

Professor Kenelm Hutchinson Digby

Hong Kong Rotarian -- an eminent pioneer of surgery

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

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Professor Kenelm Hutchinson Digby, OBE, FRCS, MBBS (4 August 1884 - 23 February 1954) was a British surgeon who lived and worked for many years in Hong Kong, where he held various professorships at Hong Kong University (香港大學) from 1913 to 1949. He was conferred the title “Emeritus Professor” by the University in 1950. Digby was an Active Member of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) in the 1930-40s holding the Classification “Medicine – Surgery”.



Digby was born in Ealing, London, England, the son of William Digby who was in the Indian Civil Service. He was the cousin of Kenelm Hubert Digby, the proposer of the notorious 1933 “King and Country” debate in the Oxford Union, and later Attorney General and judge in Sarawak, Borneo.

Digby was educated at Quernmore School, Bromley, and undertook his medical studies at Guy’s Hospital, London, where he was a prize-winning student (holding the Michael Harris, Hilton and Beaney Prizes) and where he gained his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery degrees (MB, BS) in 1907 and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1910. He was House Surgeon and Resident Obstetric Attendant at the Hospital.

In 1913 he first went to work in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong. He worked at the University of Hong Kong, holding various Professorships, for many years. In 1939 he was appointed Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) by George VI, King of the United Kingdom and the Dominions of the British Commonwealth.

Digby was captured when the British Crown Colony Hong Kong surrendered to the Imperial Japan during the Pacific War, and he was held as a Prisoner of War at Stanley Camp (赤柱拘留營) (1941–1945). He retired from Hong Kong to England in 1949.

Digby married Selina Dorothy Law in 1913, and the couple had two daughters. Rotarian Kenelm Hutchinson Digby, OBE, died at Guy's Hospital on 23 February 1954 (the Anniversary Day of Rotary). Digby will be remembered for his excellent teaching, his enthusiasm in the wards, his infectious laugh and humour, and his stern discipline in the operation theatre. He was a big man in every sense of the word.

Posts held

- (1) 1909–1911 Surgical Registrar and Anaesthetist to Guy's Hospital, England
- (2) 1912 Principal Medical Officer, Great Central Railway, England
- (3) 1913–1923 Professor of Anatomy, University of Hong Kong
- (4) 1923–1941 Professor of Surgery, University of Hong Kong
- (5) 1915–1941 Ho Tung Professor of Clinical Surgery, University of Hong Kong
- (6) 1945–1948 Honorary Consultant in Surgery to Government of Hong Kong
- (7) 1930–1948 Surgeon, Queen Mary Hospital, Hong Kong
engaged in research work, at Royal College of Surgeons of England, 1949 onwards
- (8) 1950–1954 Emeritus Professor of Surgery, University of Hong Kong

Publications

《Immunity in Health: The Functions of the Tonsils and the Appendix》(1919)
plus many papers in medical journals

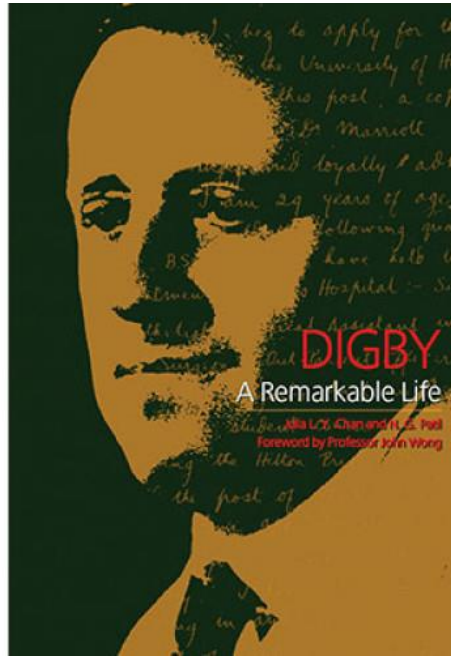


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The Digby Memorial Fund

In 2001, the Digby Memorial Fund was established by the University of Hong Kong in memory of the late Professor K. H. Digby, Professor of Anatomy from 1913 to 1923, Professor of Clinical Surgery from 1923 to 1941 and Emeritus Professor from 1950 to 1954. A scholarship was set up from 2001-02 for 1st year MBBS students until they complete their studies and MRes (Med). In 2022, the Scholarship was extended to full-time undergraduate programmes under the Medical Faculty.

The Scholarship shall be awarded annually to students who are admitted to any full-time undergraduate programmes under the Medical Faculty on the basis of academic merit (as shown in the prevailing public examination or equivalent for admission), financial need and performance at admission interview.



《Digby: A Remarkable Life》By Julia L. Y. Chan and N. G. Patil

ISBN : 978-962-209-800-8

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 香港大學出版社
HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

This monograph chronicles the life of an eminent pioneer of surgery, K. H. Digby, the important milestones in his professional life and the hardship he faced to fulfill his dreams.

Digby was a remarkable man with great compassion, highly regarded by colleagues, students, and patients, and an innovative and inspiring teacher. This biography, containing previously unpublished photographs, is a tribute to one of the pioneers of modern surgery.

In 1913, Digby took on the challenge travel to the Far East to take up the appointment at the newly established University of Hong Kong. During his career in academia spanning four decades, he endured many challenges that tested his mettle and the limits of his professionalism, especially in his internment during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. This biography is a testament to his perseverance and commitment to medical education and surgical practice in Hong Kong.

A fine anatomist and a precise surgeon, Digby was well remembered for his surgical ingenuity in nasopharyngeal carcinoma, common duct stones of liver origin, and in particular his unique “no-touch technique”, operating with perfect anatomical dissection. He contributed invaluable insight on the role of sub-epithelial lymphatic glands in immune reactions and was recognized as the first to describe “Hong Kong Disease” in the Hong Kong Chinese population in medical literature.