

**Alastair Cameron**, St Andrews graduate and founder of campaign group Scotland in Union, describes his grandfather's life and medical career.

# Sir James Cameron

**CBE TD MB ChB (StAnd) FRCGP (Hon)**

— from a St Andrews degree to BMA Chair

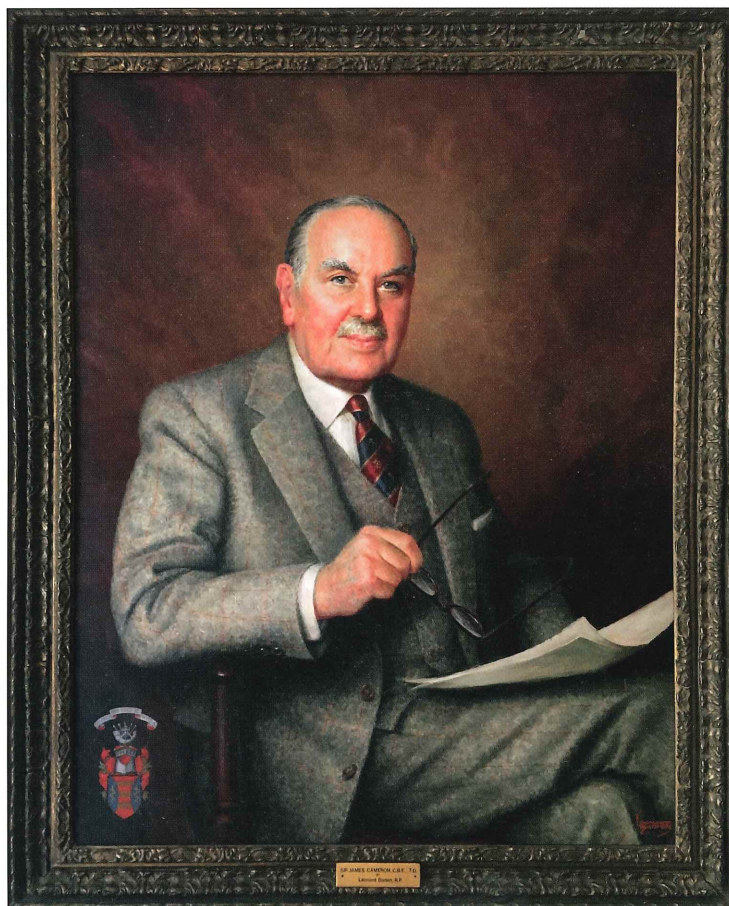
When I was speaking at an event in St Andrews recently, I wore my graduate tie. This tie was actually my grandfather's, so perhaps (to paraphrase a watch advertisement) 'you never actually own a St Andrews graduate tie; you merely look after it for the next generation'.

The occasion, and wearing the tie, set me thinking about how attending the University of St Andrews opens the door to opportunities across the United Kingdom, and beyond. My grandfather, James Cameron, born in Bridge of Earn in 1905, was the son of Malcolm Cameron, the Gaelic-speaking village police officer. After Breadalbane and Perth academies, James studied medicine at St Andrews University. His involvement in the University's representative body, and in its Officers' Training Corps, both influenced his future. On qualifying, he worked in Arbroath Hospital, originally intending to become a surgeon, but later choosing General Practice.

Looking for a suitable GP practice, in 1931 my grandfather moved to London, to a practice in Croydon that was run by a group of doctors, who had also qualified via the University of St Andrews. He proved to be a popular doctor, soon opening a second surgery in his home in Wallington. As a member of the Territorial Army, he was posted as Medical Officer to the 1st Battalion, the Rifle Brigade on the outbreak of the Second World War.

In 1940, James' unit was deployed to join the garrison defending Calais, to slow the advancing Germans, and give time for the British Expeditionary Force to complete its evacuation from nearby Dunkirk. His gallantry in this fierce battle, during which, under fire, he amputated a wounded soldier's arm with a rusty hacksaw, earned him a Mention in Dispatches.

Churchill and Eden took the difficult decision that those allied defensive forces in Calais were not to be rescued. James was captured by the Germans, spending the rest of the war in camps in Germany and in Poland. As well as caring for many nationalities in the camp hospitals, he worked hard to maintain prisoners' morale, organising camp shows, taking church services, learning German, negotiating on the prisoners' behalf with camp authorities. His final camp, to the East of Berlin, was captured by the Soviet Army, after which James led his fellow prisoners on a gruelling overland trek to Odessa to get a ship back to the UK. Much influenced by his wartime experiences, he was an abiding support to the post-war Red Cross. In 1958 he was awarded the Red Cross' badge of honour and was made a life member.



*Sir James Cameron*

---

*I am, of course, proud of my grandfather's career and of his contribution to the renaissance of general practice in the 1960s*

---

honoured my grandfather by naming the new charity The Cameron Fund; it thrives to this day and continues to grow.

When he retired from the chair after ten years, the GMSC made him its only life member. My grandfather was later elected Chairman of Council of the British Medical Association. He served for three years (1976 – 1979) at a time when Scots dominated the BMA with Dr Jack Miller of Glasgow as treasurer and Dr Alistair Clark from Clydebank, as chairman of the BMA's representative body. He died in London in 1991. His ashes were interred in the family grave in Aberfeldy, Perthshire.

I am, of course, proud of my grandfather's career and of his contribution to the renaissance of general practice in the 1960s. I like to reflect that it was his University of St Andrews that opened the door to his later achievements. He moved seamlessly to London, a crucial milestone in his career, and I think this helps to demonstrate the benefits of free movement across the UK. Later in life, he had his portrait painted; the picture now hangs in my parents' house. Sir James Cameron smiles down, wearing the same St Andrews graduate tie that I take from my wardrobe to wear on special occasions. When I wear the tie, I remember him affectionately and with pride.

After resuming his General Practice in 1945, my grandfather became active in local and national medical politics, and in 1956 he became a member of the General Medical Services Committee (GMSC). He was elected Chairman of the GMSC (1964 to 1974). As he was someone who epitomised the value of patients having a personal doctor, he proved to be the right advocate for Britain's family doctors. He was an inspirational leader and a skilful negotiator, notably while leading the negotiation of a new contract for GPs, which greatly improved their lot. His achievements in medical politics were recognised by the Claire Wand award, a gold medal from the BMA; a CBE; and then a knighthood in 1979.

Recalling a ministerial chance remark concerning £800,000 (taken out of GPs' remuneration) left over from a scheme to help finance practice expenses, in 1970 he persuaded the government to transfer that sum to establish a new charitable trust for the support of GPs and their dependants in need. GPs

*(Photo courtesy Alastair Cameron)*