Sir Astley Paston Cooper

History, English Surgeon and Anatomist

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Sir Astley Paston Cooper, 1st Baronet (23 August 1768–12 February 1841) was an English surgeon and anatomist, who made historical contributions to otology, vascular surgery, the anatomy and pathology of the mammary glands and testicles, and the pathology and surgery of hernia.

Cooper was born at the village of Brooke in Norfolk on August 23, 1768 (Fig. 1). His father, Dr. Samuel Cooper, was a clergyman of the Church of England; his mother was the author of several novels [1–3]. At the age of sixteen he was sent to London and placed under Henry Cline (1750–1827), Surgeon to St Thomas Hospital. In 1789 he was appointed demonstrator of anatomy at this Hospital, where in 1791 he

became joint lecturer with Cline in anatomy and Surgery, and in 1800 he was appointed Surgeon to Guy's Hospital on the death of his uncle, William Cooper. In 1804, he did work on hernia [4].

In 1817 he performed his famous operation of tying the abdominal aorta and in 1820 he removed an infected sebaceous cyst from the head of King George IV. He was subsequently appointed sergeant Surgeon to King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria. He served as president of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1827 and again in 1836, and he was elected a vice-president of the Royal Society in 1830 (Figs. 2).

Sir Astley Paston Cooper, 1st Baronet (August 23, 1768–February 12, 1841), English surgeon and anatomist, who made historical contributions to otology, vascular surgery, the anatomy and pathology of the mammary glands and testicles, and the pathology and Surgery of hernia [2, 3]. Astley Cooper presented two communications to the Royal Society based on his tympanic membrane observations and his treatment of certain forms of deafness by myringotomy.

Cooper was an indefatigable and original anatomist and described several new anatomical structures, many of which were named after him [5]:

- Cooper's fascia, a covering of the spermatic cord.
- Cooper's pubic ligament, the superior pubic ligament.
- Cooper's stripes, a fibrous structure in the ulnar ligaments.
- Cooper's ligaments, the suspensory ligaments of the breasts.

He also described a number of new diseases, which likewise became eponymous:

- Cooper's testis (neuralgia of the testicles)
- Cooper's disease (benign cysts of the breast)
- Cooper's hernia (retroperitoneal hernia)
- Cooper's neuralgia (neuralgia of the breast)

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Fig. 1 Sir Astley Paston Cooper (1768–1841)

His chief published works were:

- Anatomy and Surgical Treatment of Hernia (1804–1807);
- Dislocations and Fractures (1822);
- Lectures on Surgery (1824–1827);
- Illustrations of Diseases of the Breast (1829);
- Anatomy of the Thymus Gland (1832);
- Anatomy of the Breast (1840).

He married Catherine Jones in 1828 and began to practice again in London, and also travelled on the continent.

Fig. 2 Sir Astley Paston Cooper, F.R.C.S. (The portrait of Sir Astley Cooper by Sir Thomas Lawrence in the possession of the Royal College of Surgeons of England)

Cooper lived at Gadebridge House in the market town of Hemel Hempstead (Fig. 3). Today, Sir Cooper is remembered in the area with a number of local street names, and The Astley Cooper School, formerly Grovehill School, being renamed after him in 1984. The carriageway to Gadebridge House originally passed through a ford until, around 1840, Sir Astley Paston Cooper arranged for a local iron founder, Joseph Cranstone, to erect a bridge. With its attractive design resembling bamboo, it echoes the Chinese style popular at that time [1].

Much of the parkland to the North of the River Gade is scheduled as an area of archaeological importance after an extensive Roman Villa, including a large bathing pool, was found during the building of the Leighton Buzzard Road in the early 1960's. Although the villa is no longer visible, protection prohibits the use of metal detectors, which could disturb vital evidence. Possible plans are being looked into in an attempt to gain grant funding to excavate a portion of the villa, and give guided tours and explanations of life in Hemel Hempstead in Roman times.

In 1840, Astley Paston Cooper's health became worse, and he died in Conduit Street at 1:06 p.m February 12, 1841 [1]. His last words as he viewed the group of anxious faces surrounding him were "God bless you, and good-bye to you all."

According to his will an autopsy was performed and Mr. John Hilton, a surgical colleague, documented the details in the early issue of the Lancet. Peritoneal remnants of umbilical and bilateral inguinal herniae, an enlarged heart and a nutmeg liver were noted and an apical scar of healed phthisis indicated the childhood infection which had carried off his five sisters and one brother. He was interred behind Guy's chapel until his

Fig. 3 House of Sir Astley Paston Cooper

remains were later transferred to an inner crypt. He left a large bequest for prizes for student essays designed to encourage and foster observation and experimentation. A giant in the art and science of the surgery of his day, a practitioner and a teacher par excellence, confidant of the great ones, he was a Surgeon's Surgeon (The Prince of Surgery) [1].

In the collecting of evidence upon any medical subject, there are but three sources from which we can hope to obtain it: viz. from observation of the living subject; from examination of the dead; and from experiments upon living animals.

By Sir Astley Paston Cooper

Conflict of interest None to declare

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