

Friends of Millbank

Chairman's Autumn Newsletter, October 2020



In Arduis Fidelis in COVID times – courtesy of Jeanette Nathan

Dear Friend of Millbank

In Arduis fidelis – Steadfast in adversity

Greetings

I'd like to start by thanking Jeanette Nathan, one of the more artistic members of Friends of Millbank, for the delightful hand-drawn greetings card she sent me, reproduced above, how apt for these times. Might this spark off a trend or friendly competition amongst our members, I wonder?

I'd like to hereby invite all Friends of Millbank with an artistic bent to submit your own military medical artwork for consideration for inclusion in this newsletter or on our website. Whether serious or light-hearted, that's fine by me, I'll enjoy and consider all contributions. I might even initiate a new thematic section on our website's Gallery for the best ones. You'll be following in the footsteps of many great artists. Ever seen the Wipers Times? Or the Sandy Times from the First Gulf War?

The challenge to innovate – our lecture programme starts moving online

The COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown in March necessitated the cancellation of our programme of lectures at Millbank and other social activities up to the end of September. Chelsea College of Arts had to close, but it plans to re-open on 18 October, with teaching sessions temporarily re-arranged into morning, afternoon and evening sessions, and multiple COVID precautions in place. However, the pandemic's second wave is now surging exponentially through the country, new Government legislation precludes social gatherings of larger than six individuals (the 'rule of six'), and as our lecture meetings have always been social occasions we evidently cannot re-institute physical lectures for now. The College remains keen for us to return, but its priority has to be its own students, and our priority has to be the health of members and students. The challenge facing us all, as you well realise, is safety.

There's nothing like adversity to force innovation and adaptation, we already know well from our own history that the military medical services have repeatedly risen to and successfully overcome many different challenges, both organisationally and technologically. This pandemic is no different. Many different organisations have successfully adapted by holding lectures and meetings online, so it should come as no surprise to learn that the Friends of Millbank committee has now decided to start converting our lecture programme to a virtual online series. Our previously scheduled lecturers are being approached in turn with this in mind. The lectures will be hosted on Zoom, starting with the George Blair Memorial Lecture, until this second wave has abated and it is safe (and legal) to return to actual lectures and gatherings at Millbank. This new virtual format will have the benefit of enabling many more of our members scattered throughout the country and abroad to attend lectures from the comfort of their home, as well as opening up our excellent lecture series to a much wider and potentially global audience. The show must go on, but it has to evolve. Read on...

The George Blair Memorial Lecture, 30 October 2020 – our first online lecture!

Our next scheduled lecture, and the first of our virtual series this year, is the annual George Blair Memorial Lecture, by Richard Villar, at 1830 hours on Friday 30 October. I hope you can join us.

The title of Richard's talk is "*Winged Scalpel - a Surgeon at the Frontline of Disaster*". It will describe his early days as Regimental Medical Officer to 22 SAS, his time as the surgical lead for the UK disaster response (Kashmir, Haiti, Java, Philippines, Libya) in addition to his ongoing commitments to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with whom he continues to serve in Lebanon and Gaza. He will likely also be covering work in the North-West Frontier of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central India, the Middle East, the Far East, Africa and Central America, so it is quite a global talk.

Richard has successfully trialled this Zoom lecture meeting with the committee and we are confident that this format will work. We realise Zoom meetings may be unfamiliar to many members and we may each encounter teething difficulties on the day, so please bear with us on our learning curve.

Registration This Zoom lecture meeting is limited to 100 participants. You are asked to register your intent to participate with me directly (preferably by email to info@friendsofmillbank.org). Priority will be given to life members, paid-up annual subscribers, medical and nursing cadets, mailing list only members, and any others, in that order. Remember that our annual membership is only £20, and medical and nursing cadets can enrol free while still students, so do ensure your membership is up to date. A household sharing a single computer counts as one participant. The closing date for registration is Sunday 25 October.

The formal individual invitation to the George Blair Memorial Lecture, with a hyperlink to the event, will be sent out after you register. You should receive this no later than Wednesday 28 October.

An update to 'COVID-19 resources through Friends of Millbank website'

I have separately attached an update to the above article which was published in BMJ Military Health in August, and which is accessible via the COVID-19 section on our website, as [A guide to COVID-19 resources on the Friends of Millbank website](#). A useful new link soon to be added, which provides easy access to the number of cases in your local area, is COVID Messenger <https://www.covidmessenger.com/> Stay safe, stay informed.

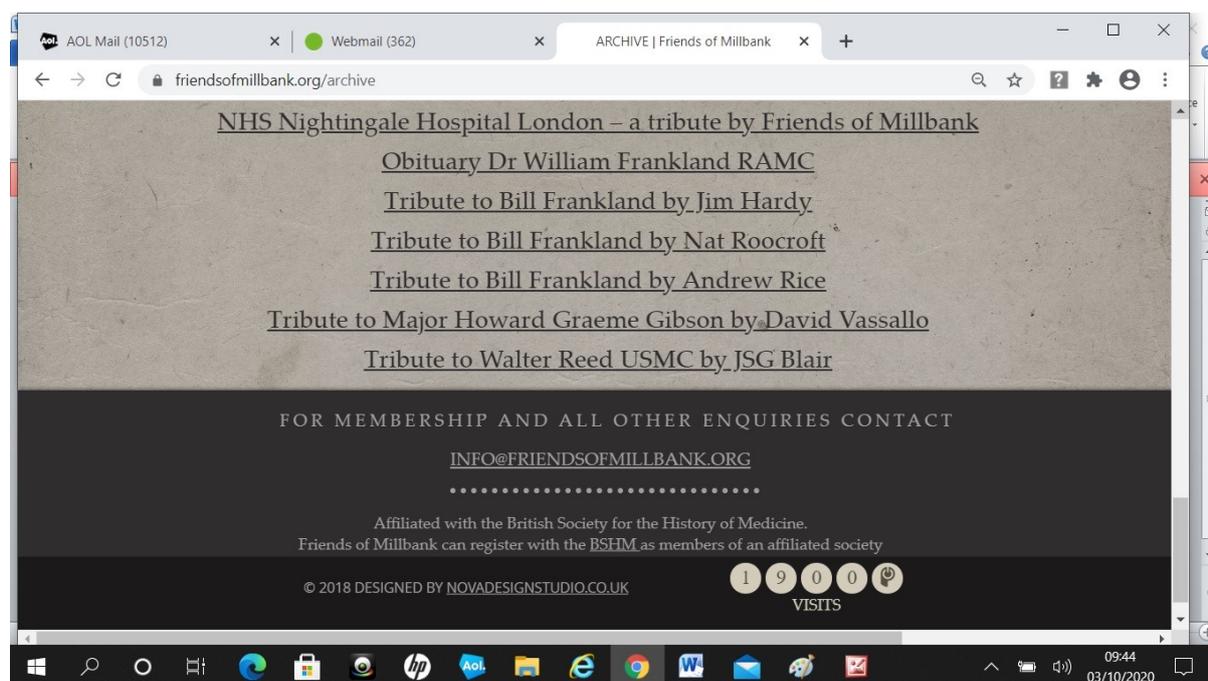
Website updates

Celebrating the heritage, achievements and ongoing relevance of military medicine

I hope you are enjoying exploring our website www.friendsofmillbank.org on a regular basis, and in particular enjoying the latest additions to the History and Archive sections (updated in September). To pick just one example to inspire you, do listen to Anna Cross's account of her personal battle against Ebola, in the Fight against Disease page (within Military Medical History). The COVID-19 section is definitely not the only section that is regularly updated, even if it is the most topical and useful (especially if used daily).

I would like here to record my continuing gratitude to the military medical artists who have so kindly given permission to use their paintings to illustrate our website, especially the Military Medical History section. I plan to continue enhancing our site with such artwork.

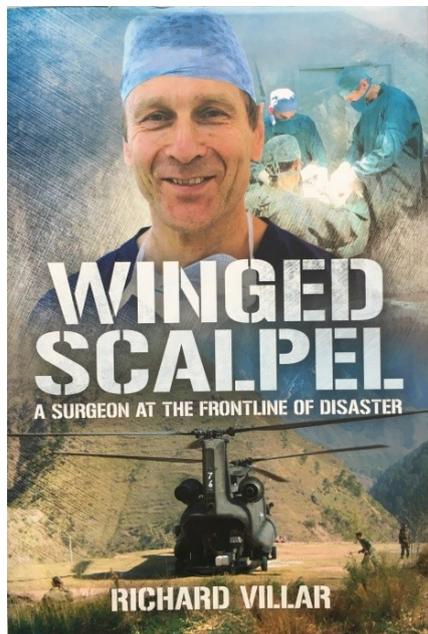
Did you know that you can access a mobile version of the website on your smartphone? Do have a look. Lastly, I am very pleased to announce that our website has now received over 1900 visits since January, passing this milestone on 3 October.



New books to read

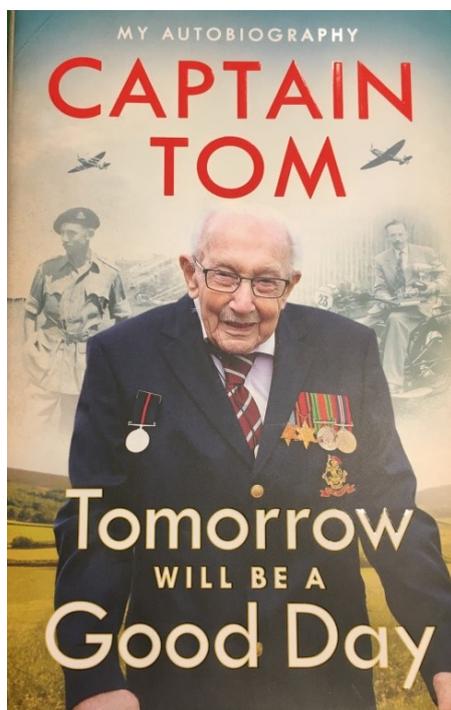
I would like to particularly recommend four books for you to consider; you should find them all of interest. The first, *Winged Scalpel*, is the subject of this year's virtual George Blair Memorial Lecture, two are very newly published (September) and their authors have been actively supported by Friends of Millbank, and the final one, David Jackson's memoir *Surgeon in the Raw* is being released on Monday 5 October. I worked for Lt Col David Jackson as a surgical registrar at BMH Munster in my first assignment as a surgeon in the Regular Army, receiving my baptism of fire as a military surgeon just after my arrival in Germany in October 1989 by jointly saving the life of a young soldier shot and

critically wounded by the Provisional IRA.¹ Both he and his fellow consultant, Lt Col John Lovegrove (now a Friend of Millbank), were excellent mentors to a young, keen but inexperienced surgeon.



World renowned orthopaedic surgeon Richard Villar will be delivering the virtual George Blair Memorial Lecture to Friends of Millbank on 30 October 2020. The topic is *'Winged Scalpel'* (a vivid account of his experiences at the sharp end of war). This book is the full account (Pen and Sword Discovery, 2012. ISBN: 978 1 78159 168 0).

See attached book review of *Winged Scalpel*, written for us in May this year by Chris Perkins, a final year medical student at Warwick Medical School, and newly joined Friend of Millbank. Richard Villar's two books (the other being *'Knife Edge – Life as a Special Forces Surgeon'*) inspired Chris to enter medicine in the first place, and then to apply to pursue a military medical career. I am delighted to take this opportunity to welcome him to Friends of Millbank, to wish him the very best in his career, and to thank him for this excellent review, which will be published on our website.

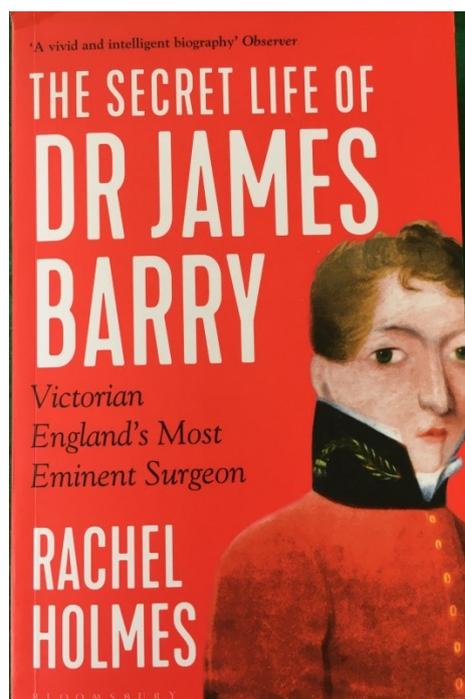


100-year old Captain Tom (now Captain Sir Tom Moore) will doubtless be familiar to you all, having caught the nation's affection and imagination during the coronavirus pandemic by his determination to do his bit at a time of crisis and setting off to walk 100 laps of his garden with his Zimmer frame. He amazingly raised some £33 million for NHS charities in the process and was knighted by Her Majesty. Friends of Millbank have actively supported him from the start, and a link to his fundraising page is prominently displayed on the COVID-19 section of our website. This 400-page autobiography, exploring his rich, happy and inspiring life, was published by Penguin Random House Publishers on 17 September. I am immensely enjoying reading it and recommend it wholeheartedly.

'Tomorrow will be a good day. Tomorrow you will maybe find everything will be much better than today, even if today was all right. My today was all right and my tomorrow will certainly be better. That's the way I've always looked at life.'

Captain Sir Tom Moore, April 2020

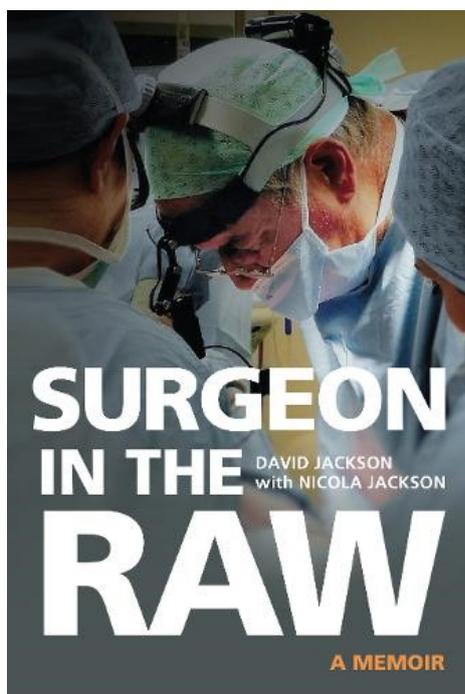
¹ Vassallo DJ, Singer BR, Yasin T and Jackson DS. A Terrorist Incident. *J R Army Med Corps* 1990; 136: 80-84



'Dr James Barry was transgender before the term was introduced. This fact is not recent news.'

So starts the introduction to this new and very readable paperback (published by Bloomsbury on 17 September), a re-issue of Rachel Holmes' remarkable biography of a most extraordinary, energetic and eminent Victorian army surgeon, who rose to the top rank of Inspector General of Hospitals and was found at post mortem to be female. The Royal Army Medical College proudly commemorated Dr Barry through the 'Barry Room', and the Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital at Millbank, whose wards were mainly named after recipients of the Victoria Cross, had the Barry Ward for female officers. My predecessor and now Emeritus Chairman, Colonel (retd) Frank Davis, carried on this tradition by actively assisting the author in her researches and inviting her to talk to us on 'The life of Dr James Barry', delivered on 23 September 2011. She very generously acknowledged this support in her introduction:

The Friends of Millbank, Royal Army Medical Corps, proved loyal and supportive friends indeed to Dr James Barry, proud of his legacy and membership of their ranks.



'I have had to operate in many difficult situations throughout my surgical career in several far-flung parts of the world and under the most trying conditions. At times it has not been the physical challenges that have tested me, but the psychological ones...'

I first heard of David Jackson at the time of the Falklands War, when he published his experience with a Field Surgical Team, in the Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons. His leading article in the special 1984 Falklands issue of the Journal of the RAMC highlighted the critical role played by helicopter evacuation in saving lives, signposting the dedicated medevac helicopters in the 1990s Bosnian conflict and the recent Afghanistan campaign. David's memoir, co-authored with his wife Nicola (paperback, Mereo Books, due publication 5 October), has many narrative threads, and does not flinch from the rawness of the emotional impact of dealing with critically wounded casualties – a matter of deep relevance to all who care for the casualties of war.

See the attached flyer for more details.

Friends of Millbank Christmas cards – courtesy of Valerie Abraham

I shall end this newsletter by reverting to an artistic theme, this time in preparation for Christmas. Valerie Abraham has very kindly sent me her remaining stock of her own individually designed Friends of Millbank Christmas cards, as her contribution to raising funds to meet expenses, for you to select your choice. Valerie normally distributes these at our social gathering at Millbank before the George Blair Memorial Lecture. This will not be possible this year so you are invited to order them from me. Please email me your preferences from the attached pdf showing images of the 42 different cards, listing up to a maximum of ten cards per individual, and I shall post them to you, as available, on a first come, first served basis. The suggested donation is £1.25 per card. I shall send details of where to send your donation with your cards so don't send anything yet.

Thanking you in advance for your generosity.

Stay well. I look forward to seeing you at our virtual George Blair Memorial Lecture on 30 October.

In Arduis Fidelis

David Vassallo

Col (ret'd) FRCSEd, MA, L/RAMC
Chairman, Friends of Millbank