

Dame Ida Mann (1893-1983)



Graduating in medicine, she subsequently published a DSc thesis on the development of the human eye. This was soon followed by *Congenital Defects of the Eye* in 1937. Both these publications were trail blazing and definitive texts of embryology.

Her wide interests included comparative anatomy. She established the first contact lens clinic in London prior to the First World War and studied mustard gas keratitis and thyroid eye disease.

Appointed as assistant surgeon to the Central London Hospital becoming the first female consultant to the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital later known as Moorfields.

Oxford University appointed her Margaret Ogilvie Reader in Ophthalmology and subsequently gained a personal chair which was the first in Britain for a woman to hold the title of Professor at Oxford.

She was honoured with the Doyne Lecture in 1928 and the Harrison Gale in 1929. Other notable lectures were the Nettleship and the Montgomery Lecture in 1935.

In the post-war era, Ida travelled to Australia on the "Strathmore" with her husband, Prof William Gye in 1949, ostensibly on a cruise on three months leave from Moorfields where she was then senior ophthalmic surgeon, to escape the bleak climate, both social as well as meteorological, of post war Britain. She had cousins in Tammin, a town in the south-west of WA, and the plan was to spend some time with them before going on to Melbourne.

They both found Melbourne, like London, too cold and wet and Bill Gye's health suffered. Coincidentally they were offered a house in the Perth suburb of Dalkeith which they decided to buy, Ida understandably causing a bombshell when she wrote to Moorfields announcing her resignation and intention to settle in Australia.

She related in later years that she was somewhat surprised during her first few months in the house to not infrequently receive visits from American sailors who were equally surprised to find themselves greeted by her and not the very accommodating former occupant they were expecting.

Her husband continued his research into viruses and cancer and Ida set up a small ophthalmic practice from her house regrettably experiencing considerable professional jealousy from some of her ophthalmic colleagues in Perth. Her original Gullstrand slitlamp remains in Subiaco.

Bill Gye's health gradually deteriorated and he died in 1952. A friend brought to her attention an advertisement for an ophthalmologist to make a short trip to the Kimberley to report on eye diseases there thinking it might provide a diversion for her from her grief. On the way the small party of three called into Darwin to meet with Father Frank Flynn, a catholic priest and ophthalmologist who had been Ida's house surgeon at Moorfields some 20 years earlier. He introduced her to early-stage trachoma, something she had not encountered in the UK, and an investigation that was to last four years documenting the cause of the high rate of blindness among the aboriginal population of the Kimberley and western desert and highlighting the prevalence of a disease supposed by governments to not exist in Australia.

Ida travelled incessantly over the next 20 years, in between times maintaining her small city practice in Dalkeith and one in the south-west coastal town of Busselton which she asked Andrew Stewart - Past President of RANZCO to take over on her retirement in 1976. She had built a holiday house, Adsett, overlooking Geographe Bay where she would spend a few days a month whenever she was not on one of her expeditions. Andrew often called on her there on his visits to Busselton, enjoying her humorous recollections of her Moorfields days, and her still restless and enquiring mind, sometimes taking international colleagues who were visiting Perth.

For her many contributions to ophthalmology she was awarded the CBE in 1950 and made DBE in 1980.