

Fetlar2013

Sir William Watson Cheyne

Born at Hobart off the coast of Tasmania on 14th December 1852 on a ship captained by his father, Cheyne was the only child of Andrew Cheyne and Eliza Watson, daughter of Fetlar's Minister, the Reverend William Watson. After the death of Eliza in 1856, with his father in the South Pacific, Cheyne was raised in Fetlar by his aunt and uncle-in-law, who was the minister in succession to the Reverend Watson.

In 1864, he was sent to Aberdeen Grammar School and later attended the University of Aberdeen. In 1871, Cheyne enrolled at Edinburgh University where he encountered Joseph Lister, whose lectures on antiseptics he followed with great enthusiasm. He became Lister's house surgeon in 1876, accompanying him a year later to London's King's College Hospital. In addition to antiseptics Cheyne took an interest in another controversial area of medicine, bacteriology, and published several important works.

In 1879, Cheyne passed the examinations for Membership and Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons. At King's College he held a number of positions before becoming Professor of Clinical Surgery in 1902. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1894 and was appointed a Hunterian professor on four occasions delivering the Bradshaw Lecture in 1908 and the Hunterian Oration in 1915. From 1914-1916 he was President of the Royal College of Surgeons. In 1924, he was awarded the first Lister Medal in recognition of his contributions to surgical science and delivered the first Lister Oration in 1925.

Cheyne volunteered for service as a consulting surgeon in the Second Boer War and then the First World War, when he was given the rank of Surgeon Rear-Admiral. For his services he was created a C.B. and later a K.C.M.G. In 1919, Cheyne was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Orkney and Shetland with the rank of Vice-Admiral. After his retirement from medical practice he was elected M.P. for the Universities of Edinburgh and St. Andrews, which later became the Combined Scottish Universities.

Cheyne was awarded a baronetcy in 1908 for his work and research in medicine, particularly in the field of antiseptic surgery. He continued to work tirelessly to promote Lister's methods in surgical practice. Even after his retirement, he occasionally offered his services as a doctor for the local

people of Fetlar and had a surgery room in Leagarth House. He died on April 19th 1932.

Leagarth House

Completed in 1901, Leagarth House was built for Sir William Watson Cheyne and became his main residence in his later life. It is a grand turn of the century house and a Category C listed building. It has recently been extensively restored by the Cheyne family.

The house was well known for its beautiful landscaped gardens, which defied the harsh Shetland winters, and had a number of heated greenhouses in which a range of exotic plants was grown. They became an attraction for visitors during the 1920s, when the gardens were opened to the public on Sunday afternoons.

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