Sir Harold Ridley

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“A Pioneer in the quest to eradicate world blindness”, Sir Nicholas Harold Ridley was described by World Health Organization in 2003 in their bulletin two years after his death.

Sir Nicholas Harold Ridley an English Ophthalmologist was born on 10th July 1906, in Leicestershire to Nicholas Ridley and Margaret. He had a younger brother Olden. In his childhood Ridley had a stammer which he largely managed to cure.

He was educated at Charterhouse School before studying at Pembroke college, Cambridge from 1924 -1927. He completed his medical training in 1930 at St.Thomas Hospital. He worked as a surgeon at Moorfield eye hospital and St Thomas Hospital in London, specializing in Ophthalmology. In 1938 Ridley was appointed full surgeon and consultant at Moorfield eye hospital.

While working with Royal Air Force casualties during world war II, Ridley noticed that when splinters of perspex from aircraft cockpit canopies became lodged in the eyes of wounded pilots they did not trigger rejection, leading him to propose the use of intraocular lenses. He implanted first intraocular lens on 29th November 1949 at St Thomas Hospital, London. His implantation, inarguably one of the most important innovation in the history of ophthalmology and a blessing to society was widely criticized. He worked hard to overcome complication and had refined the technique by the late 1960s.

Ridley had a special and sincere interest in the field of tropical ophthalmology. His father was an ophthalmologist in British Royal Navy of the 20th century, a position providing his family with worldwide outlook. His wife was raised in India. He led important research into Onchocerchiasis when he was stationed in Ghana for part of his war service in world war II. His work in Africa ranks among most important of his non-intraocular lens contribution. He not only performed clinical examinations on effected patients but also completed histopathological analysis of the microorganism causing the disease. He himself painted a figure showing this disease fundus, now universally termed as Ridley fundus.

He was a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons and a fellow of the Royal society. In February 2000 he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham palace in London.