

On Call in Africa

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Earlier this year, we had the pleasure of welcoming Dr Tony Jewell to [present at the Centre's seminar series](#). Given his past as Chief Medical Officer for Wales, one might have expected a public health talk. Instead, he came to talk about his grandfather's work in early twentieth-century East Africa. The source of this presentation came from his grandfather's memoirs, recently collated and edited in the volume [On Call in Africa – In War and Peace](#) (ISBN 978-0-9931382-0-1).

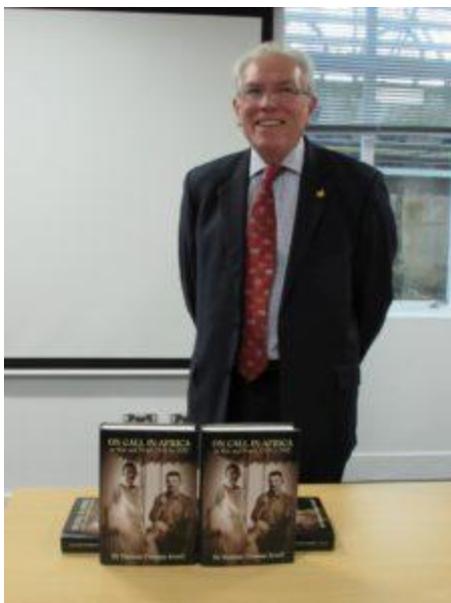
Dr **Norman** Jewell trained at Trinity College Dublin before joining the Colonial Medical Service and being stationed to the Seychelles. During the Great War he practiced with the 3rd East African Field Ambulance Unity in East Africa. It is on this subject that Tony focused his presentation, but there was plenty of biographical material on his later return to Dublin, escape from Bloody Sunday and subsequent books on tropical diseases. You can listen to the talk [here](#).



On Call in Africa is not a simple reproduction of diaries and photographs. As Centre member [John Manton](#) (historian of public health and medicine in Africa) has noted, this is not simply 'a tale of high (medical) adventure alongside nostalgia for the cosmopolitanism of empire'. This sense *does* come through in Norman's words, but the important context provided by the editors grounds this attitude in its time and place.

John Manton is also keen to stress the importance of this volume as a primary source in its own right. It ‘takes us deep into the trials and tribulations of field and emergency medical work in a relatively neglected theatre of world war in the twentieth century’. The inclusion of biographical detail on Norman’s wife, Sydney Auchinleck, also gives insight into women’s education and the role of women within and without the Colonial Medical Service.

When discussing histories of this type, academic historians sometimes have a tendency to swing between extremes. Popular histories are seen to lack rigour and heft; nuanced and dense volumes tend to alienate the lay or casual reader. Judging by Tony’s presentation skills and the way in which this work has been edited, *On Call in Africa* can be accused of neither. The history of Empire is a difficult and controversial one. Mistakes were made and atrocities committed. Discoveries were made and innovative solutions found in remote areas with scarce resources. All are shown, “warts and all”, and with benefit of context rather than judgement or apology.



The book can be purchased through the [On Call in Africa](http://www.oncallinfricaweb.com) website. As of August 2016, it is priced at £35 for those living in the European Union, Africa or the Seychelles.

The presentation was recorded and this is now available at the link below:

<http://history.lshtm.ac.uk/2016/01/22/on-call-in-africa-in-war-and-peace-1910-1932/>