

# Theodore Howard Somervell (1890–1975)

A **Medical Missionary** and **Renaissance Man** who excelled in medicine, mountaineering, music, and art. His life was guided by a deep commitment to Christian faith.



# A Life of Service and Achievement



## Medical Training

Completed undergraduate and postgraduate surgical training at University College Hospital, London, graduating as an FRCS in 1921.



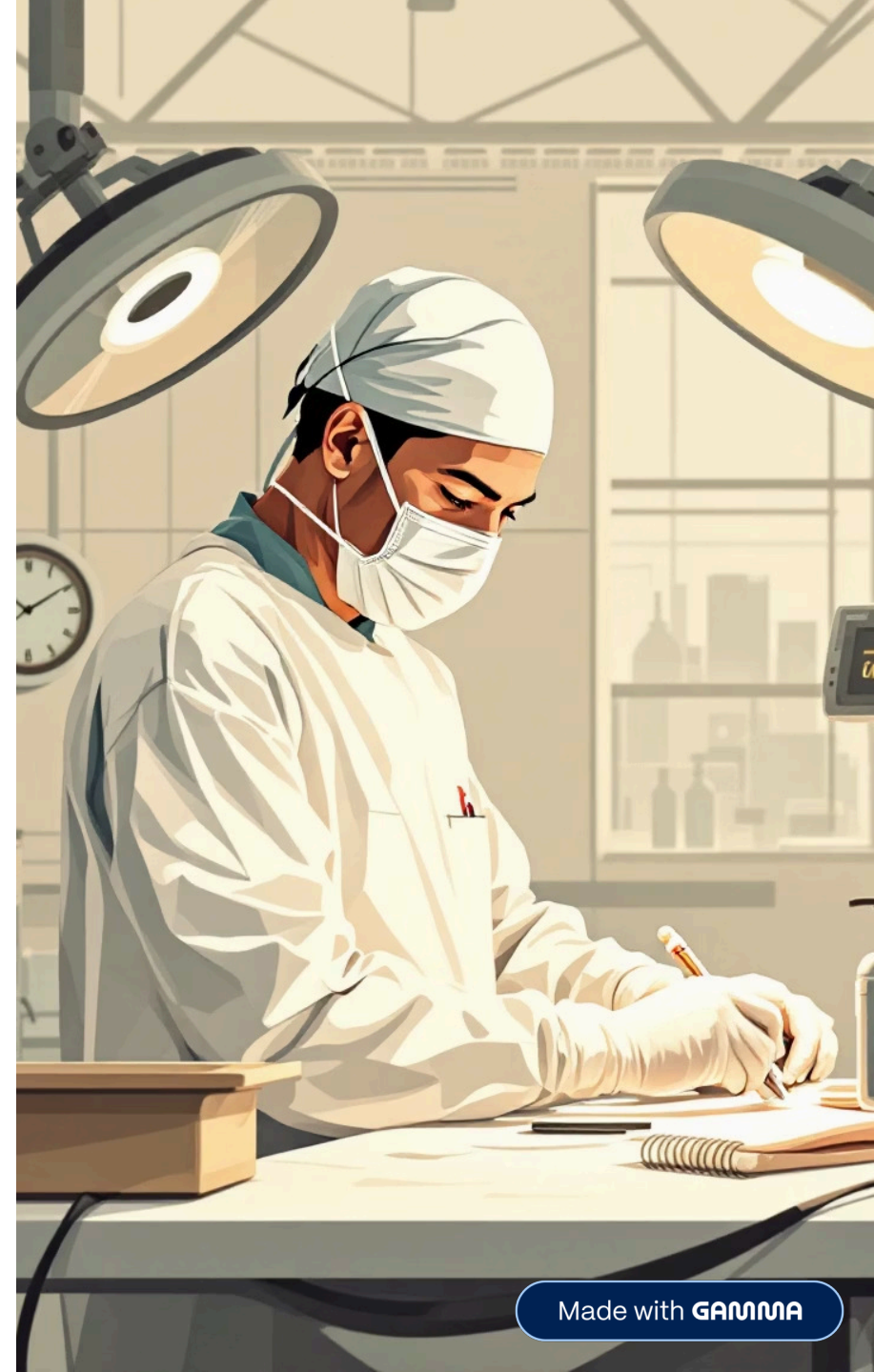
## World War I Service

Surgical training was interrupted by service in the Royal Army Medical Corps between 1915 and 1918.



## Mountaineering Passion

His passion for mountaineering brought him to India as a member of the 1922 and 1924 British Everest Expeditions.



# The Call to Neyoor, India

After the 1922 Everest expedition, Dr. Somervell traveled across India, witnessing the immense misery and suffering due to inadequate medical facilities.

This experience was perceived as a **divine prompting** to return to India as a medical missionary.

He wound up his lucrative practice in England and returned to Neyoor (Tamil Nadu) in 1923 to serve at a hospital founded by the London Missionary Society (LMS).



# Everest Record and Mission Commitment

## 1924 Everest Expedition

Due to a prior commitment, he completed the 1924 expedition before starting his mission work.

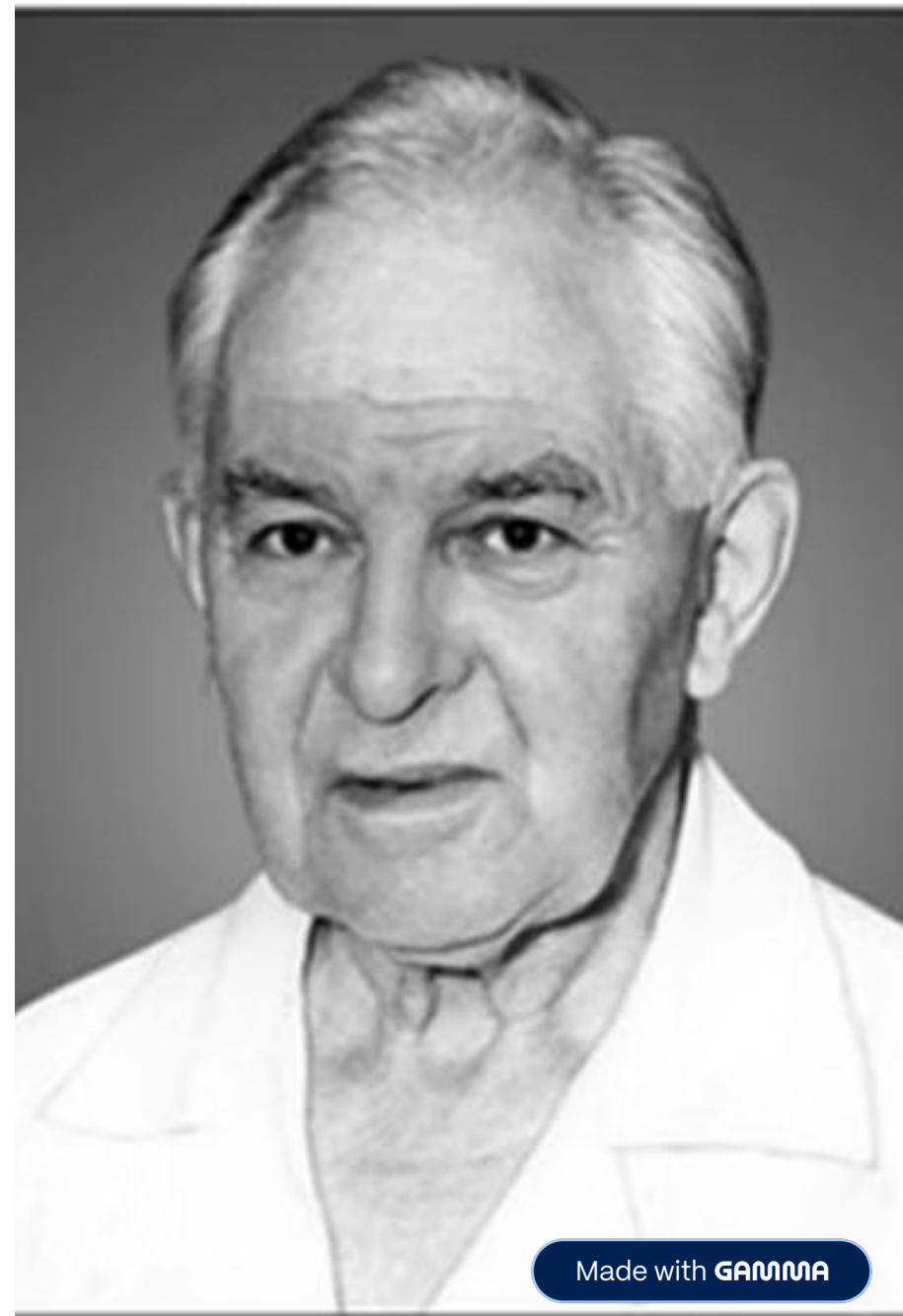


## Altitude Record

He and his team reached **8,570 meters** without oxygen support—a record unbroken until 1952.

## Neyoor Hospital

Assumed full responsibilities in September 1924. His wife, Margaret, joined him the following year.



# Innovating Medical Care in India

As Medical Superintendent (1926 onwards), Dr. Somervell introduced innovative methods to build patient confidence in modern medicine.

## Viewing Gallery

Built a gallery in the operating theater so friends and relatives could observe surgery and learn about its benefits.

## Global Recognition

The Neyoor Hospital, with its branch network, became one of the largest missionary hospitals in the world.

## Surgical Training

His fame attracted many young surgeons, and he was chosen to be on the panel of postgraduate examiners for the University of Madras.



# Awards and Honors

**1938**

**Kaisar-i-Hind  
Gold Medal**

Awarded for his  
outstanding  
contribution to  
medical work in  
India.

**1953**

**Officer of the  
Order of the  
British Empire  
(OBE)**

Appointed during the  
New Year honors for  
his continued service.

**1924**

**Olympic Gold  
Medal**

One of 21 recipients at  
the Winter VIII  
Olympiad for  
achievements in  
mountaineering.



# The Somervell Surgical Era at CMC Vellore

Dr. Somervell returned to India in 1949 to join the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore, serving as Associate Professor in General Surgery during its crucial development stage.

## Legendary Figure

Considered the Indian version of Albert Schweitzer, he was a compassionate surgeon and keen teacher.

## General Surgeon Par Excellence

He belonged to the school of surgeons who operated literally "from head to foot," specializing in a wide range of procedures.

# A Teacher and Humanitarian

## Speed and Efficiency

Operating in an era when anesthesia was in its infancy, he taught trainees to get to the heart of the procedure quickly.

## Surgery for the Poor

Having served the 'have-not' class for years, he made surgery available to the poor, treating everyone—prince or pauper—with the same respect.

## Approachability

He was known for his uniformity of behavior and easy availability, even lying on the floor to talk to a patient expressing gratitude.



# The Renaissance Man: Beyond Medicine

Dr. Somervell maintained his diverse interests even after retirement from CMC in 1961, serving as President of the Alpine Club, London, for three years.



## Musician

Played the violin and piano at concert level. He transcribed and performed Tibetan songs from his Everest expeditions.



## Artist

His high-quality drawings and paintings are displayed in major museums, including the Royal Geographical Society, London.



## Mountaineer

Reached the highest altitude of his time and was honored with an Olympic Gold for his achievements.



# Legacy of Humility and Humanity

Dr. Theodore Howard Somervell was described as:

**"a man of science, a man of art, a man of warm humanity and above all, a Christian."**

He passed away on January 23, 1975, leaving a vacuum that is near-impossible to fill. He touched many lives, doing everything well and with great humility, as an expression of the best in him.



Read more about his mission heritage: [cmcvelloremissions.org](http://cmcvelloremissions.org)