

Joseph Baron Lister (1827 – 1912)

He applied the first anti-septic measures which are now the common place basis of one aseptic surgery. Previously the mortality was so terrific that if on 25 per cent of the patients operated in the hospital died, the hospitals thought to be congratulated.



Joseph Lister was born on April 5, 1827 at Upton Lane, West Ham. His father was Joseph Jackson Lister. As Joseph's family were Quakers, he could not go to any of the schools which might have assured him a career. He was educated privately and strictly, and grew up to be a young man of serious countenance. Of average height but slender build, he had a large, intellectual head, dark, luxuriant hair, and side whiskers. He wore the curious black coat favoured by the Quakers, and altogether presented a rather odd appearance.

In 1903 he had a serious illness from which he never really recovered, and for the remaining nine years of his life he was practically a cripple. He never wrote a book because his life was so crowded with work, and when his days of leisure came Lady Lister was not there to inspire him and help him as in the past. His faculties gradually began to fail him; and, like a tired child, he fell asleep on February 10, 1912.

The funeral took place in the Abbey, and the great building was thronged with highest names along with the poor and the halt and the lame, whose sufferings he had soothed and whose lives he had saved.