Children are a nation’s most precious resource and all deserve having the best start to help them live full and meaningful lives. At some time or another, all children are unwell, but some have additional needs. 21st century child health care is exemplified by that of the Children’s Directorate, Northampton General Hospital, United Kingdom.

Here, a range of different units working together provide excellent care as an integrated Children’s Department. For children with more complex needs, other provision such as educational support also have an important role.

Until recently, historians of paediatrics have generally assumed that “paediatrics as a specialised branch of medicine had no real existence before the middle of the nineteenth century.” Of course, this is only true if we equate paediatrics here with specialised children’s hospitals and with professional organisations.

It is clear from earlier surviving archival records such as that held at Northampton that hospital paediatrics has a much longer history and that hospital child health care was occurring and in large numbers. Indeed the first inpatient ever admitted at the Northampton General Hospital in 1947.

Dr Isaac Henry Gosset was the first consultant paediatrician for Northampton. His Northamptonshire responsibilities included both general and neonatal care also included hospitals in North Oxfordshire.

As a boy he had great gifts as an engineer, reportedly making his own television. Having trained in Oxford and St Thomas’ London, he initially tried general practice before starting in paediatrics. After serving in the RAF, he did a further year of postgraduate training at Great Ormond Street Hospital before being appointed to Northampton General Hospital in 1947.

In neonatal practice he designed the ‘Gosset icterometer,’ made of perspex allowing an accurate estimation of serum bilirubin without requiring a blood test. Ictometers, although at that time an important advance, and used for many years afterwards, have been superseded and are no longer supported by current NICE guidelines.

He died of a coronary thrombosis aged only 57.

Shortly before his death, he designed the neonatal unit at Northampton. In this he was a generation ahead of his time which even in the 1970’s saw such units as being restricted to teaching centres. The Gosset Neonatal unit is named after him and working to this day.

On the 50th anniversary of his untimely death, we his consultant successors in Northampton dedicate this presentation to his life and memory.

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Dr Isaac Henry Gosset (1907–1965) FOUNDER OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PAEDIATRICS

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