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Malthus mysterious orofacial cleft correction

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Abstract:	<p>Thomas Malthus. (1766-1834), distinguished English Professor , is the father of modern Demography and the most famous hare-lip carrier of history. Much is known of his orofacial cleft but nothing regarding its mysterious surgical correction. A 1833 portrait of Malthus by John Linnell, finished when he considered himself "handsome enough" for sitting does not show any upper lip scar. When this surgery took place? Although technically feasible in the XIX century, surgery of cleft lip and palate was complicated. Malthus would not risk his life to have his orofacial disability corrected shortly before his death. Linnell cunningly dissimulated his deformity.</p>

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Malthus mysterious orofacial cleft correction

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) was one of the most influential world political economists, the father of modern Demography, and the most famous hare-lip carrier of history along with Pharaoh Tutankhamun. Much is known of his orofacial cleft but nothing regarding its mysterious surgical correction.

Malthus was born with a hare lip and cleft palate in Surrey, England, in a numerous family. Orofacial cleft was commonly found among his ancestors. Malthus' facial deformity was probably superficial, although the deeper pain it caused him is unknown. Due to this defect his father educated him privately. At 18, he entered Jesus College, Cambridge, winning prizes for declamations in Latin and Greek in spite of his speech defect. He graduated there in 1788, took Holy Orders in 1789, and was elected as a Fellow in 1793. Malthus, after discussion with Dr Beadon, Master of Jesus College, wrote that *"he did not imagine that my speech would be much objection for rising in the Church, because when I read or declaimed in chapel he scarcely ever lost one word"* (James, 1979). Through family connections he obtained an Anglican curacy at Albury in Surrey in 1796. In 1798 Malthus anonymously published his masterpiece "An essay on the principle of population, as it affects the future improvement of Society". In 1803 he became rector of Walesby, Lincolnshire. In 1804, at the late age of 38 he married his cousin Harriet Eckersall, and had three children. He was conscientious, devout, and pious in his curacy. He avoided long sermons due to his speech problem and rarely performed weddings due to the superstition that a pregnant bride's first born would

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5 carry any deformity of the performing minister. His appointment in 1805 as the first
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7 Professor of Political Economy at the East India Company's Haileybury College limited
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10 his parish life. However, his handling of the parochial baptism and funeral register was
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12 extremely useful for his demographic studies. In 1818 Malthus became a Fellow of the
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14 Royal Society. Years later, already a national celebrity, he became member of the
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16 prestigious French Institute and the Berlin Academy (1832), and a founding member of
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18 the Statistical Society (1834) (James 1979; Petersen 1979)
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24 Mary Edgeworth (1768-1849), an Anglo-Irish writer that visited the Malthus in 1813
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26 wrote that *"I do wish that hare lip were away and that he could speak more like a*
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28 *human creature, for if I were a child and had heard of his being an Ogre I should run*
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30 *away if he were near me and begin to speak"* (Henderson and Davis, 1997)).
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36 In 1832 Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), a British social theorist and writer visited
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38 Malthus. She has stone deaf and used an ear trumpet as a hearing aid, but she did not
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40 used it during their long talks. She wrote: *"Malthus was the one whom I heard quite*
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42 *easily without it; Malthus whose speech was hopelessly imperfect ... his inability to*
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44 *pronounce half the consonants in the alphabet ... His first sentence, slow and gentle,*
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46 *with the vowels sonorous, whatever might become of the consonants, set me at ease*
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48 *completely ... his worst letter was "l"* (Rickard, 1998)
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5 Malthus always refused to have his portrait painted due to his orofacial cleft until 1833
6
7 when the famous English painter John Linnell finished his only portrait in which no
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9 hare-lip can be observed (Fig 1). At that time Malthus said he was “handsome enough”
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11 for portrait sitting.
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18 When and where did Malthus’ surgery take place? Nothing comes from his biographers
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20 (James, 1978; Petersen, 1979). Malthus travelled widely outside England, to the
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22 Scandinavian countries (1796), France and Switzerland (1802), Ireland (1817) and
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24 continental Europe (1825). This last European trip was done for “health reasons”.
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26 Malthus always complained of rheumatism. Perhaps it was during this last travel abroad
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28 that Malthus underwent orofacial cleft repair although there are serious problems with
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30 this hypotheses.
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37 The history of surgery of cleft lip and palate goes back to 390 B.C. when for the first
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39 time a cleft lip was closed successfully in China. Although a cleft lip correction was
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41 performed in 1762 by Le Monnier in France, it was not until 1816 when several
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43 successful operations on a cleft palate conducted by Gräfe in Germany and in 1819 by
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45 Roux in France took place (Perko, 1986). Karl Ferdinand von Gräfe (1787-1840)
46
47 Professor of Surgery in Berlin was a pioneer of plastic and reconstructive surgery, and
48
49 the founder of German rhinoplastic surgery. No successful orofacial cleft corrections
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51 were reported from England at the time. The introduction of chloroform in Europe by
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53 Soubeiran and in the USA by Guthrie both in 1831 help facilitate all kinds of
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55 operations, although poor surgical techniques and lack of hygiene made surgery, and
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5 especially orofacial cleft correction, unsuccessful and even life-threatening. Most
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7 surgeons till the early XIX century were scarifying and suturing the margins of the cleft,
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9 employing different unsuccessful techniques to ensure good approximation of the lip
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11 edges. The resulting vertical scar invariably caused an ugly shortening of the lip. In
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13 1844 Mirault revolutionized this surgery by introducing a triangular flap from the lateral
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15 side into a gap created by making a horizontal incision on the medial side. This broke
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17 up the linear scar and introduced some extra tissue in an attempt to lengthen the lip. It
18
19 also helped creating a nostril floor (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Mirault, 1844).
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26 If Malthus underwent surgery in 1825 while travelling in Europe he could not have
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28 benefited from chloroform use or the Mirault surgical innovation. If he was operated
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30 after 1831 he would be older than 65 at the time. It does not make sense that an old
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32 Anglican priest, internationally famous, would risk his academic career and even his life
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34 to have this congenital orofacial disability corrected only few years before this death.
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36 He died suddenly of heart disease on Dec. 29, 1834. The most logical explanation, also
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38 hinted by Rickard (Rickard, 1998) is that Malthus never had a fully corrected orofacial
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40 cleft and that Linnell cunningly dissimulated the hare-lip from Malthus' painting
41
42 making his face "handsome enough" for portrait viewers. Never the money payed for a
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44 portrait was better used.
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For Peer Review

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5 **Fig. 1 Legend** . The Rev.d T. R. Malthus., M.A., F.R.S., Profosor of History & Political
6 Economy at the East India College and author of an Essay on the Principle of
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8 Population &c.&c by John Linnell. (1833). Oil in canvass. The Masters and Fellows of
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10 Jesus College, Cambridge, England.
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Fig.1



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