

The General Surgeon – an extinct species?

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The demise of the general surgeon has been long predicted – is the species finally extinct? We can trace the evolution of general surgery from its not very general origins, to its heyday between about 1880-1980, and its later decline with super-specialisation.

Welsh surgeons are well-represented in this story from the 18th century onwards, examples being David Samwell, William Price, Hugh Owen Thomas, Robert Jones, Thelwall Thomas, Moriston Davies, Arthur Tudor Edwards, Ivor Lewis – though their achievements may not all have been in their home country. They also illustrate well the development of specialisation.

In the second part of this address I will give a personal view of the changes in general surgery over a 40 year period, which spanned for instance, the demise of ulcer surgery, the rise of transplantation and of endoscopic and laparoscopic surgery.

Finally, I would like to consider in what habitat general surgeons may still be found, by giving a brief introduction to surgery in northern Uganda.

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