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THE SCOTTISH SOCIETY OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
Session 1976–77

The past session was a most successful one with increased membership and well-attended meetings with attractive programmes. Three meetings were held in Edinburgh and a summer one in Aberdeen.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND EIGHTY-THIRD ORDINARY MEETING

The Twenty-Eighth Annual General Meeting and following Ordinary Meeting were held at the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, on 30 October 1976, when Miss Antonia J. Bunch, Librarian, Scottish Health Service Centre, Edinburgh, read a paper entitled:

MEDICINE FOR THE SOUL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL LIBRARIES IN SCOTLAND

Based on the speaker's book,[1] the following is a summary of her paper.

The title of this talk comes from the inscription over the entrance to the ancient library at Alexandria which can be translated as "nourishment for the mind" or "medicine for the soul".

The oldest surviving medical library in Scotland is that of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh founded in 1681, but there were medical books in libraries for many centuries before then. Papyrus rolls used by the Romans would have a brief life in our damp climate so we may only conjecture what medical books were available in Roman-occupied Britain. We are on slightly firmer ground when we reach the medieval period and, although their provenance cannot definitely be established, it seems likely that five medical manuscripts, dating from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, and now in the National Library of Scotland, came originally from Scottish monasteries. The wholesale destruction of churches and monasteries at the time of the Reformation meant that most of the libraries were destroyed also. After the holocaust, a small number of scholars tried to re-assemble what was left, and much of the material collected by them now rests in the National Library of Scotland and the university libraries. There were also private collectors during the late medieval period, outstanding among them William Schevez (d. 1497), Archbishop of St. Andrews, who had studied medicine at Louvain and who was court physician to James III. Medical manuscripts, once his property, are now in the British Library and the university libraries of Glasgow and St. Andrews.

[1]Antonia J. Bunch, *Hospital and medical libraries in Scotland: an historical and sociological study*, Glasgow, Scottish Library Association, 1975.

The libraries of the four Scottish universities were not rich in medical works during the first two hundred years or so of their existence and by the end of the seventeenth century, only Aberdeen University, which had received some valuable bequests, had a collection which could be described as significant. The implementation of the Copyright Act of 1709 meant substantial increases in the quantity if not always the quality of the bookstock, but eventually, in 1837, the copyright privileges were commuted to lump sums of money, Glasgow's being used immediately to help to pay off expenses incurred in a lawsuit. In modern times, all the universities with medical schools have extensive medical libraries, most of them situated within or adjacent to large teaching hospitals.

Sir Robert Sibbald is acknowledged to be the founder of the library of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh with an initial donation of one hundred books and subsequent smaller gifts. The library grew rapidly and its accommodation was a major headache to the College authorities. A proposal to amalgamate with Edinburgh University Library was rejected and for a time the library was housed in the Royal Infirmary. In 1846 the present building in Queen Street was opened and today the three-hundred-year-old library occupies the major portion of the premises.

The libraries of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow were also founded at the end of the seventeenth century but they did not seem to get off to such a good start as their older sister. The library of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh was, in fact, merged with that of Edinburgh University in 1763 and the Surgeons were without a separate library until the early nineteenth century when the collection was re-established.

The great cultural and intellectual renaissance in eighteenth-century Scotland gave rise to an enormous number of clubs and societies. Edinburgh, the capital, was teeming with them, several being of a medical nature. Many had libraries, the largest and by far the best known being that of the Royal Medical Society. The dispersal of this comprehensive collection at Sotheby's in 1969–1970 took six days. Outside Edinburgh, the most substantial society library was that of the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society. In 1967, it too was auctioned at Sotheby's. Institutional libraries not primarily medical but containing medical items include the Signet Library, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal Botanic Garden, and it is known that some of the circulating and subscription libraries, that special phenomenon of the eighteenth century, contained medical works, although others specifically forbade them.

The eighteenth century also saw a great upsurge in the number of individual owners of libraries and many medical men assembled collections for the use of their students. Andrew Balfour left 3,000 volumes to be auctioned at his death in 1694; the library established by Alexander Monro *primus* is now in the Otago Medical School Library in New Zealand; William Smellie's books are housed in the Lindsay Institute, Lanark; and the magnificent collection made by William Hunter, a truly great bibliophile, now resides in a special room in Glasgow University Library.

With the re-establishment of the hospitals from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, we see also the creation of small medical libraries within these institutions. In the nineteenth century, however, more attention was paid to patients' libraries than to libraries for staff. The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh was possibly the first hospital in

the United Kingdom to establish a library for patients. This was in 1834 and the hospital chaplain was appointed librarian. A leading article in the *Lancet* of 5 October 1872, commended the idea but criticized the content as being too religious in tone. It was left to the psychiatric hospitals to develop the therapeutic aspects of reading. All the Royal Mental Hospitals developed libraries for patients, the outstanding collection being at the Crichton Royal Hospital, Dumfries, where the enlightened superintendent, Dr. W. A. F. Browne, and his staff developed to a high degree what would now be called "bibliotherapy".

The libraries of the royal colleges and the university medical schools have carried on their splendid traditions into the present century, but in many respects the staffs of our hospitals, and certainly the patients, are not as well served, alas, as their forebears. Perhaps the future will provide the remedy.

THE EIGHTY-FOURTH ORDINARY MEETING

This meeting, organized jointly by the Scottish Department of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, the Franco-British Pharmaceutical Commission, and the Society, was held in the Department's Hall, Edinburgh, on 10 November 1976. A delightful colour presentation of "Old monastic pharmacies in France" was given by M. Pierre Martinot, editor of *Le Moniteur des Pharmacies et des Laboratoires.*

THE EIGHTY-FIFTH ORDINARY MEETING

This meeting, on 7 May 1977, was a joint one with the Royal Medical Society, and was held in that Society's new rooms situated within the Students' Centre, Bristo Street, Edinburgh, known locally as "The Island Site". Papers were read by Dr. J. J. C. Cormack, a Fellow of the Royal Medical Society, and Mr. Allen D. C. Simpson, Assistant Keeper, Department of Science and Technology, Royal Scottish Museum.

Dr. Cormack spoke on the early days of the Royal Medical Society in a paper entitled:

A TAVERN IN THE TOWN

The story of the origin of the Royal Medical Society is told in a letter written by Dr. William Cuming of Dorchester to John Coakley Lettsom in 1782.[1] It began in 1734 with a small group of six students meeting in the anatomical theatre of Alexander Monro *primus* in the old buildings of the university to dissect the body of a young woman who had died of a fever. After completing the dissection, which occupied the greater part of a month, the little group adjourned to a nearby tavern for a social evening. After supper one of the number, Archibald Taylor, proposed that the group should meet fortnightly in each other's lodgings when papers would be read and discussed by the six. From this tavern meeting there developed the society which

[1] James Gray, *History of the Royal Medical Society, 1737–1937*, Edinburgh University Press, 1952, pp. 15–16.

was formally constituted in 1737, and received a Royal Charter of Incorporation in 1778, becoming the Royal Medical Society, the first, and it is believed, the only student society to possess a Royal Charter. The Society numbers many of the great figures in medicine who were members in their student days at Edinburgh.

At the outset the Society met weekly in a tavern; later it was granted the use of a room in the Royal Infirmary before occupying its own first hall in Surgeons' Square from 1776 to 1851, its second in Melbourne Place from 1852 until 1966, and, prior to entering its third and present home, occupying temporary accommodation in Hill Square through the generosity of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

After describing in some detail the present location of the Society's premises, the speaker related it to the same area of the city in the 1730s. He liked to think that the site of the tavern in which the first group met in 1734 was on or near where his audience were sitting at the moment. By chance the Society might have returned to its original spiritual home. Whether this was true or not, one thing was certain. The original spirit of youthful inquiry, of meeting to read and discuss dissertations and relate medical cases, and enjoy decent conviviality remain today as they have continued over a period of two hundred and thirty-three years to inform and vitalize generations of Edinburgh medical students. Long may this remain so.

Mr. Simpson spoke on:

THE "RIOT IN THE COLLEGE" AND ARCHIBALD PITCAIRNE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EDINBURGH MEDICAL SCHOOL

Edinburgh's Medical Faculty has its roots in the late seventeenth-century activities of two outstanding physicians, Archibald Pitcairne and Robert Sibbald. The early examinations, in which both participated, for the licence of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh seem to have attracted municipal interest, and Sibbald was appointed first professor of medicine by the Town Council in 1685. It was probably he who secured the appointments of Pitcairne and James Halket as additional professorial examiners to bring the University into line with the College. However, no teaching took place, possibly because the venture centred round Sibbald who soon found himself barred by his change of faith from holding University office. Fleeing for his safety, he subsequently renounced Roman Catholicism but his self-imposed exile from Edinburgh lasted several years.

Pitcairne's reputation became established with the publication of a pamphlet in 1688 vindicating Harvey's disputed claims. At home, his strong Jacobite sympathies had become a serious bar to preferment, but his iatromathematical approach was well received in Leiden and in 1691 he was invited to fill the vacant chair of medicine there. He clearly acquitted himself admirably but his stay was short. He returned to Edinburgh in the summer of 1693, married the daughter of his colleague, Sir Archibald Stevensone, and was persuaded to stay.

It was probably Pitcairne who initiated improvements to the College's licence examinations, including the change to the annual appointment of examiners. With

his close friend, the surgeon Alexander Monteith, he successfully petitioned the Town Council of Edinburgh for the grant of bodies for dissection, intending to make significant advances in anatomy. Their action prompted the Incorporation of Surgeons to lodge a similar petition which was also granted on condition that the Incorporation built an anatomical theatre and carried out annual public dissections. The close parallel to Leiden practice suggests that Pitcairne influenced the Council to make this conditional offer.

Pitcairne's close association with Stevensone is seen in his support for the latter's opposition to the production of Sibbald's *Edinburgh pharmacopoeia;* and they soon clashed with Sibbald's supporters over the examination system also. In a bitter dispute Pitcairne and Stevensone were out-manoeuvred and were ejected from the College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1695 in what later became known as the "Riot in the College".

Pitcairne now turned to the Surgeons of whom Monteith had become Deacon (or President). The Incorporation of Surgeons was soon persuaded to accept the Town Council's offer and a new hall incorporating an anatomical theatre was begun. This included a chemical laboratory, another Leiden feature. In 1701 the Incorporation, again under Monteith, acknowledging substantial but unspecified services performed by Pitcairne and hoping to encourage their continuance, elected him a free surgeon. With Monteith, Robert Eliot a former Leiden student of Pitcairne, and a number of colleagues, Pitcairne now launched public courses: chemistry lectures were first offered in the spring of 1702, and in the following winters ambitious systematic dissections were performed. Pitcairne's Leiden-inspired initiative seems to have had little lasting effect, however, and he presumably withdrew from the Incorporation's teaching. He was able to rejoin the College of Physicians in 1704, and in the following year was one of the examiners for the University's first M.D. candidate. Shortly afterwards he ceased attending College meetings and later broke with the Surgeons also. His activities at Surgeons' Hall undoubtedly influenced another of his former Leiden students, John Monro, and it was he who played the central organizing role that led to the successful establishment of the Edinburgh University Medical Faculty.

THE EIGHTY-SIXTH ORDINARY MEETING

This summer meeting was held in the Hall of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Aberdeen on 23 July 1977, when the speaker was Dr. G. P. Milne, whose paper was entitled:

THE HISTORY OF MIDWIFERY IN EIGHTEENTH-, NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY ABERDEEN

One of the earliest references to raising standards of midwifery in Aberdeen was contained in the records of the kirk session of St. Machar Cathedral in Old Aberdeen in 1759. The session "emitted a long and strong edict about the ignorance of mid-

wives and recommended Dr. Skene's midwifery class." To such classes inaugurated separately by Drs. Skene and John Gregory in 1758, many kirk sessions in the city and north-east of Scotland referred midwives for training, following the example set by St. Machar's. In 1788, Dr. Alexander Gordon (1752–1799) started similar classes for midwives. He was the first purpose-trained man-midwife to practise in Aberdeen, having undergone a rigorous training at the Lying-In Hospital, London, under Thomas Denman, another M.D. of Aberdeen.

Gordon's pioneer work, meticulously carried out, in relating the spread of puerperal sepsis from nurse to patient, and doctor to patient, preceded by fifty years that of Semmelweis in Vienna. It was incorporated in his work, *A treatise on the childbed fever which prevailed as an epidemic in Aberdeen from 1789-92,* published in 1795.[1] But vested interests among midwives and doctors and ignorance prevented advantage being taken in Aberdeen of Gordon's classic work. Indeed, he was abused for his efforts.

In 1789, the Aberdeen Medical Society, later the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society, was founded. Nearly a century before the Midwives (Scotland) Act reached the Statute Book in 1915, the Society had taken action. In 1827 it established a system of registration of midwives and issued certificates after a comprehensive examination embracing anatomy and the dimensions of the pelvis, diseases of pregnancy, management of labour, after-care and puerperal diseases, child management, therapeutic bleeding, and the use of the catheter. The Society, in constituting a local midwives' board did much to improve the practice of midwifery in Aberdeen and surrounding districts.

At the jubilee dinner of the Society in 1835, among those present was Dr. Robert Dyce, later to become the first professor of midwifery in 1860 when King's College and Marischal College were united to form the University of Aberdeen. He was the son of Dr. William Dyce, who had succeeded Alexander Gordon. The family Dyce apparently originated with one John de Diss, and became landed proprietors and probably gave their name to the village of Dyce near which is situated Aberdeen Airport.

The speaker then went on to discuss later events, personalities and institutions in the field of obstetrics in Aberdeen, drawing particular attention to Professor William Stephenson, who was instrumental in establishing the first Children's and Maternity Hospitals in the city, and to the original work of Parlane Kinloch, John Smith and Matthew Hay on puerperal sepsis and the investigation of maternal deaths during the first quarter of the present century. The system of confidential enquiry into each maternal death set a pattern later to be developed on a national scale.

There remains much to be done by way of more detailed documentary research on midwifery in Aberdeen and Dr. Milne hoped to be able to continue his study, during which he had already uncovered considerable original material.

[1] Ian A. Porter, *Alexander Gordon, M.D. of Aberdeen, 1752–1799*, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1958 (Aberdeen University Studies, No. 139).

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