

## On the 80th Anniversary of Dow

### My Grandfather Sir Hugh Dow

- Founder of Dow Medical College in Karachi - Helen Wagner



Helen Wagner

Helen Wagner is the grand-daughter of Sir Hugh Dow. She is a veterinarian who studied veterinary science at Liverpool University and resides in Berlin, Germany.

In 2017, I received an email from Helen Wagner, the granddaughter of Sir Hugh Dow. I was delighted to learn more about Sir Hugh Dow through the account she wrote about her granddad. Her 2017 note was shared here with the Dowites. Recently, she wrote a more detailed account of her granddad, and with her permission, we are happy to share with all the Dowites a personal account of her granddad, Sir Hugh Dow. As she notes, "There is some information about my grandfather you can find via Google. I am going to tell you about more personal things that you won't find on the internet." While this book goes into great detail about Sir Hugh Dow's role as a Governor of Sind, Governor of Bihar, and later Counsel General of Jerusalem, these were political affairs and the steps he took as a representative of the British Empire. To gain perspective on his personal life and beliefs is valuable. I am happy to have been in touch with his granddaughter, Ms. Helen Wagner, who wrote about him and shared her thoughts with us. Additional sidebar information and research are added to provide perspective.

- Rizwan Karatela

#### October 16, 2025

*Dow is a Scottish surname. There's a small seaside village in southwest Scotland called Cairndow, and another village in northern Scotland called Tomdow. The Dows were part of the Scottish Buchanan clan, and there's a ruined castle north of Glasgow called Buchanan Castle. So my grandfather obviously had Scottish ancestors, but as far as I know, he grew up in a village near London. He was born on May 8th, 1886. My grandmother came from the same village, and they played together as children. After they married, they had two children, first a daughter named Dorothea and then a son named Hugh Peter, known as Peter, who was my father. There's some information about my grandfather you can find via Google. I am going to tell you about more personal things that you won't find on the Internet.*

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Additional research on the subject based on the information and the references in the article to supplement the article.



Helen Wagner, the grand-daughter of Sir Hugh Dow, provided this photograph from her personal collection.

*There was a deep bond between my grandfather and my Scottish mother, who was, of course, his daughter-in-law, not his daughter. His daughter, Dorothea, married an Australian doctor and spent the rest of her life in Australia, so I think my mother was like a substitute daughter for my grandfather, whom I will now refer to as Grandad, which is what I called him.*

*My mother's father was also a doctor. He was a devout Christian, studied medicine at Edinburgh University, and then, with his young wife and two small children, went to Malawi as a medical missionary to help the people of Africa. He smoked a lot and died of lung cancer before I was born, so in a way, my Grandad was also a substitute father for my mother.*

*There are a lot of references to Scotland and doctors here! I'm half Scottish through my mother, and I also have Scottish ancestors through Grandad being a Dow. I studied veterinary medicine, so medicine is in the blood, too!*

## The Athenaeum Club

The famous gentlemen's club you're looking for is The Athenaeum Club, a prestigious private members' club in London, founded in 1824 for distinguished figures in literature, science, and the arts, known for its intellectual focus and iconic Greek Revival building on Pall Mall.



It's famous for attracting intellectuals, including Nobel laureates, and was a pioneer in allowing women members in 2002, moving from its traditional male-only status.

As related in the memoirs of David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, on 18 May 1937 he met at the Athenaeum Club with St John Philby, a British official who had converted to Islam and was serving as a senior adviser to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. For several hours, Ben Gurion and Philby held informal talks there on a draft treaty between the Zionist movement and an Arab Federation headed by Ibn Saud. However, they did not reach agreement on the details.

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Grandad spent an enormous amount of money on my dad's education, sending him to one of the best boarding schools so he would be able to get ahead in life and be successful. But you know, as the Beatles say, money can't buy you love.

**So my dad became a radical leftist Marxist and vowed he would never do to his children what his father did to him and would never have anything to do with high society and rich people. I remember my dad talking with excitement about The Revolution that would come and solve the world's problems.**

He was born on May 8th, 1886. My grandmother came from the same village, and they played together as children

*I mentioned that my Scottish grandfather, a doctor, died before I was born. Sadly, my two grandmothers passed away when I was very young, so Grandad was the only grandparent I had while I was growing up. It must have been tragic for him to lose his wonderful wife to skin cancer, so soon after he retired from his career with the British civil service. He sold their lovely house and got a small flat in the very expensive London district of Mayfair. It was only a short walk from the flat to the famous gentlemen-only club called The Atheneum. Women and children could be invited as guests to the restaurant there, but women were not allowed to become members. Sometimes Grandad invited my parents, my brother John, and me there, but mostly he came to visit us at our place in Wimbledon, the tennis district on the southern edge of London.*

*To be honest, I didn't think the food at the Atheneum was all that great, especially compared to my mother's cooking, but Grandad went there every day for lunch, then sat in the lounge and read newspapers all afternoon. He also did crosswords to keep his brain active. My dad told me that he never learned to cook, although Grandad once said to me, "You can do everything with an egg except lay it!" So maybe he sometimes cooked eggs for himself in the evening. My dad went every Friday evening after work and cooked supper for him.*

*But despite my dad being a very dutiful son, I think there were emotional problems between the two men that never really got resolved because neither received the recognition and appreciation from the other that they deserved. You see, my grandparents were in various parts of India, which is now Pakistan, and my father and his sister, Dorothea, were at boarding school in England and hardly ever saw their parents. My mother told me that my father only saw his father once every five years! Whether or not he saw his mother more often, I don't know. My poor father grew up like an orphan. He had a wonderful father who didn't have time for him because he was busy doing all kinds of wonderful things for the people of this country. Grandad spent an enormous amount of money on my dad's education, sending him to one of the best boarding schools so he would be able to get ahead in life and be successful. But you know, as the Beatles say, money can't buy you love. So my dad became a radical leftist Marxist and vowed he would never do to his children what his father did to him and would never have anything to do with high society and rich people. I remember my dad talking with excitement about The Revolution that would come and solve the world's problems. My mother was a Christian and really respected Grandad for establishing the Medical School and for other projects he tried to get going, but I think my dad just felt abandoned, unloved, and resentful. My mother always spoke very highly of Grandad, and a lot of what I know comes from her.*

Additional research on the subject based on the information and the references in the article.

*Every Christmas, my dad drove to central London to pick up Grandad from his flat so he could spend Christmas Day with us. In advance, Grandad ordered a special Christmas selection of very expensive food items from a famous London food shop, and it was delivered to our flat in a huge wicker basket filled with straw. Unpacking it was always very exciting for my brother and me.*

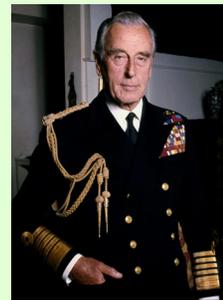
*Birthday cards and presents came by post, and afterward I had to write thank-you letters to Grandad. "Dear Grandad, thank you for the book." It was mostly books. Grandad loved books and was very good at finding well-recommended ones appropriate for my age. When John and I were small, he often sent cute, funny ones that made us laugh. Then sometimes he read these books to us when he came to visit, and my dad tape-recorded them so we could listen to them again with Grandad's voice later. There was one called "Harry the Dirty Dog" that I'll never forget. **On the thank-you letter envelopes, I wrote Sir Hugh Dow and then all the letters after his name, according to my mother's instructions. KCSI, she said, stands for Knight Commander of the Star of India, and then GCIE, she said, stands for General Commander of the Indian Empire.***

*He was given the title of "Sir" when he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. Unlike some people who reach high positions, he didn't come from an elite family. He came from a Christian minister's family, attended an ordinary government school rather than a private one, and joined the British civil service, where he kept getting promoted, I guess because he was very clever, conscientious, honest, reliable, and able to take responsibility, as well as having good social skills and being friendly and likeable.*

*In an article in the Dow News about the founding of this medical school, quoting an old newspaper article, it was written that he didn't want the medical school named after himself. He told the Minister of Health, a native of your country, that it should be named after him. The writer of the article considered that rather surprising, since most*

*My mother told me that Grandad was looked down on by the British elite because he came from humble beginnings and hadn't been born into an elite wealthy family as they had. He once overheard them talking about him behind his back. "He's not one of us," somebody said.*

### Lord Mountbatten - Last Viceroy of India



Lord Mountbatten, was a British statesman, Royal Navy officer and close relative of the British royal family. He was born in the United Kingdom to the prominent Battenberg family. He was a maternal uncle of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and a second cousin of King George VI. He joined the Royal Navy during

the First World War and was appointed Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command, in the Second World War. He later served as the last Viceroy of India and briefly as the first Governor-General of the Dominion of India.

In February 1947, Mountbatten was appointed Viceroy and Governor-General of India by the Labour government under Prime Minister Attlee. In this capacity he oversaw the Partition of India into India and Pakistan. He then served as the first Governor-General of the Union of India until June 1948 and played a significant role in persuading princely states to accede to India. In 1952, Mountbatten was appointed commander-in-chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet and NATO Commander Allied Forces Mediterranean. From 1955 to 1959, he was First Sea Lord, a position that had been held by his father, Prince Louis of Battenberg, some forty years earlier. Thereafter he served as chief of the Defence Staff until 1965, making him the longest-serving professional head of the British Armed Forces to date. During this period Mountbatten also served as chairman of the NATO Military Committee for a year.

In August 1979, Mountbatten was assassinated by a bomb planted aboard his fishing boat in Mullaghmore, County Sligo, Ireland, by members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. He received a ceremonial funeral at Westminster Abbey and was buried in Romsey Abbey in Hampshire.

people who do something great are eager to take credit for it and be remembered for it. Apparently, the Minister of Health insisted that it be named after my grandfather and that's how it became the Dow Medical School, now part of the Dow University.

Although Granddad had a very noble upright appearance and was obviously very self-confident, he wasn't in any way proud or dominating and had no respect for people who were. My mother told me that he was a lot more popular with the people of your country than with the British aristocracy he had to work under and work with. This was proven to me when our neighbour from Pakistan happened to come out of his front gate onto the pavement as Granddad was about to get into dad's car after a visit to our house in Wimbledon. My dad told him that the elderly gentleman he was wishing to assist was in fact Sir Hugh Dow who had been in Karachi. On hearing this, Mr Patel was quite overwhelmed. After the car drove off, he turned to me and said, almost with tears in his eyes "Your grandfather is a wonderful man!" This was a very moving experience for me and confirmed everything my mother had told me.

**Granddad didn't like Lord Mountbatten, who was his senior. Well, to say he didn't like him is an understatement, although I don't believe my Granddad hated anybody. He told endless stories about his time in India and Mountbatton always seemed to be the bad guy.** Granddad was raised in a Christian family and I think he was very aware of Jesus' teaching about loving and forgiving even our enemies. I do believe he tried to apply Christian ethics and morals to his personal life, although he had no interest in churches. So I don't believe he hated Lord Mountbatton, but he saw through him. Sometimes what people display on the outside, isn't the same as what's on the inside.

**Granddad was always thinking about how to serve the people, improve the standard of living and do what was best for the people. He was up against the British overlords who were only there to serve themselves and the interests of Britain and British businesses.** My mother told me that Granddad was looked down on by the British elite because he came from humble beginnings and hadn't been born into an elite wealthy family as they had. He once overheard them talking about him behind his back. "He's not one of us," somebody said.

*I think someone who wasn't served everything on a silver platter but achieved their position through hard work and a responsible attitude should be MORE respected! From what my mother told me, I understand that he came to India as a civil servant with some kind of bookkeeping or financial responsibility. I know he was in Lahore as well as in Karachi because he often mentioned those places in conversations with my parents after the Christmas dinner, when they sat by the open fire in the living room. But those conversations about Lahore,*

*"Unlike some people who reach high positions, he didn't come from an elite family. He came from a Christian minister's family, attended an ordinary government school rather than a private one, and joined the British civil service, where he kept getting promoted, I guess because he was very clever, conscientious, honest, reliable, and able to take responsibility, as well as having good social skills and being friendly and likeable"*

*Karachi, and terrible Mountbatten were rather boring for me as a child and as a teenager, so I would go and play in another room with my younger brother. Now I wish my dad had made tape recordings of those conversations, because they might be quite interesting for me now.*

**Well, I say conversations, but Grandad did most of the talking, reminiscing about people and places, his struggles to get things done, and the opposition he faced. My mother told me he had great plans for irrigation to improve agriculture and the lives of poor farmers, but the British colonials opposed them. One year, a terrible natural disaster struck just as Grandad was due to go on holiday to Britain, so he canceled his trip and stayed.**

*As you can see, I have great admiration for Grandad, whom I believe was rather unique and exceptional among the British occupying your country at that time.*

*Although Grandad had a very noble upright appearance and was obviously very self-confident, he wasn't in any way proud or dominating and had no respect for people who were. My mother told me that he was a lot more popular with the people of your country than with the British aristocracy he had to work under and work with. .*

*But I also have great respect and love for my father, who dedicated his free time to his children, was a really good family man, and did lots of interesting things with us, played games with us, and took us on holiday to the*

*seaside. He didn't have any political ambitions for himself, but my mother told me years later that he actually hoped I would become the first female British Prime Minister of the Labour Party. This wouldn't have gone down well with Grandad, who was a staunch Conservative.*

*Grandad wanted me to study medicine, but I had already decided at age nine that I wanted to be a vet. I studied veterinary science at Liverpool University. During that time, I wrote letters to Grandad, which he appreciated very much, and sometimes I got letters back. When he was in his late eighties, he was still very healthy, but he thought it might be a good idea to have a thorough medical checkup. The doctor told him he was in perfect health and, with British humor, said he should come back in TEN YEARS!*

*He died peacefully in his sleep at home at the age of 92. \**

