

BOOK REVIEW

Faces from the Front: Harold Gillies, the Queen's Hospital, Sidcup and the Origins of Modern Plastic Surgery

by Andrew Bamji

Hardback, 240 pages

Helion Books

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The subtitle of *Faces from the Front* makes it clear that this book is about Harold Gillies, the Queen's Hospital in Sidcup and the origins of modern plastic surgery. The stated aims are to examine the British response to the huge number of soldiers with facial injuries returning from the trenches of the First World War, to uncover the history of the Queen's Hospital, which was established by Gillies, and to put forward the argument that the development of plastic surgery was aided by the multidisciplinary nature of that hospital.

The body of the book is based on original surgical records of facial injury patients operated on by Harold (later Sir Harold) Gillies, a New Zealand ENT surgeon who found himself seeing a large volume of these cases in France. The book is the story of how he built up a specialist hospital for these men and how, by bringing together a team of medical and non-medical experts, he developed the basic principles and "art" of plastic surgery.

Having read extensively on this subject, including other writings of Dr. Bamji and the works of Harold Gillies himself, I approached this book wondering if I would learn anything new. I'm delighted to say I did. This book has been fully and lovingly researched and covers a much broader area than previous works on this topic: in particular, the contemporary work of other nations in plastic surgery and also the input of the Allies and units from the Dominions, both positive and negative. The use of primary sources, which allows the identification of the individual wounded faces, adds a very personal touch to the detailed history.

I would recommend *Faces from the Front* to historians of the Great War, the military medical service and of course plastic surgery. However, this easy-to-read book would be enjoyed by most readers with any interest in medical history.

Jonathan Goddard

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