

## Thomas Groves, 1862 – after 1920

by Brian Stevenson, Kentucky, USA

Thomas Groves worked primarily as a chemist (pharmacist) until the turn of the century, apparently preparing and selling microscope slides as an additional source of income. Around 1900, he changed his primary occupation to dealing in automobiles, cycles and associated supplies. Groves' advertisements indicate activity during the late 1880s through mid-1890s. It is not known whether he continued mounting slides after that period. The majority of Groves' slides contain stained, thin sections of human tissues (Figure 1). Brian Bracegirdle's *Microscopical Mounts and Mounters* illustrates an uncommon non-histological preparation, of tous le mois starch (plate 19, slide K).



**Figure 1.** Examples of microscope slides prepared by Thomas Groves. Other Groves' slides are illustrated in Brian Bracegirdle's *Microscopical Mounts and Mounters*, plate 19, slides J and K.

Census records indicate that Thomas Groves was born in Dorchester, Dorset. He was most likely the boy born in late summer, 1862, the eldest son of James and Hannah Groves. James was a provision merchant and butcher. He was evidently very successful, as all censuses recorded the Groves' household as including multiple servants. James acquired his business from his uncle, Thomas Bennett. An announcement from the 1900s gave our slide maker the middle initial "B", suggesting that his middle name was probably Bennett. It is probable that the slide maker was related to Thomas Bennett Groves, F.C.S., of Weymouth, Dorset (1829-1902), a renowned pharmacist of the Victorian era.

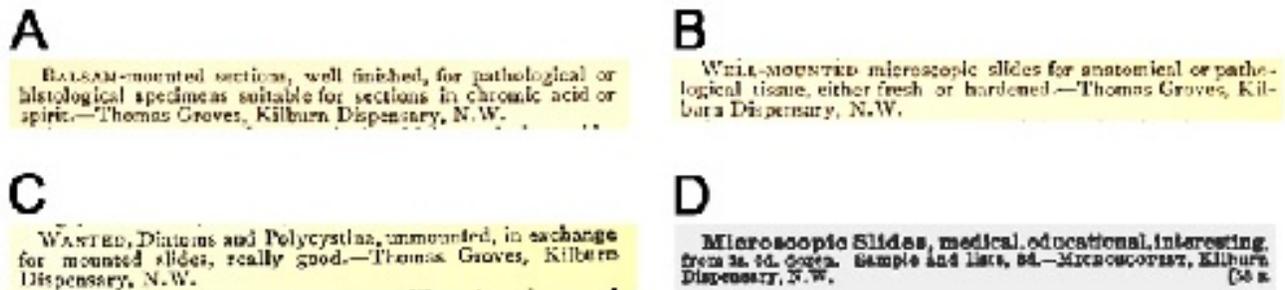
The 1881 census listed our microscopist as being a "visitor" (probably meaning he was a boarder) at Malvern House, Clevedon, Somerset. The 1883 *Yearbook of Pharmacy* reported that T. Grant operated a pharmacy from that location, and it may have been such a business before that date. Intriguingly, Frederick R. Martin, pharmacist and microscope slide-maker (1842-1883), advertised from that address in 1882. This raises the possibility that Thomas Groves may have learned some of his slide-making skills from Martin.

WANTED, first-class botanical and geological slides, rock and bone sections, also double-stained vegetable tissues and other good objects. Offered in exchange, anatomical and pathological preparations, and a variety of well-mounted interesting specimens.—F. R. Martin, Malvern House, Clevedon.

**Figure 2.** An 1862 advertisement from slide-maker and pharmacist Frederick Martin. Thomas Groves lived at Malvern House in April, 1881. It is likely that Groves and Martin knew each other, and that Groves learned slide-making skills from his elder.

By 1886, Thomas Groves was a trained pharmacist employed at the Kilburn Dispensary, in northwest metropolitan London. This appears to have been a clinic and pharmacy. Medical newsletters of the period indicate that physicians worked at the Dispensary, while the 1891 census indicates that there were not any overnight patients. The 1904 *Low's Handbook to the Charities of London*, described the Kilburn, Maida Vale, and St. John's Wood Dispensary as having been established in 1862, and providing "for the gratuitous medical treatment of the sick poor both at the Dispensary and in their own homes".

It is from Kilburn Dispensary that Groves issued his only known advertisements for microscope slides, in 1886 and 1894 (Figure 3). He showed an interest in acquiring anatomical specimens, consistent with his known output of stained histological sections. Groves also requested diatoms and polycistina in 1886; whether these were for his personal collection, or for mounting and sale is not known.



**Figure 3.** Exchange offers from Thomas Groves. (A-C) from *Hardwicke's Science-Gossip*, 1886. (D) from *Work*, 1894.

Thomas Groves married Caroline Whitaker Wastnage in early 1891. Caroline was a widow, with a 12 year-old daughter, Muriel Agnes Wastnage. Caroline's first husband, Percy Whitaker Wastnage, had died in 1888. There was evidently a strong, lasting relationship between Caroline and Percy's family. Her maiden name was Caroline Levy, yet she adopted Percy's middle name of Whitaker throughout life, with the 1901 census recording her as "*Caroline W. Groves*", and in 1911, as "*Caroline Whitaker Groves*". Percy was a stationer, and Caroline was listed in the 1891 census as being a "*stationer's assistant*", suggesting a continued business relationship with his family. The Wastnage family later featured prominently in Thomas Groves' employment.

The 1891 census, taken on the night of April 5, shows Thomas working late, and alone, at Kilburn Dispensary. Caroline and Muriel lived in the family home nearby, at 233 Maida Vale, Paddington. The household also included a Rosa Brain, who was a "*servant*" and "*stationer's assistant*", Thomas Dunsford, a "*chemist's assistant*", and Bessie Gibbs, their "*domestic servant*".

By the end of the 1800s, Groves made a significant change in employment. The 1901 census records him as being the managing director of a "*cycle and motor car company*". This was Wastnage and Co., of 15 High Road, Kilburn. The company's name indicates a relationship with wife Caroline's former in-laws. Wastnage and Co. rented cars and garage space, repaired vehicles, plus sold related equipment and supplies. As examples, in 1905 they advertised to purchase "*one 7 and two 10 h.p.*"

*Panhard's, equal wheels essential*". A 1907 note in *Motor Car Journal* announced that "Messrs. Wastnag and Co., Ltd., of the garage, Kilburn Gate, N. W., ask us to say that their clothing stores were burglariously entered on Sunday, and chauffeurs are invited to inform the firm should any of the coats be offered for sale".

Groves remained associated with the Kilburn Dispensary for some time after his jump to the motor trade. In 1904, he was listed as the Honorable Secretary of the Kilburn, Maida Vale, and St. John's Wood Dispensary charity.

Groves was convicted of "furious driving" in 1904: "At Brentwood, Thomas Groves, of Maida-vale, W., was summoned for driving a motor-car at a speed of over twelve miles an hour between Brentwood and Romford on March 2nd. Police-constable Swann said the defendant covered six miles in sixteen minutes. The defendant stated to the Bench that he was driving a surgeon to an appointment in Essex. The day was a most deplorable one. and the roads were thick with mud. He drove slowly where there was danger to the public, but he did not know he was restricted to twelve miles an hour on any particular stretch of road. He always drove most carefully, the whole of twenty-seven miles occupied 2 3/4 hours, and the law allowed him to go thirty-three miles in that time. Defendant was fined £2, and 8s. costs. The bench pointed out that the law did not allow defendant to keep up an average of twelve miles an hour. The law was that he could not go more than twelve miles in any one hour. Defendant said he had misunderstood the law".

The 1911 census of England located Thomas and Caroline in Tilehurst, Berkshire. Thomas was an "employer" and "managing director" of a "motor car" company. It is not known whether there was a relationship between Groves' Berkshire company and the London-area Wastnag company, but Groves was again described as "chairman" of Wastnag and Co. in 1920. What happened to Thomas Groves after 1920 is as-yet unknown. His was a fairly common name, so it is not clear where or when he died.

***This and other illustrated biographies of historical microscopists may also be seen at the author's web site, <http://microscopist.net>***

## **Resources**

*The Autocar* (1905) Advertisement from Wastnag and Co., Vol. 14, page 38

Bracegirdle, Brian (1998) *Microscopical Mounts and Mounters*, Quekett Microscopical Club, London, pages 48 and 142-143

England census, birth, marriage and death records, accessed through ancestry.co

*Estates Gazette Digest of Land and Property Cases* (1905) Hill vs. Hurditch (Thomas Groves was a witness), pages 13-14

*Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* (1882) Exchange offer from F.R. Martin, Malvern House, Clevedon. Vol. 18, page 144

*Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* (1886) Exchange offers from T. Groves. Vol. 22, pages 72, 240 and 264

*London Gazette* (1920) Wastnag and Co., Nov. 16, page 11155

*Low's Handbook to the Charities of London* (1903-1904) Kilburn, Maida Vale, and St. John's Wood Dispensary, Sampson Low, Marston & Co., London, page 103

*The Motor Car Journal* (1904) Furious driving cases, Vol. 4, page 70

*The Motor Car Journal* (1907) note, Vol. 9, page 343

*Pharmaceutical Journal* (1902) Obituary of Thomas Bennett Jones, Vol. 69, page 34

*Work: the Illustrated Weekly Journal for Mechanics* (1894) Exchange offer from T. Groves. Vol. 8,

pages 222

*Yearbook of the Royal Automobile Club* (1904) Wastnage and Co., page 22

*Zoologisches Adressbuch* (1895) Thomas Groves, Friedländer & Sohn, Berlin, page 177

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