

## William Harvey (1578 – 1657)

He opened a new era of medical science by introducing his theory of the circulation of blood in the body and made profound discoveries in the science of embryology.

He was born at Folkestone, England. He was the son of Thomas Harvey, a yeoman-farmer. He was one of 'a weak of sons where of this William, bred to learning, was the eldest'; William was a voracious student, first studied in King's School, Canterbury, and afterward to Cambridge.



In 1597 after a serious illness Harvey travelled to Padua, at that time the most famous school of medicine in the world. There in the candle lit lecture hall of the University, he listened to Fabricius of Aquapendente, the great anatomist. That proved the starting point of his discovery.

He was present at the Battle of Edgehill. His task was to take care of the Prince of Wales then twelve years of age. Harvey sought the shelter and started reading a book from his pocket, which was interrupted by a cannon ball dropped near by. But William Harvey was not satisfied with being the foremost anatomist of his day.

By studying animals given to him by his regal employer, Harvey eventually developed an accurate theory of how the heart and circulatory system operated. He published his theories in 1628, which made him notorious throughout Europe. Many people thought it was absurd, and others took it as a threat to their understandings of how the body worked. Controversy went for years. It was believed by the vulgar that he was crack-brained; and all the physicians were against his opinion. At last after about 30 years it was received in all the universities in the world.

Harvey remained a physician at St. Bartholomew's until 1643. He maintained his college lectureship until 1656, the year before his death, missing by a moment the dismantling under Cromwell of the monarchy that had supported his research throughout his life.

When he was 68 years of age and much troubled with gout, which he sought to ease by putting his feet in cold water. In 1654, his busy life was now declining. His health was poor, although almost to the last he maintained his clarity of mind. On June 3, 1657, he was struck down by paralysis. Unable to speak, he managed to distribute some of his personal belongings to his nephews and then died. He was buried at Hempstead in Essex. His wife died childless some years previously.