HISTORY OF ORTHOPAEDICS

Great Names in the History of Orthopaedics X —
Benjamin Collins Brodie

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ABSTRACT

Sir Benjamin Brodie increased our knowledge of diseases by his exhaustive and detailed studies of their clinical and pathological manifestations. While possessing all the qualities of a successful surgeon, he was more concerned with the prevention of disease than with its cure. His strength lay in clinical diagnosis. In 1832, Brodie published his findings on a form of chronic abscess of the tibia, since known as Brodie’s abscess. In 1840, he also first described serocystic disease of the breast. After his retirement, Brodie took an active interest in medical reform. He wrote extensively on anatomy, surgery, neurology, philosophy, and even psychology! He was a remarkably clear and persuasive teacher and lecturer. He is the only person to have occupied the posts of President of the General Medical Council, the Royal Society, and the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Key Words: Benjamin Brodie, History, 19th century, History of medicine, Orthopedics

INTRODUCTION

In the pre-anaesthetic era, few gentlemen were attracted to surgery. Training was tough, physical toil was great, and both physical and mental strain were overwhelming during a prolonged operation on a conscious patient. Little wonder, then, that members of the upper classes with medical intentions chose to become physicians rather than surgeons.

Benjamin Collins Brodie (1783-1862) [Figure 1] was an exception. Born in Wiltshire, England, where his father was a parish priest, he was privately educated by his father. After obtaining a solid grounding in Greek, Latin, and mathematics, he was sent to London in 1801 to study medicine. Then 18 years old, he studied at St Bartholomew’s Hospital under John Hunter’s pupil, John Abernethy (1764-1831), and at William...