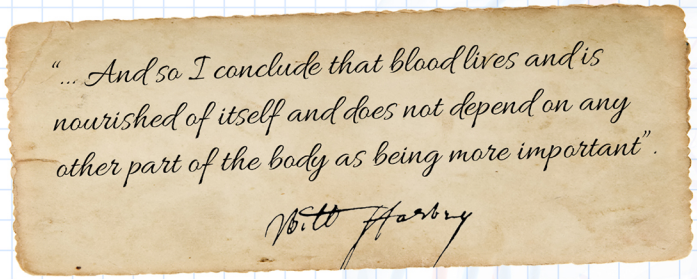
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Dr William Harvey

William Harvey was an English doctor who discovered how blood travels around the body. While other scientists has claimed that the liver was key to circulation, Harvey's fascination with the circulatory system led him to a ground-breaking discovery...



At a glance

- William Harvey was born in Folkestone, Kent on 1st April 1578.
- He married his wife, Elizabeth Browne, in 1604.
- William died on 3rd June 1657, at the age of 79.



Early Studies

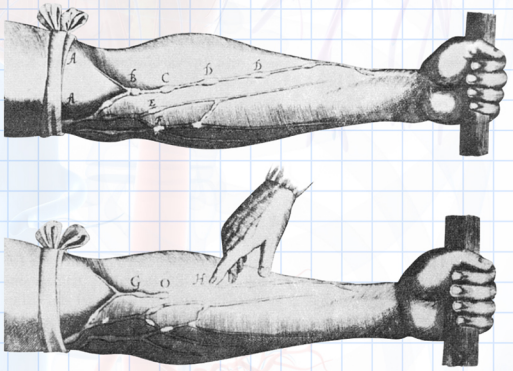
He first studied the arts at Cambridge University between 1593 and 1597, before joining the renowned University of Padua in Italy, to study medicine. After graduating as a doctor from Padua in 1602, he returned to live in London and continued to study medicine and work as a doctor. By 1609, the promising physician had joined St Bartholomew's hospital, where he would spend the rest of his working life.

Harvey's research

In 1615, he began researching the circulatory system and performed dissections and vivisections, in order to prove his own theories. In 1628, he published An Anatomical Essay on the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals to explain how blood circulates around the body. Many scientists criticised his work but Harvey persisted with his experiments, even dissecting dead and wounded soldiers on the battlefields of the English Civil War (1642 – 1651).

Harvey's discovery

Prior to Harvey's discovery, it was widely accepted that blood was formed in the liver and absorbed by the body as 'food' and that blood passed through 'invisible pores' in the heart. After years of tireless research, Harvey proved that blood is not used up; instead, the heart pumps the same blood around the body again and again. He was the first to establish there must be a fixed amount of blood flowing through the arteries, which then returned through the veins back to the heart in a cycle.



Harvey carried out experiments to prove that blood can only flow through a vein in one direction. He discovered that valves in the vein prevented blood from flowing backwards.

Royal doctor

As a successful and respected physician, Harvey became the personal doctor to King James I in 1618. He performed the same role for James' son, King Charles I, in 1625. Charles even provided Harvey with deer from his hunts, to carry out experiments!

Harvey's legacy

The significance of his discovery can never be underestimated and is still regarded as a major breakthrough in the history of medical knowledge. He paved the way for further enquiry and investigations into the workings of our circulatory systems, and his findings are still recognised today.

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