

A FAMILY LEGACY

Sir Julian Paget

Sir James Paget was a British surgeon and pathologist. He published excellent papers describing Osteitis Deformans which of course, we now refer to as Paget's disease. Sir James Paget's great grandson, Sir Julian Paget is a Patron of the Paget's Association and in this article he describes the legacy Sir James Paget has left to the Paget family.

One of the trickier decisions that we have to make in life is probably the choice of a career to follow. Sometimes it will be virtually resolved for us, if there is, for example, a family business or estate to be taken over. There may alternatively be a family tradition to be carried on, such as a line of distinguished ancestors in the Services, the State or the church; in such cases, the incentive to follow in their footsteps is there, and the choice is easier. Another, rather rarer possibility is that it is all in one's genes, so that one knows from the start that one wants to follow one particular career.

None of these possibilities would seem to have applied to James Paget (except possibly the last). He was born in 1814, the eighth of seventeen children. His father, Samuel Paget, was a prosperous merchant in Great Yarmouth in Norfolk. An older brother, George, went into medicine, and James may well have decided to follow him, but his father sadly ran into financial trouble, and instead of sending James to Charterhouse, like George, he apprenticed him in 1830, at the age of 16, to the local GP in Great Yarmouth.

James never looked back, went on to St Bartholomew's Hospital and ended a distinguished career as a Fellow of the Royal Society, Surgeon to Queen Victoria and a Baronet. George also ended up as a Fellow of the Royal Society, greatly respected in medical circles.

James left an impressive legacy, not only to Medicine, but also to the Paget family, and it is intriguing to see the form that it took. He had three sons whose careers are relevant. The eldest was John, who became a distinguished barrister and a QC. Then there was Francis, my Grandfather, who was Bishop of Oxford 1900 – 1911, and Stephen who was a fine surgeon, though not perhaps as famous as his father. He was however, a prolific writer and author, in particular, of an excellent biography of his father.

James, of course was also an outstanding lecturer and this, together with his literary ability, would seem to be skills that have been passed on to future generations of Paget's, many of whom have published books (usually of a somewhat serious nature).

Another characteristic stemming from Sir James is a remarkable capacity for hard work and long hours. When he was created a Baronet, he chose as the motto for his coat of arms “Labor Ipse Voluptas” or “Work itself is a pleasure”, which was very appropriate for him. It has since become a family trait in future generations. My grandfather, Bishop of Oxford, was always said to have died of overwork, and my father, General Sir Bernard Paget, was renowned for driving himself (and his staff) to the absolute limit when he was Commander in Chief of the Home Forces, in the Second World War. I am not sure, however, that present Paget family members suffer from the same affliction!

Another characteristic that was certainly passed on by Sir James was a marked seriousness, even devoutness, of character. He was himself a very devout man, who held family prayers every day, and the next two generations of his family produced no less than two Bishops and an Archbishop. One was Luke, Bishop of Chester, another was Francis, Bishop of Oxford, and one of his sons became Edward, Archbishop of Central Africa.

Sir James also bequeathed two intriguing physical characteristics, which have lasted through six generations. The first is the distinctive ‘Paget Proboscis’ (nose), and the second is the ‘Paget Stoop’ so noticeable in the Spy cartoon of Sir James, and now evident in myself in my old age! So, Sir James left an impressive legacy on both the mental and physical sides, but no sign of any interest in Medicine, I am sorry to say.



Sir James Paget caricature published in Vanity Fair in 1876



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