THE BIRMINGHAM BURN CENTRE ARCHIVE: A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF POST-WAR BURN CARE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM (P157)

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Introduction: The post-war development of civilian burn care in the UK was pioneered in Birmingham within the MRC Burns and Industrial Injuries Unit. The serial photographic documentation of burn injury was also introduced at this time. During the relocation of the Birmingham Burn Centre from Selly Oak Hospital to the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital, a photographic archive of burn injuries was discovered and saved. The purpose of this study was to digitize, index and archive a unique historical photographic resource depicting the treatment of burns from 1945 to 1975.

Methods: The archive, consisting of photographs and slides was digitized, indexed and archived for analysis. Over 3000 images have been scanned and digitally enhanced (Figure 1). We present a summary of the archive, evidencing the early developments in burn care.

Results: The images document a different pattern of burns than we experience today, with a large number of clothing fires and burns from heavy industry. The initial management and subsequent reconstructions are documented. Photographs depicting trials of topical antimicrobials, as well as intra-operative images showing surgical instrumentation, and post-operative pictures of dressings and nursing techniques are included. The social impact of burn injury and the role that the Burn Unit played in the Cold War is also documented. A subsequent search using digital and broadcast media has resulted in the present day follow-up of patients whose injuries were documented in the 1940s and 1950s. We have traced six patients from the archive with burn injury follow-up of over 60 years (Figure 2).

Conclusions: This is the first time that the primary source material from this era has been archived and investigated. It gives insight into the development of the UK civilian burns service and represents a unique historical surgical resource, highlighting the role of a research-led approach to burn care.