Brodie’s Abscess

Sir Benjamin Brodie was one of the best-known surgeons at St. George’s Hospital in London during the nineteenth century. His early education began at home, being taught by his father, Reverend Peter Brodie. In 1801, he went to London to study medicine, attending anatomy lectures at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital. In 1802, he attended the Windmill Street School of Anatomy. By May 1805, Brodie’s work earned him the position of Assistant Surgeon at St. George’s Hospital. A few months later, he was admitted as a member of a very prestigious and influential group: the Royal College of Surgeons. Sir Benjamin Brodie was recognized as an outstanding physician and statesman, serving as personal surgeon to King George IV.

Brodie was a skilled surgeon and successful writer. His works were very influential, improving medical education beyond his years. In 1819, he published his first book, On the Disease of Joints which served as a manual in understanding and classifying clinical aspects and pathology of joint disease. However, one of his greatest contributions came in 1832, when he first described a chronic abscess of the tibia that has since been named after him: Brodie’s abscess. The following is an excerpt from Brodie’s original article.

An Account of Some Cases of Chronic Abscesses of the Tibia
By B. C. Brodie F.R.S., and Surgeon to St. George’s Hospital

Mr. P. about twenty-four of age, consulted me in October, 1824, under the following circumstances.

There was considerable enlargement of the lower extremity of the right tibia, extending to the distance of two to three inches from the ankle-joint. The integuments at this part were tense, and they adhered closely to the surface of the bone.

The patient complained of a constant pain referred to the enlarged bone, and neighboring parts. The pain was always sufficiently distressing; but he was also liable to more severe paroxysms in which his sufferings were described as most excruciating. These paroxysms recurred at irregular intervals, confining him to his room for many successive days, and being attended with a considerable degree of constitutional disturbance. Mr. P. described the disease as having rendered his life miserable during the whole of that period.