

Michael Dillon: Self Made Man

By: Paige Platter

Michael Dillon was a British physician and the first trans man to undergo a phalloplasty, which is the construction of male genitalia. Dillon was also heir to the Baronetcy of Lismullen, however that title was given his brother.

Dillon was born in 1915 in England. Dillon was raised with his brother by their two aunts in Kent, England. He attended St. Anne's College in Oxford, an all women's school, where he was the president of their rowing club. However, Dillon was always more comfortable in men's clothes and presenting in a masculine fashion. This led to Dillon seeking out Dr. George Foss, who was experimenting with testosterone to treat excessive menstrual bleeding. Foss recommended seeing a psychiatrist first. However, the psychiatrist began to tell people of Dillon's desire to become a man and it spread throughout the town. (The First Man-Made Man).

These rumors forced Dillon to flee to Bristol, where he took a job at a garage. The hormones had made it easier for him to pass as a male so the garage manager enforced that all employees would refer to Dillon by he/him pronouns as to not confuse the customers. Dillon suffered from hypoglycemia and would frequently hit his head when he fainted from low blood sugar. While he was in the Royal Infirmary, recovering from an attack, he met one of the few practitioners of plastic surgery at the time. The surgeon performed a double mastectomy, the removing of breasts, and provided a doctor's note for him to change his birth certificate. The surgeon also put him in contact with Harold Gillies, another plastic surgeon, who would perform Dillon's phalloplasty many years later. (The First Man-Made Man).

Gillies performed 13 surgeries from 1946 and 1949 under the guise of correcting a medical condition. Dillon at the time was a student at the Trinity College in Dublin studying medicine. In order to not draw suspicion on himself, he and a friend changed his school records to say he graduated from Brasenose College, an all-male school, rather than St. Anne's, an all-women school. During this time at Trinity, he gave himself a new personality, a rather misogynistic one, in order to pass in the male school and not draw suspicion. (The First Man-Made Man).

In 1946, Dillon wrote a book called *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology*, a book about what it is to be transsexual (now referred to as transgender) and stated that the body should reflect the way the mind felt, even if that meant getting sexual reassignment surgery. (Self-Made Men). *Self* introduced Dillon to a woman named Roberta Cowell, the first trans woman to get male to female sexual reassignment surgery. Even though Dillon wasn't a licensed physician he still performed an orchidectomy on Cowell, which is the removal of the testicles, a procedure which was illegal in Britain.

In 1951, Dillon became a licensed surgeon and joined P&O, a British company that shipped mail, as a naval surgeon. However, in 1958 two people writing about his brother's station as Baron of Lismullen discovered his secret when they found a discrepancy between one mention

of only a sister and one mention of Dillon but no sister. (A Change of Heir). This forced him to flee to India, where began to study with the Buddhist community in Sarnath. However, Dillon had an argument with his teacher and turned to Tibetan Buddhism. Dillon was ordained a novice monk and lived with the Tibetan monks until his visa expired. In 1962 at the age of 47, he died at a hospital in Dalhousie, India. (Becoming Jivaka).