



Frederick Treves was a famous surgeon who once lived at number 18 Gordon Square in central London. He wasn't brought up in London, though. He was born in the city of Dorchester, near the south coast of England, in 1853 – around 150 years ago. His father was a furniture maker and upholsterer and Frederick was his youngest son.

When he was 14 Frederick was sent to London, to be a pupil at the Merchant Taylors' School. After he finished school, he stayed on in London and studied to become a doctor, like his elder brother William. He was especially interested in surgery – operating on patients. When he was only 22 he passed the exams to become a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Soon after this, when Frederick was 24, he married a bride from his home town: Ann Elizabeth Mason. They had two daughters.

Frederick Treves worked at the London Hospital and was soon made assistant surgeon for the hospital, then full surgeon. He was very short-sighted, so usually wore spectacles. But when he was operating on a patient he didn't wear his specs. He had to bend his head down close to the wound to see properly what he was doing.

When Frederick was starting out as a doctor, he earned extra money by demonstrating to student doctors how to carry out operations. He did demonstrations every day, and crowds of students came to watch, he was such a good teacher. When he was demonstrating to the students how to carry out operations he explained everything very clearly.

It is around this time that Frederick Treves lived in Gordon Square.

Frederick enjoyed all surgery, but was particularly interested in operating on abdomens. He became an expert on the diseases of the appendix, which up until then no-one knew much about. He said that doctors should cut out the appendix if it was diseased or inflamed, but he also thought that if someone had an attack of appendicitis, the surgeon should wait for five days before taking the appendix out.

He soon became the most successful appendix surgeon in London and made a lot of money from operating on people who came to his surgery. He had so many of his own private patients that he stopped working at the London Hospital – he was just too busy with his own practice.

In 1900 a terrible thing happened to Frederick's family: his younger daughter became ill; she had appendicitis. Although Frederick was a world expert on appendicitis, he did not realise that his daughter had it until it was too late - her appendix burst and poison spread into her

abdomen. Frederick operated on her, trying desperately to save her life. Filled with terror he tried and tried to close the wound, but he had left the operation too late, and she died. What a cruel and dreadful blow for Frederick. He, the appendicitis expert, had not been able to save his own daughter's life.

Meanwhile, in the world outside he was famous. He had such a good reputation as a surgeon that in 1900 Queen Victoria appointed him as her surgeon extraordinary. After she died her son became King Edward VII. 26th June 1902 was the date set for him to be crowned in a magnificent ceremony in Westminster Abbey. The whole country was excited, and Londoners were looking forward to seeing their new king driving in the royal coach to the Abbey for his coronation. Thousands of people were planning to gather along the road to watch him pass.

Then, disaster struck! On 13th June, the King felt a sudden terrible pain in his abdomen. His temperature rose and he felt feverish. His doctors announced that he had appendicitis. Anxiously they watched over him. Five days later, on 18th June, they called in Frederick Treves – they wanted the expert's opinion. Frederick and the King's doctors decided to wait and keep a close watch on the King. Everyone's hopes rose when the King's temperature dropped to normal and the pain and swelling in his abdomen slowly subsided/went down/went away. But three nights later his temperature shot up again and the swelling in his abdomen reappeared – and this time it was larger and more painful than before.

Early on the morning of 24th June (only two days before the coronation), the King's doctors approached him, looking very serious. 'Sir, you have acute appendicitis. We recommend that you have an immediate operation to remove your appendix.'

But the King was obstinate: 'I cannot have an operation now. I must keep faith with my people and go to the Abbey.'

The surgeons pleaded with the King, but he would not budge. Then Frederick stood up very tall and straight and spoke urgently to the King, explaining how serious his appendicitis was.

Again the King repeated: 'But I must keep faith with my people and go to the Abbey.'

Frederick replied: 'Then, sir, you will go as a corpse.'

The King gave in, and Frederick operated on his appendix. When Frederick cut open the King's abdomen, he found that the King did not only have acute appendicitis – he also had a large swollen abscess next to his appendix. Frederick put tubes into the abscess and drained all the pus out of it. The whole operation lasted nearly 40 minutes.

Two days later, the King's temperature was back to normal, but Frederick Treves did not go to bed for a whole week after the operation – he felt responsible for the King's health, and so stayed on duty for all that time.

The King recovered completely from his operation and was crowned at the Abbey six weeks later, on 9th August. How the people cheered as he drove through the streets, waving and smiling.

The King was so grateful to Frederick Treves that he made him a baronet – Frederick was now Sir Frederick Treves, and his wife Ann was Lady Treves. The King also made Frederick his serjeant-surgeon. Frederick was now more famous than ever, and so many people came to him to be treated for appendicitis diseases that he grew very rich.

When the King died eight years later, Sir Frederick Treves became serjeant-surgeon to the new king, George V, too. As Sir Frederick grew older, his heart began to grow weak, and he moved to France to rest.

Sir Frederick Treves died when he was 70 – from peritonitis, a disease of the abdomen!

## Key points

Sir Frederick Treves:

Pioneer of anatomy of the abdomen

Great teacher and surgeon

Surgeon to three monarchs

Expert on the appendix and its diseases (yet they killed both him and his daughter)

## Vocabulary

**Abdomen** In humans, between the bottom of the ribs and the hips. Organs in your abdomen include kidneys, bladder, and intestines.

**Abscess** Collection of pus in a cavity – it causes inflamed swelling

**Appendicitis** Inflammation of the appendix caused by infection by micro-organisms

**Appendix** Small blind tube leading off part of the large intestine

**Baronet** A hereditary title that comes above a knight, but below a baron

**Corpse** Dead human body

**Peritonitis** Inflammation of the membrane around the guts (intestine, etc.)

**Surgeon** Doctor who treats patients by operating on them

**Upholsterer** Person who makes beds, curtains, furniture

### Nuffield Primary History: Urban spaces cross-curricular project

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