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Parathyroid Gland Discovery. From Indian Rhinoceros to Otolaryngologist
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The parathyroid glands were first mentioned by Richard Owen following dissection of an Indian Rhinoceros in 1852. At the time Owen and Charles Darwin were in public disagreement about the theory of natural selection. It is safe to say that Darwin's theory became the most popular but we should acknowledge Owen's contribution to the discovery of the mighty parathyroid gland. Swedish born Sandstrom is credited with naming the glands. His brilliant yet tragic story starts as a medical student when he performed some excellent work describing the glands. However his life was tragically cut short. We pick up the story in 1891 where a French Physiologist, Gley, made the remarkable discovery that certain complications of thyroidectomy could be avoided if the parathyroids were not excised. Viennese surgeon, Felix Mandl is widely credited with performing the first parathyroidectomy. His most famous case is the story of Captain Charles Martell. A journey through repeated neck explorations before a much more invasive and definitive operation.

This fascinating story highlights the contribution of people like Owens, Gley and Felix to knowledge many take for granted. The principles laid out by these pioneers not only formed the foundations for further innovation but are still some of the principles used in surgery today.