RANZCO Eye Museum

Crossing Paths with Dame Ida Mann

When I was studying anatomy in my second year of medical school, I studied *Human Embryology* authored by Ida Mann. The slim volume was enough for my needs and I was unaware at that time of her major contribution in this field.

Ida Mann trained in ophthalmology at Moorfields Eye Hospital under Sir Stuart Duke Elder, rising to senior surgeon which at that time was a triumph for a female doctor. She authored *Congenital Abnormalities of the Eye* and engaged in fundamental research on contact lenses and wartime ocular trauma.

Eleven years later, I arrived in Oxford taking up post as lecturer in the Nuffield Laboratory of Ophthalmology. Again, I was unaware that the institution was established by a grant from Lord Nuffield and was home to the first female professor of ophthalmology in the UK, Ida Mann. In my office, I found a dusty box of embryo histology slides prepared by her.

Ida Mann and her husband migrated to Australia in 1949 as her husband needed a warm climate for his health. She started a small practice in Bunbury, West Australia. She met up with Father Frank Flynn who was originally her house surgeon at Moorfields. Flynn was doing trachoma survey work in the Pilbara and convinced her to join him. There began a series of major field trips documenting early trachoma, which she had never encountered before in her time at Moorfields. Her observations and public health recommendations were prescient. Fortunately, the RANZCO Museum has extensive documentation of her trips used as evidence when the National Trachoma Eye Health Program was established.

She was a founding member of the Australian College of Ophthalmology research group, providing advice from her distinguished career.

Ida Mann died in 1953 at the age of 90. Her practice was later taken over by Past President Andrew Stewart who tragically died from complications from a cycling accident.

Shortly after his passing, I received a call from his daughter offering the College her original Gullstrand slit lamp from Bunbury. The crate duly arrived with its precious contents.

After assembling the slit lamp, it now sits in the Ida Mann Room at the RANZCO office in Sydney with a poster of Dame Ida Mann's career.

David Kaufman
Curator, RANZCO Eye Museum

Gullstrand slitlamp from her practice in Bunbury, WA.