



Geoffrey Wooler 1911-2010

Cardiothoracic Surgeon

Geoffrey Wooler was a cardiothoracic surgeon at Leeds General Infirmary and a pioneer of open heart surgery.

After a short period reading Law at Cambridge, he switched to medicine and went to the London Hospital for his clinical studies. He qualified in 1937 and went to Berlin to learn about thoracic surgery.

Wooler joined the territorial army and after passing the FRCS, became a graded surgeon and served in the 70th General Hospital RAMC in North Africa, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He was mentioned in dispatches after the battle of Casino.

After the war he returned to the London Hospital to become first assistant to Tudor Edwards and Vernon Thompson.

He was invited to join Philip Allison in Leeds as a cardiothoracic surgeon and in 1957 set up an open heart surgery unit with one of the first heart lung machines, designed by Denis Melrose at the Hammersmith Hospital.

For some time Leeds General Infirmary and the Hammersmith were the only two units doing open heart surgery in the United Kingdom. He was later joined by Marian Ionescu and together they developed the use of pig valves to replace damaged heart valves, a technique which didn't require post operative anti-coagulants.

His reputation was increased further when Lord Woolton collapsed at the Conservative Party Conference. Wooler was called in, overturned the original diagnosis, successfully treated him and he fully recovered.

He retired in 1974 and ran a restaurant for a short period, writing a memoir (*Pig in a Suitcase*) having a reputation for considerable achievements in surgery, in particular his development of biological tissue heart valves.

