

Thomas Richardson Colledge : born 1797, died 1879.

Contributors

Royal College of Surgeons of England

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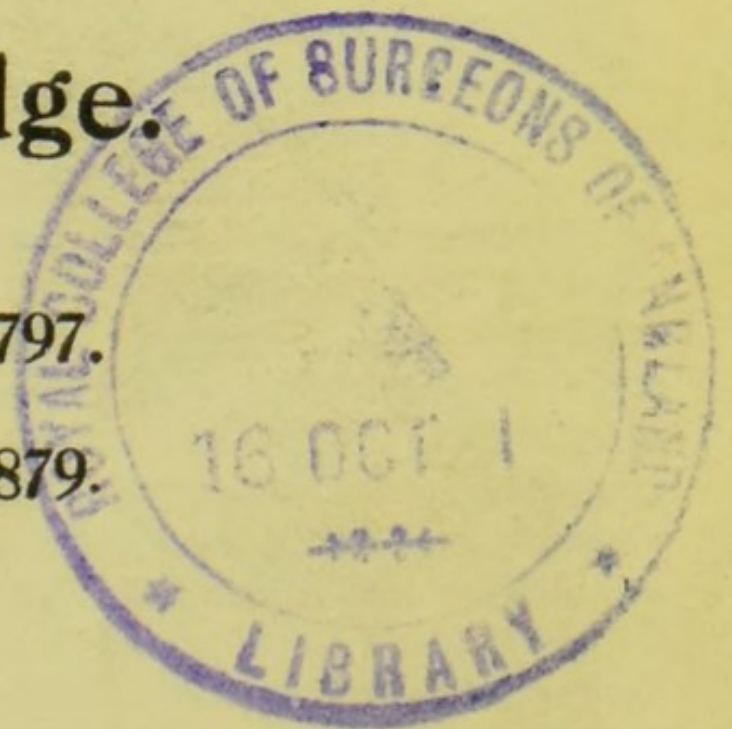
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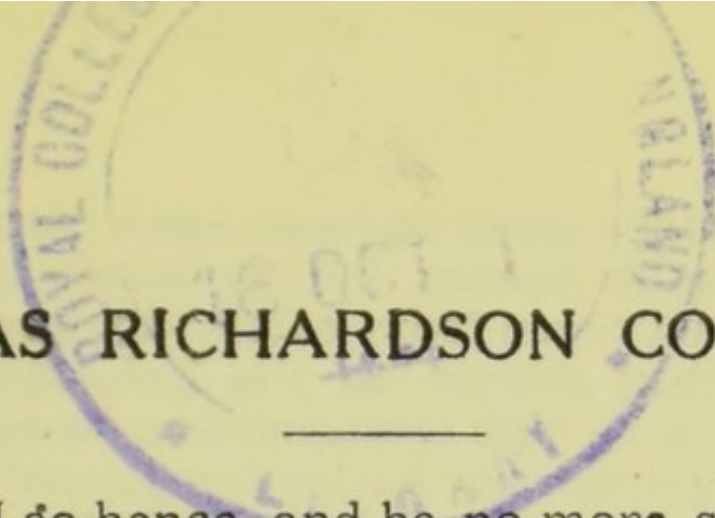


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THOMAS RICHARDSON COLLEDGE.

Before I go hence, and be no more seen or able to answer any questions, I think I had better jot down for my Colledge nephews and nieces what I know of my father and his family. He believed they originally came from Northumberland, but he was born the 11th June, 1797, at Kilsby, in Northamptonshire, in what was called "The old Manor House," said once to have harboured Charles II. for a night during his wanderings and adventure in the oak tree. I have never been there, but have been told in the Kilsby and Barby Churchyards are many tombstones to the Colledge ancestors, and a memorial to one Jeffery Colledge, born 1676, died 1743. The old Manor House, said to have had 300 acres of land attached to it, became mortgaged in my grandfather's time, and, though my father sent several thousands to clear it, it was wrongfully left away from him, and about 16 years ago denuded of its lands, was sold for a very small sum. My grandfather, Thomas Colledge, married a Miss Richardson, and my father was given his father's Christian and mother's surname. At seven he began to show his bent, and doctored all the sick cats and dogs he could get hold of, and a human where he could find a confiding one. Later on, when he had to go to school he didn't approve of the arrangement, so mounted on his pony, and with his father riding on one side, and uncle on the other, was thus conducted to Rugby.

The Colledges seem to have been good riders, and had some valuable horses, for my father spoke of riding a thorough-bred mare from Kilsby to London. From Rugby my father passed to the Leicester Infirmary, from whence, with high testimonials, he went to London in 1817 to study under Sir Astley Cooper, whose favourite pupil he became, and it was on Sir Astley's advice that he accepted the appointment of the H.E.I.C. to be Civil Surgeon in Macao, offered him by his old friend Sir George Best Robinson, Bart. My father was 20 years in China, said to be about the most popular man with all classes out there. Not finding his Civil Surgeon's duties sufficient to occupy him, he started, with the help of friends, an Ophthalmic Hospital for the Chinese. So interesting and skilful were his operations there that he seems to have drawn of a morning admiring spectators among the Company's writers who went to see "Old Tom Colledge," as they called him, at his work, and letters were written that are now to be found in London and China among the records of that time. His one Assistant was a half-Chinese, half-Portuguese named Afun, a Roman Catholic, and the best man, my father used to say, he ever knew. So particular, at this time, was my father to keep his delicacy of touch for his operations that he wouldn't even sharpen a pencil.

He was also founder of the Medical Mission in China, and was President of the Society for 40 years. His influence with the Chinese was so great that when Lord Napier of Merchistoun, who had been sent out as Governor, was taken on board a boat to try and secure him in his illness some quiet, my father was able to get

the Chinese, who were surrounding the boat, beating their tom-toms furiously, to quietly disperse, and poor Lord Napier died soon afterwards in his arms. In memory of his services, Lady Napier sent my father a very pretty writing set composed of Scotch pebbles, mounted in fine gold, which is still in the family. In March 1833, my father married Caroline Mathilda Shillaber, whose brother was the first American Consul in Java, and whose ancestors, Puritans, had gone to America in the reign of James II. on account of religious persecutions. About twelve years ago a very interesting book was published in America by Catherine Hillard, after her mother's death, called "Letters from my Mother's Journal." These letters were written by my mother's old school-fellow, then Harriett Low, and at whose Uncle and Aunt's house in Macao, my father met my mother. In her letters constant mention was made of my parents, and of the picture the Board of Directors desired Chinnery, a well-known artist in China and India, to paint of my father and for which they gave him £500. The picture remained for many years with one of the Directors, a Mr. Millett, who directed at his death it should be sent to the Colledge family, and in 1875 it came down to Cheltenham, just in time on my return from India to prevent it going to the Leicester Infirmary, my father saying, "Oh, if you would like it you can have it."

When my father left Macao, an eye-witness (one of those seeing him off) told me every European was on board ship to wish him "*bon voyage*," and the sands and rocks around crowded with Chinese. Arrived in England 1838 he found "The Lancet" writing him up. His

friends urged him to set up as an oculist in London, the influential ones saying "We can ensure you a first-rate practice as there is no one at the present moment who can touch you." However, my father wouldn't, as he said he didn't like town, it depressed him. He went down to Edinburgh, took his M.D. at King's College, Aberdeen, 1838, became F.R.C.P. Edinburgh, 1840, and was made Fellow of The Royal Society, Edin. 1844.

He wished to set up in practice in Edinburgh, but the doctors there, as he was not a Scotchman, hoped he would not so he came south and found himself in Cheltenham in the days of the old four-in-hand mail coaches. Fancying the place he bought a house just built, and two of his old China friends set him up with a carriage and pair of thorough-breds. As a girl I can remember my father, a very busy man, constantly called in consultation, and sent for to various parts of England. Every Director and friend who had been with him in China came at least once to visit him in his provincial home, and several took houses and came to live and die near their beloved doctor. My mother said she never once knew of his giving a wrong diagnosis. Twice he differed in opinion over two patients he had sent to Critchett, and both times the famous oculist wrote afterwards to say my father had been right. Meeting Dr., after Sir Richard Quain, as a married woman he said to me "What does your father do living in Cheltenham? He is one of us and ought never to have been there!" And my brother meeting Sir Henry Thompson at dinner one night, and sitting next him, the famous surgeon, said: "There is no doctor out of London that has the reputation of Colledge, of

Cheltenham." We always regretted his choice of going into the provinces, where few realised the talent of the man living among them. A born doctor, and with such skill and so re-assuring a manner, we felt he ought to have gained considerable eminence, and not have hidden his light under a bushel. With his modesty though he didn't seem to view things in the same way, and during his last illness said, "The one good work of my life has been founding the Medical Mission in China," yet he had freely bestowed his skill on others and constantly helped them pecuniarily. He died at his house in Cheltenham 1879 at the age of 82.

My father had eight children, six sons and two daughters. His eldest son, George Welstead, passed into Haileybury at the earliest age allowed, and on leaving stood first of his term in Persian. Proceeding to Calcutta he secured his first admission into the Indian Civil Service in three months, and gained the gold medal for proficiency in Oriental languages. He was through the Mutiny, and spent ten years in India. He died October 1863 at the age of 30, Magistrate and Collector of Boolundshuhur, N.W.P. He married Katherine, eldest daughter of William Dent, of Bickley Park, one of the Directors of the Old East India Company, and left four sons and a daughter. My father's next three sons died in infancy in Macao. His fifth son, John, was in the 20th Hussars, and afterwards joined the Bengal Staff Corps, and was appointed to the Central India Horse. He was through the Kabul Campaign in 1880, and with Sir F. Slade Roberts, (afterwards Lord Roberts) on his famous march to Kandahar. He was mentioned in despatches and received a medal,

clasp, and the bronze star. He retired as a Major and died 1904. John Colledge married "Jane Mackenzie," only daughter of William Inglis, Esq., Madras Civil Service, and had two sons and a daughter. The sixth and youngest son, Robert Inglis, was an invalid from his birth, and died in 1862 in his thirteenth year.

The eldest daughter, Caroline Georgina, died of rheumatic fever, at seventeen.

I (Frances Mary), the youngest one, married in 1870, Capt. Cunliffe Martin (afterwards Colonel and C.B.) and have had eight children.