace.

14 THE HERALD 24/11/11
ERECTED 4/11/11



At Former Devonshire Terrace

1918 – 2001

9. Dame Sheila Sherlock who died aged 83, was the world's leading liver specialist

Aggressive, ambitious and audacious, Sheila Sherlock was a small bundle of energy, and her output - written, clinical, research, and teaching - was phenomenal. She was the first woman in Britain to be appointed a Professor of Medicine and the first to become vice-president of the Royal College of Physicians.

She wrote the first serious modern textbook on her subject, *Diseases of the Liver and Biliary System*, in 1954; it ran to 11 editions and was translated into at least six languages.

In the 1950s, no one knew much about liver disease, but her clinical research and teaching soon improved diagnosis and treatment.

She popularised needle biopsies, making an exact diagnosis possible. In 1966 she helped to create what is now a standard test in diagnosing primary cirrhosis of the liver.

Sheila Patricia Violet Sherlock was born on March 31 1918. From Folkestone Grammar School she was rejected by several medical schools, who had few places for women, and went to Edinburgh University, graduating top in Medicine in 1941.

Prevented from holding a house job because she was female, she became clinical assistant to James Learmonth, Professor of Surgery. After a Rockefeller Fellowship at Yale University and a further year at the Hammersmith, she was appointed Lecturer and Honorary Consultant Physician. She was still only 30. By the time she was 35, she and her liver unit were internationally known.

She received many awards and honours, and was appointed DBE in 1978. In 2001, she was made a Fellow of the Royal Society. She married, in 1951, Dr Geraint James with whom she had two daughters.

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Goodbye to Dame Sheila

**Renowned doctor leaves
amazing medical legacy**

WORLD renowned doctor, Professor Dame Sheila Sherlock, died in December aged 83.

She blazed a trail for women in the male-dominated medical world to reach the top of her profession.

Dame Sherlock was born in Dublin but moved to Folkestone and attended County School, now Folkestone School For Girls.

She then went to Edinburgh University in 1936 to study medicine and graduated top of her class in 1941.

Despite her extensive qualifications she had to battle against sexual prejudice and was unable to get one of the top jobs at the Royal Infirmary. Her first job was as a lowly clinical assistant.

In 1943 she learned liver biopsy, which was to become her field of specialist expertise.

In the course of her early career she investigated the effects on human livers of malnutrition in German concentra-

tion camps, and by the time she turned 30 was already a highly respected teacher and doctor, and soon after a world famous figure.

She was a founder member of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and vice-president of the Royal College of Physicians.

Made Dame Sherlock, she took the Chair for medicine at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine in 1959, which expanded in both size and reputation under her leadership.

She was honoured with degrees and prizes from institutions and groups over the world, and until a few months before her death still toured, speaking at medical conferences.

She celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary to Gerry James only a fortnight before she died, and had two daughters.

Her interests ranged widely, from opera to football, and she inspired loyalty and admiration from hundreds of people who came into contact or worked



ADMIRER: Dame Sheila

Photograph: GEOFFREY ARGENT

with her, though she apparently started life being less approachable.

Schoolmate Joan Beattie, said: "Sheila was lethal on the hockey field, though she was a bit of a loner. Determined I would describe her as."

"She went to Edinburgh because they wouldn't take her in London, her being a woman. Her life rather speaks for itself."

Sheila Sherlock

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Professor Dame **Sheila Patricia Violet Sherlock, Mrs. James**, DBE, MD, FRCP, FRCP Ed, FRS^[1] (31 March 1918 – 30 December 2001) was a British physician, hepatologist and teacher.

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Early life

Sheila Sherlock was born on 31 March 1918 in Dublin. Her early life was spent in London, before her family moved to Folkestone in 1929. She was educated at the Folkestone County School for Girls. She was rejected by several colleges when she applied for a place to read medicine; in pre-World War II Britain, female applicants to medical schools were at a great disadvantage. She did gain a place at Edinburgh University in 1936. Her ability became evident, and she graduated in 1941, only the second woman to be awarded an **Ettles Scholarship** for finishing top of her year.^[2]

Career

She remained in Edinburgh to take up the post of Assistant Lecturer in Surgery offered to her by Professor Sir James Learmonth, and published her first paper with Learmonth in 1942;^[3] she later recounted that Learmonth had taught her how to conduct and document research. In the same year she was appointed House Physician to Professor Sir John McMichael at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital.

In this post she worked on hepatitis, which she was able to continue from 1943 to 1947 with funding from the Medical Research Council and subsequently with the award of the Beit Memorial Fellowship. She was awarded her MD with a thesis on *The Liver in Disease: with special reference to aspiration liver biopsy*, receiving a Gold Medal from Edinburgh University^[4]. She also conducted research into portal hypertension, hepatic encephalopathy and ascites at this time.

In 1947 she spent a year at Yale University's School of Medicine as a Rockefeller Travelling Fellow, working on carbohydrate metabolism and liver disease.^[5] In 1948 she was appointed Lecturer in Medicine and Consultant Physician at Hammersmith Hospital at the age of 30. In 1951, aged 33, she was awarded the

Sheila Sherlock



Sheila Sherlock

Born	31 March 1918 Dublin, Ireland
Died	30 December 2001 (aged 83) London, England, UK
Residence	United Kingdom
Nationality	British
Fields	Medicine
Institutions	Royal Free Hospital
Alma mater	University of Edinburgh
Known for	Hepatology

Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians (FRCP), making her, at the time, the youngest woman to receive this qualification.

In 1959 she was appointed the first professor of medicine at London's Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine. She founded the liver unit which was located in a temporary wooden structure on the roof of the hospital in Gray's Inn Road; despite its location, the department attracted trainees from around the world, and many current leaders in the field of hepatology spent time there. Research in several different areas of liver disease was undertaken: bilirubin metabolism, haemochromatosis, cholestasis, drug-induced liver disease, albumin synthesis, portal hypertension and ascites, autoimmune liver disease and its treatment with corticosteroids, and the use of liver biopsy in the diagnosis of liver disease were all studied.^[*citation needed*]

In 1974 the department moved to the new hospital in Hampstead, where it was situated close to the clinical wards, on the 10th floor. Research continued there, with viral hepatitis, liver transplantation and endoscopic treatment of varices all becoming important areas of study. She retired from the Chair of Medicine in 1983, but continued to see patients, conduct research, and write.^[*citation needed*]

Publications

Dr. Sherlock was known as a clear and succinct writer, and she published over 600 papers in scientific journals. Her most widely known book, *Diseases of the Liver and Biliary System*^[6], was first published in 1955. It was written solely by her until the ninth edition in 1993, and is now in its 11th edition. She was also editor of *Gut* and the *Journal of Hepatology*.

Affiliations/awards

- Co-founder (with Hans Popper) and president, International Association for the Study of the Liver (1958–1962)
- President, British Society of Gastroenterology (1973)
- Founder, and later President, British Liver Trust (1988–2001)
- Founder, American Association for the Study of Liver Disease

She was the first woman in the UK to be appointed Professor of Medicine as well as the first woman to be Vice President of the Royal College of Physicians. She held honorary degrees from universities including Lisbon (1981), Yale (1983), London (1989) and Cambridge (1995), and was awarded the Buckston Browne Prize (1953), the Thannhauser Prize (1980) and the Gold Medal of the British Medical Association (1985).^[*citation needed*]

Honours

- In 1951 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and delivered their Bradshaw Lecture (1961), Humphrey Davy Rolleston (1968) and Lumleian Lectures (1978) and Harveian Oration (1985).^[7]
- In 1978 she was appointed Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE).
- In 1991 she received the honorary doctorate for being an outstanding personality in the fields of clinical and experimental Hepatology from the Universal Medical Center of the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (JGU).^[8]
- In May 2001 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) ^[9].

Personal life

In 1951 Sheila Sherlock married Dr Geraint James, a physician and researcher into sarcoidosis. They celebrated their golden wedding two weeks before her death in London on 30 December 2001, aged 83, from pulmonary fibrosis. She was survived by her husband, two daughters, Amanda and Auriole, and two granddaughters. Her daughter Amanda, a Baptist minister, conducted her funeral.^[10]

Legacy

When Dr Sherlock started her medical career, little was known about liver disease. Her work helped to establish hepatology as a medical specialty. She pioneered the use of needle liver biopsy.^[11] which had been used purely as a research tool, based on the technique of Sir John McMichael; this improved understanding of the pathology of liver disease and is used in the diagnosis of liver diseases today. The liver unit that she set up at the Royal Free Hospital became the centre for both research into liver disease and the education of trainees in the specialty.

In 1966, she developed the standard test for Primary Biliary Cirrhosis^[12] and later showed that it was an autoimmune disease, with Deborah Doniach of the Middlesex Hospital. She also demonstrated the efficacy of corticosteroid therapy for autoimmune hepatitis^[13]. She also recognised the link between hepatitis B and hepatocellular carcinoma^[14]

In 2006, the **Sheila Sherlock Prizes** were founded with a donation from her husband, Dr Geraint James; two prizes are awarded to the highest achieving medical students at the UCL Medical School^[15].

In March 2008, the 90th anniversary of her birth, the liver unit at the Royal Free Hospital which she founded was renamed the **Sheila Sherlock Liver Centre** in her memory.

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People educated at Folkestone School for Girls

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