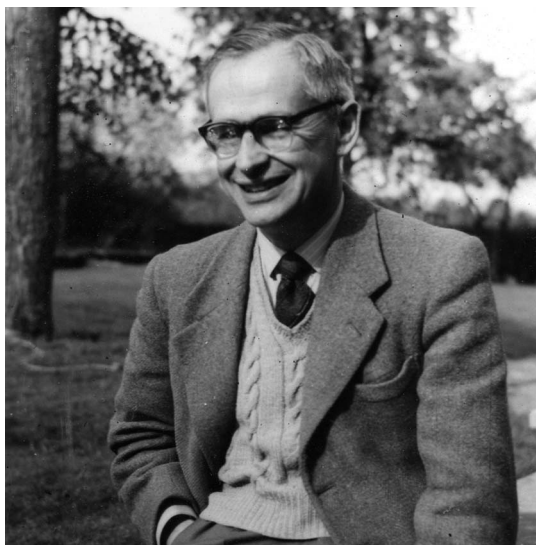


## IMAGES IN NEONATAL MEDICINE

## Dr Isaac Henry Gosset (1907–1965) inventor of the 'Gosset' icterometer and founder of Northamptonshire neonatal paediatrics

Dr Isaac Henry 'Harry' Gosset was appointed the first consultant paediatrician for Northampton General Hospital in 1947<sup>1</sup> (figure 1). At the commencement of the National Health Service in 1948, his duties were extended to include Kettering, thereby encompassing all Northamptonshire general paediatric and neonatal care.<sup>2</sup>

He was an early pioneer for the advancement of exchange transfusions,<sup>3</sup> which established 'an entrée for paediatricians into maternity hospitals'.<sup>4</sup> He invented the 'Gosset Icterometer', '...a strip of transparent Perspex...[on which] are painted five transverse yellow stripes...of different shades' and published in



**Figure 1** Dr Isaac Henry Gosset.



**Figure 2** The icterometer in action.

*The Lancet*<sup>5</sup> (figure 2). This allowed a rough assessment of serum bilirubin, thus avoiding a heel prick blood test. He was candid about its limitations.<sup>5</sup> However, given the greater practical issues concerning blood sampling and analysis, the icterometer was viewed as an important advance. Although subsequently used for several decades, icterometers have been replaced by electronic devices and are not now approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

For Northampton, Dr Gosset helped in the planning of the premature baby unit which opened in 1950, and in the design of the special care baby unit which replaced it and opened in 1965. He was forward thinking in this respect in that a decade later neonatal units were still largely limited to the teaching centres of university hospitals.<sup>6</sup> He died unexpectedly 3 weeks before the special care baby unit opened, which was later renamed in his memory. The Gosset Ward, a neonatal intensive care unit, honours his work and is still playing its full part within the Central Newborn Network.<sup>7</sup>

Neither Dr Gosset nor the icterometer is mentioned in any history of the origins of neonatal intensive care.<sup>8</sup> A repository of his papers which illuminate general paediatric and premature

baby care in the 1950s and 1960s is planned to be on the Northampton General Hospital Archive website.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of his untimely death, and this brief paper is dedicated to his life and memory.

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Andrew N Williams and Fred O'Dell

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