

# Medical History

## Dr W G Grace, LRCP Edinburgh, MRCS England, 1879

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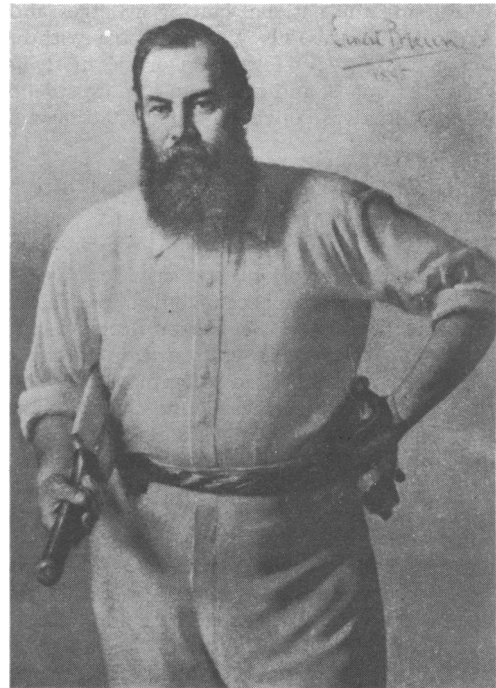
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One hundred years ago William Gilbert Grace, already established as the world's greatest cricketer, travelled to Edinburgh to obtain the LRCP diploma which, when added to his MRCS (Eng), enabled him to qualify as a doctor. So much is known and so much has been written about this man's extraordinary achievements on the cricket field that it is not surprising that relatively little is known of his medical career, which provided a stability to his family life in Gloucestershire from 1879 until the end of the century. There in Bristol, this giant of a man, perhaps more instantly recognised by the Victorian public than any other personage except Mr Gladstone, modestly went about his business as a family doctor in one of the city's poorer areas.

### Following family traditions

It was always expected that Gilbert (W G), the fourth son of Dr Henry Mills Grace, would follow family tradition and take up medicine as a career. His father, who had married Miss Martha Pocock in 1831, had set up in practice in the small Gloucestershire village of Downend where he combined his doctoring with an enthusiastic addiction to cricket, which was just emerging as a popular sport. His first four sons all became doctors. Henry, the eldest, born in 1833, was to practise at Kingswood-hill, and Alfred, born in 1840, also became a general practitioner, living in Chipping Sodbury. The third son, Edward Mills (E M), born in 1841, trained in Bristol and later became coroner for the Lower Division of Gloucestershire. He too became a famous cricketer, but his batting style was a good deal less orthodox than W G's. The fifth son, George Frederick, was also destined to become a doctor, but died tragically from pneumonia at the age of 30 only two weeks after playing in the 1880 Test Match with his two brothers E M and W G.

W G himself did not seem to be in any great hurry to graduate and although he entered Bristol Medical School in the late 1860s, he did not qualify as a doctor until 1879. During this time he must have pursued his studies in a desultory fashion, since it coincided with some of his greatest cricketing triumphs. In 1873 W G married his cousin Miss Agnes Nichols Day, and early in their marriage the couple moved to Earl's Court and subsequently to 1 Leamington Park, Acton, to enable W G to continue his studies at St Bartholomew's Hospital. There it is said that his ample frame and prematurely bearded face became a familiar sight in the medical quadrangle. At Bart's he studied anatomy with Mr A E Cumberpatch, who later became an aurist, and general surgery with Mr Howard Marsh, FRCS.



Photograph of Dr W G Grace, from a painting by Ernest Breun, 1895.

Later he moved to Westminster Hospital where he studied medicine with Dr W H Allchin, FRCP. Clearly, this gentleman was well able to teach his students the scientific basis of clinical medicine since he was, in addition to being a consultant physician to the hospital, a lecturer in both physiology and pathology. W G's regular cricketing activities prolonged his days as a medical student and the unusual nature of his qualifications, LRCP Edinburgh and MRCS London, suggests a piecemeal approach to his examinations. He does not appear to have been a great scholar, and is said to have rebuked members of his teams for reading, the explanation being that it ruined the eyes for cricket. There are reports of W G addressing the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1878 in Dublin, but if this was so there are no records in the official published transactions of the "learned and not unamusing address" he is reputed to have given.

### Professional responsibilities

Nevertheless, having qualified in 1879, W G took his professional responsibilities seriously, and earnestly thought of giving up cricket altogether. It was not that there were financial problems, for though clearly a "Gentleman" and not a "Player,"

W G was obviously well rewarded financially for his cricketering ability. Indeed, in the year of his qualification he received a national testimonial, consisting of a cheque for £1458, a clock, and obelisks made of marble and bronze. Suggestions had been made that a practice might be bought for him, but these were eventually rejected. At the presentation of the testimonial Lord Fitzharding said "Having talked the matter over it was felt that Mr Grace was old enough and strong enough to choose a practice for himself." In the event, W G returned to Bristol and set himself up with a surgery at 61 Stapleton Road in the middle of an unfashionable area. Initially, the Grace family lived nearby in Thrissle Lodge, but later moved to the larger Thrissle House, where there was a garden large enough to accommodate a cricket field that allowed the Gloucestershire eleven early season practice each spring.

In the first year of his professional career W G worked hard to establish his practice and did not play any first-class cricket until late in the season. Although he failed to reach 1000 runs, he managed to top the national batting averages and take 105 wickets. From 1879 until 1899 W G was busy with his medical work, moving house every few years or so, firstly to Clifton, then to Victoria Square, and finally to a more splendid house, Ashly Grove, which was conveniently situated near the county ground.

### Combining two careers

Despite his concurrent cricketering activities, W G's medical enterprises flourished and he became official parish doctor in his district, medical officer to the Barton Regis Union, public vaccinator in the same union, and surgeon to the Pennywell Colliery. In the summers he had to employ one or two locums for whom the Gloucestershire County Club made him an allowance of £20, which was later increased to £36 per season, though he continued with his patients' care at the weekends and throughout the winter. Clearly W G enjoyed looking after his patients in this part of the world and his professional work was very much on a local basis. Many stories are told about his doctoring in this largely working-class area. W G emerges as a gruff, kindly, and sometimes reluctantly sympathetic doctor who, while being widely respected and admired, was by no means revered by his patients. Now in the late 1970s with so much hysterical hero-worshipping it is difficult to imagine that such a well-known national figure could disappear into relative obscurity during the winter to conduct his affairs without the impertinent intrusion of the media. His patients were mostly simple, unsophisticated folk who were quietly proud of having W G as their doctor, but were not overawed by his ample presence.

At a time when medicine was unquestionably more of an art than a science W G adopted a common-sense and practical solution to some of his problems. For the jovial and slightly inebriated sweep who wanted a tonic, W G thought exercise would be more appropriate and sent his maid for the boxing gloves. A few rounds of sparring, perhaps the Victorian equivalent of jogging, was not appreciated by his patient, who rushed from the surgery into the street crying "The great big b . . . r wants to fight me." Nevertheless, W G had his gentler moments and once he sat up all night with a confinement to go on next morning to complete an innings of 221 against Middlesex. Undoubtedly his tremendous stamina enabled him to combine his two careers so successfully.

W G's rough-and-ready treatments were called upon often for crises on the cricket field. One of the most dramatic of these was in 1887, when A C M Croome of Gloucester gashed his throat on the spiked railings at Old Trafford when dashing round the boundary to save a four. While further surgical help was being sought, W G maintained compression of the wound for almost half an hour, preventing what might well have been a fatal haemorrhage. On another occasion the Kent amateur C J M Fox fell while fielding at point and dislocated his shoulder. With

one doctor-cricketer on his head (E M Grace) and another (W G Grace) with a foot in the axilla, the shoulder was reduced without further ado. In another match he stitched the cut eye of Palmer the Kent wicket-keeper who had been struck by a vicious bouncer. Shortly afterwards W G, to his intense annoyance, was stumped by Palmer, and left the pitch growling "After all I've done for you—that's what you do for me!"

Life continued in this pattern during the 1880s and '90s with cricketering summers and doctoring winters, but when the cricketering world was expecting W G to retire from the game he found new vigour and enthusiasm for his cricket. Such was his success that in the summer of 1895 at the age of 47 he scored 2346 runs, including more than 1000 runs by the end of May, and the compilation of his century of centuries. The enthusiasm of the public was fired by these prodigious feats and several public testimonials were started, including a national shilling testimonial from the *Daily Telegraph* and funds from the MCC, Gloucestershire Cricket Club, and the *Sportsman*. The generous response brought forth a total sum of £9078 8s 3d, a highly satisfactory payment for an "amateur."

### End of a medical career

At the end of the century there came a surprising turn of events in W G's career. He left the West Country and moved to London, giving up his medical work to take up the post of manager of the newly formed London County Cricket Club. The reasons for this sudden change are uncertain. Bernard Darwin, writing in Grace's biography, suggests that a re-arrangement of districts caused difficulties with several parish doctors. This left W G high and dry, and forced him to take up the post of organising the London County Cricket Club at the Crystal Palace. It seems astonishing that a man of his stature should be squeezed out of a practice in which he had been established for twenty years. What seems more likely is that a row with his own Gloucestershire County Cricket Club provoked the move. For years W G had developed an autocratic attitude in selecting the teams and dominating the affairs of the club. When asked by the committee of the County Club to state the matches in which he would play during the year he exploded and resigned his captaincy in a letter which ended "I have the greatest affection for the County of my birth, but for the Committee as a body, the greatest contempt."

Perhaps W G had tired of his medical work, for he did not pursue his profession any further after his move to London. The London County Cricket Club venture lasted until 1905, when W G retired early to spend what were to be his last few years playing club cricket, golf, and bowls and gardening at his home in Mottingham. Even at the age of 58 he was still able to score 71 in a triumphant last appearance for the Gentlemen against the Players. In 1915 the Grand Old Man of English cricket, greatly disturbed and distressed by the war, died after a stroke. There have been more famous doctors but few more famous cricketers.

### Further reading

- Darwin, Bernard, *W G Grace*. London, Duckworth, 1934.  
 Grace, W G, *WG—Cricketing Reminiscences and Personal Recollections*. London, James Bowden, 1899.  
 Thomson, A A, *The Greatest Cricketer*. London, Robert Hale, 1957.

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**WORDS CANDIDATE.** In a medical context a candidate is one who has applied for a job in face of competition. *L candidus*, white, refers not to the colour of the applicant's face at interview but to the white togas worn in ancient Rome by applicants for office. Today it still helps to be appropriately dressed when attending for interview, and to exhibit a CANDID (frank and open) demeanour.