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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Luck, Pluck, and the Making of the Macintosh Laryngoscope



British anaesthetist Sir Robert Macintosh (1897 to 1989, *right*) was born in New Zealand under a lucky star. The son of a mayor and newspaper editor, young Macintosh shone as a student and athlete. In 1937, automotive magnate Lord Nuffield beamed as Oxford University officials installed Macintosh as Britain's first (Nuffield) Professor of Anaesthetics. Honorary doctorates and fellowships followed, along with knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II. Fortune indeed favored him, but adversity had forged his mettle. His beloved mother died in his youth. During World War I, German soldiers shot down his fighter plane and took him as a prisoner of war. To invent his namesake laryngoscope in 1943, Macintosh would fuse pluck with luck. While helping a surgeon insert a Boyle–Davis gag (*lower left*) prior to a tonsillectomy, the tip overreached into the patient's vallecula. Serendipity revealed a glorious glottic view. After extensive experimentation, Macintosh and his technician, Richard Salt, fashioned a prototype (*upper left*) that also lifted the sensitive epiglottis *indirectly*. Facilitating visualization and endotracheal intubation (pre-curare) under lighter anesthesia, the Macintosh laryngoscope—like its creator—gained respect and affection everywhere. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library–Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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