

A Cutting Edge Pedigree

Sir Harold Gillies would become Archibald McIndoe's most important ally. Generally regarded as the man who "invented plastic surgery", Gillies rose to prominence during World War I. He single handedly created Britain's first plastic surgery unit at Aldershot Hospital and went on to pioneer a variety of procedures including, the face-lift, the sex-change operation, limb reattachment, eyelid reconstruction, and the pedicle skin graft. He also established what is today known as 'cosmetic surgery' and literally trained hundreds of surgeons throughout the world in what he called "the art of plastic surgery". His textbook entitled; "Plastic Surgery of the Face" (1920) became the world's leading authority on plastic and reconstructive surgery.

Astonishingly, Gillies and McIndoe shared a common pedigree. Harold's father (Robert Gillies) and Archibald's paternal grandmother (Elizabeth McIndoe-nee-Gillies) were siblings. The McIndoe and Gillies clans had sailed with one another from Scotland to New Zealand in 1859 in search of a better life and both families had chosen to settle in Dunedin. However, these two men were not only bound together by a common ancestry but also by a common destiny.

Unwittingly, the older man would pass on the mantle of distinction to the younger man, thus ensuring that the latter would make a similar impact on the medical world during a similar epoch in human history. Upon meeting McIndoe, Gillies would comment, somewhat insightfully; "he could become one of the greatest [plastic] technicians in the country", and with a similar level of hindsight, McIndoe would later acknowledge how fortunate he had been to meet Gillies; "skill is fine and genius is splendid, but the right contacts are more valuable than either".