

Dorothy Davison (1890–1984): Manchester medical artist and her work for neurosurgeon Sir Geoffrey Jefferson (1886–1961), a historical paper in the Journal of Medical Biography, 5/2, 2017, p.130-137.

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Miss Davison was a medical artist at the Manchester Royal Infirmary (MRI) and the University of Manchester from around 1918 until her retirement in 1957. During her long career she illustrated books and scientific papers on anthropology, anatomy and surgery, however, it's her work for neurosurgeon Geoffrey Jefferson during the 1930s–1950s that she is best remembered.

She first met Jefferson when he was a lecturer in anatomy researching into cervical fractures and did some illustration work for him during the 1930s. After 1945 she devoted most of her time to the MRI Neurosurgical Department, preparing hundreds of sketches, watercolour paintings and finished drawings of neuropathological specimens and Jefferson's operations for his lectures, scientific papers and books. She became known for her striking pictures produced on 'Ross board', a difficult technique involving the use of carbon powder on special art paper to reproduce shading and depth of view.

Mr Jefferson along with Norman Dott (1897-1972) in Edinburgh and Hugh Cairns (1896-1952) in London were the pioneers of British Neurosurgery. They all, at some point, spent time with Harvey Cushing (1869-1939) at the John Hopkins in Baltimore and brought back not just his surgical techniques, but also his style of record keeping, teaching and medical illustration. Cushing's medical artist, Max Brodel (1870-1941), had developed the Ross board technique for illustrating Cushing's publications and later trained medical artists from Britain in the technique. Jefferson preferred Davison's illustrations to photographs because her pictures were better at highlighting key features and depth of field and were less intrusive during surgery than photography.

Dott and Cairns also employed medical artists skilled in Ross board technique.

Many of her earlier pictures have been lost, however her neurosurgical work was safely stored in the Manchester Neurosurgical Department for many years and is now in the University of Manchester archives. Examples of her work can be found throughout Jefferson's journal articles and his Collected Papers (1960). She also illustrated monographs on urology, haematology, anatomy and anthropology. She taught students of medical art and was an active member of the Medical Artist Association (MAA) which she helped found in 1949.

More details and full references are in the original article.

Dr PD Mohr FRCP

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