

## THE HISTORY OF HAND SURGERY

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Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the practice of hand surgery was really limited to treating injuries and infections. The lack of anaesthesia and with sepsis often resulting in death there were few people ready to volunteer for more than the most minor procedure and few surgeons willing to undertake such procedures. In the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries prominent anatomists such as Leonardo, Vesalius and Bidloo contributed significantly to our understanding of the anatomy of the hand with extensive dissections and beautifully detailed drawings and engravings. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dupuytren described the pathology of the palmar fascia and an operation to treat what has become known as Dupuytren's Disease, although there is evidence that the condition was previously described and treated by Henry Cline, a pupil of John Hunter.

The practice of hand surgery developed significantly during the Second World War when Sterling Bunnell was tasked to optimize the outcome of hand injuries in ten centres across the USA. Bunnell dedicated his career to educating hand surgeons, resulting in the formation of the *American Society for Surgery of the Hand*. Founded in 1946 by a group of predominantly military surgeons it now has a membership of over 3000.

A similar but less structured situation evolved in the UK during WW II, the management of hand injuries growing as a subspeciality interest and initially discouraged by the parent specialties. Although an informal dining club had existed since 1952 (The Hand Club), the British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH) owes its true origins to a more serious group founded in May 1956 named the 'Second Hand Club'. This was a group of young British hand surgeons who organized regular meetings to discuss hand surgery and arranged instructional courses. After 12 years, the club developed a more formal constitution, and became the BSSH in 1968. Today the BSSH, composed of both orthopaedic and plastic surgeons, has a membership of 800. There are twice yearly scientific meetings, advanced teaching on a 3 year cycle of constantly updated instruction courses and BSSH has established a Diploma in Hand Surgery and an MSc in Hand Surgery degree in collaboration with the University of Manchester. *The Journal of Hand Surgery (European Volume)* is the official journal of the Society and is the foremost publication on the subject. There is a national system of *Interface Fellowships in Hand Surgery*, taken after training in one of the two parent specialties and providing training in both orthopaedic and plastic surgery elements of hand surgery. To date over 250 surgeons have completed this programme.

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