



### Dr. Robert Prosser White

Robert was an eminent medical doctor who lived in King Street. Recorded on the 1861 census age 6 living with his father James White, also a doctor.

Keeping it in the family, Dr James White, J.P was born in Minshull, Cheshire on Christmas Day in 1823 and died in January 1897 having spent 50 years as a surgeon in Wigan.

Dr White spent time as a surgeon at the Dispensary and lived on King Street. He moved to 139 Wigan Lane in 1892 on the corner with New Lodge. Much closer to

Wigan Infirmary which he moved to on its opening in 1873.

A commemorative plaque can be seen in St Michael's Church, Swinley erected by his son Dr Robert Prosser White, M.D.



Robert was the only son of Dr James White J.P. and his wife Mary Hutchings Prosser. He was educated at the Royal Grammar School in Clitheroe, Edinburgh University and University College London. He graduated with a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) in 1880.

In 1885 he was elected honorary physician to Wigan Infirmary, later becoming a lifelong Vice President.

He founded the skin department and gave the first X-ray and Finsen light apparatus to the hospital. After his retirement he was elected honorary consulting dermatologist and for many years prior to his death in 1934 he was the certifying factory surgeon for the Wigan area.

Amongst many other things he has been recognised for:

- International reputation as a specialist in industrial diseases, especially relating to their effects on the skin.
- Ex president of London dermatological society and Factory Surgeons Association.

- Author of numerous medical works his principal work on '*Occupational Affections of the Skin*' the 4<sup>th</sup> edition published in 1915 has been translated into every European language and there have also been several American editions. He was a member of the Permanent International Committee for the study of industrial diseases under the League of Nations in Geneva.

Those who knew "Prosser" as he was affectionately welcomed by his friends realised the amount of work embodied in every article he wrote. His knowledge of both medicine and men with his unbounded energy and keenness in medicine left no time for the uninterested or slackers. His love of the chosen branch of medicine was almost equalled by his love of his hometown and its people.

Around 1890 he published a manual for Church Lad's Brigade Medical Staff Corps and became medical officer and Surgeon Colonel of the Brigade and Editor of Brigade's Medical Corps Manual. Taking pains to ensure proper training of the youth of the area. He was interested in the Wigan Mining and Technical College and founded a "French Travelling Scholarship" allowing Wigan students to spend three months in France or another continental country to study their special branch.

His artistic temperament included poetry and music and took a practical and beneficial form. He funded Wigan Parish church Musical Fund to ensure an annual organ recital. In 1924 he founded the Medical Book Trust Fund at Wigan Public Library to buy books on original research, expensive textbooks and works in ancillary services.

In his younger days to preserve records of Wigan he commissioned young artists to paint and make drawings of the many old buildings. He later donated a collection of 45 Paintings, etchings and Drawings illustrative of Wigan and surrounding districts to Wigan Free Public Library and placed on the walls of the Central newsroom.

In Chester in 1907 he married Clarice Emma Le Rougetel from Guernsey. They had two children, Robert Le Rougetel White (1908-1979) who was a Doctor of Economics and a Royal Naval Volunteer as a temporary acting Sub Lieutenant between 1943-45.

Their second son James Helier White (1912-1944) died in Normandy while leading his men during the invasion on D-day. He was a Captain in the South Lancashire Regiment and 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion the East Yorkshire Regiment and is named on the Bayeux War Cemetery in France.

After a long career in medicine, he died on 4 January 1934 and is buried with his father at Lower Ince Cemetery. His obituary in the BMJ states "*he was of fine character. Although breezy and cheerful, and going out of his way to help the underdog, his mind was always on the ultimate good that might accrue from his work*".

*With thanks to Pat and Will Sharp leads for "Who Built Wigan Churches?" project and members of the Wigan Local History and Heritage Society and Jim Meehan also a member of Wigan Local History and Heritage Society from his work on King Street Heritage Action Zone project.*

Jan Bannister Thomas  
Wigan Local History and Heritage Society  
October 2023.

*Sources:*

[www.Ancestry.co.uk](http://www.Ancestry.co.uk)

[www.Findmypast.co.uk](http://www.Findmypast.co.uk)