

THE SCOTTISH SOCIETY OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

Session 1979–80

The Society has again had a successful session. Membership has been well maintained and the meetings enthusiastically supported. Two meetings were held in Glasgow, and the third was a joint one with members of the Pybus Club of Newcastle upon Tyne.

THE THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND NINETY-FOURTH ORDINARY MEETING

The Thirty-First Annual General Meeting was held in the Department of Pathology of the Royal Infirmary of Glasgow on 17 November 1979. The Ninety-Fourth Ordinary Meeting, which immediately followed, centred on an exhibition of Listeriana established in the Department in 1923. Professor Donald Campbell of the Chair of Anaesthesia set the scene by describing some aspects of the Royal Infirmary and of Glasgow in earlier days. Mr. Donald F. Hay, for over fifty years the mentor of visitors to the Listerian Collection, presented a brief background to the various exhibits.¹

Professor Campbell's paper was entitled:

THE ROYAL INFIRMARY AND OLD GLASGOW

It is interesting to consider, as a background to the foundation of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, some of the history of the surrounding area, mainly the Barony of Glasgow, and mention a few of the distinguished men associated with the city, the university, and the hospital.

The birth of the city may be traced to the foundation by St. Mungo, or Kentigern, of his monastic community on the banks of the Molendinar burn in 543. It may be fanciful, and there is no real supporting evidence, to suggest that, like other religious communities, this supplied some primitive medical attention to the local population. If so, it is likely that some form of medical care has continued unbroken on the present site for over 1400 years! The old St. Nicholas Hospital (the Provand's Lordship), the oldest building in the city still extant, was founded primarily to care for orphans and the aged, but some of the work carried out there in the fifteenth century would now be considered to be socio-medical.

It is certain, however, that burghers of the city met in the Tontine Hotel in Argyle Street to open a subscription list which led to the building and opening of the Royal Infirmary on its present site in 1792. It was a fine building, designed by the Adams brothers, and lasted till the present building was erected at the turn of the nineteenth century. At the time of the foundation of the Infirmary the population it was designed

¹ Donald F. Hay, *Lister at the Royal*, Glasgow, University of Glasgow Press, 1977, pp. 11–18.

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to serve stood at about 62,000. It now serves, along with its associated hospitals, around 250,000.

By the middle of the eighteenth century Glasgow showed distinct signs of social improvement, enterprise, culture, and even luxury. The university (founded 1451) in particular fostered the intellectual life of the city, much neglected since the decline of the cathedral as a centre of learning following the Reformation. Over four hundred students attended the university, quite a large number for that time. About half were from England and Ireland, where the universities were closed to dissenters. Men of learning from the Glasgow district were actively involved in the foundation of many institutions abroad, notably the universities of Princeton (John Witherspoon (1722–1794)) and McGill (James McGill, M.A. Glasgow (1744–1813)).

Amid all the signs of progress, within the city lived a man whose genius was to have world-wide repercussions. James Watt (1736–1819) came from Greenock, and he was employed as a mechanic. The Corporation of Hammermen would not permit him to set up in business because he was neither the son of a burgess nor apprenticed to a citizen. The college professors, however, showed rare good sense and allowed him to set up his workshop within the university, where he made, among other things, scientific and medical instruments. His shop was frequented by students who lent him books, and by professors like Robert Simson (1687–1768), Adam Smith (1723–1790), William Cullen (1710–1790), and Joseph Black (1728–1799), who discussed with him the scientific questions of the day.

Dr. John Moore (1729–1802), a physician with considerable literary ability, lived in the Trongate at this time. He was the father of the hero of Coruña, Sir John Moore (1761–1809), and his younger brother, James Carrick Moore (1763–1834), became a noted surgeon. Incidentally, Sir John Moore's statue was the first of many to be erected in George Square, and is cast from the brass of melted-down cannon from Coruña.

Thomas Campbell (1777–1844), the poet, was born nearby in Nicholas Street (behind the Provand's Lordship), and entered the university at the age of twelve at the time the Royal Infirmary was founded. He later became Lord Rector of the university on three successive occasions. Other men of letters walked the High Street and attended the university at this time, notably James Boswell (1740–1795), and Tobias Smollett (1721–1771), who served his apprenticeship as a surgeon in Glasgow, being at one time illustrator in the department of anatomy in the university. He translated and published the first edition in English of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in 1755.

The Old University stood for over four hundred years on College Street, the continuation of High Street. It was a beautiful building and precinct, with the sacred Molendinar flowing through the College Green's spacious lawns on its way from Hoganfield Loch to the Clyde. The Hunterian Museum, one of the finest buildings in Glasgow, stood within the grounds. The gift of Dr. William Hunter, it contained exhibits comprising the best contemporary collection in Europe and a library of over 12,000 volumes.

Dr. Cleghorn of Shawfield was a lecturer in chemistry at the university at the turn of the century. He became the first physician in charge of the asylum for lunatics

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opened in Parliamentary Road, near the Royal Infirmary, in 1814. His portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn now hangs in Gartnavel Hospital.

The students in Glasgow seem to have participated only to a limited extent in resurrectionist activities. Nevertheless, under the bold leadership of Mr. Granville Sharp Pattison (1791–1851), a lecturer on anatomy and surgery in the Andersonian School, they drew lots in secret to rob graves in the surrounding churchyards, usually the Ramshorn Kirk nearby. Matters came to a climax when they robbed the grave of a well-known merchant's wife, a Mrs. McAlister. An enraged mob attacked the university in High Street, and parts of the body were discovered. Pattison and three students were brought to trial before the High Court at Edinburgh in 1814. They were acquitted, but feelings ran so high in the city that Pattison was forced to go to America, where he eventually became an eminent surgeon and professor of anatomy.

The Royal Infirmary had an unusual origin in that it was initiated not by medical men but by the Professor of Logic at the University, George Jardine (1742–1827), who was also its first secretary. The original list of subscribers still exists. By this time the Glasgow Medical School proper was firmly established, largely through the efforts of William Cullen and his pupil, Joseph Black, before both went to Edinburgh.

A point of interest regarding the present hospital building is the small obelisk in the car park facing Cathedral Square. It marks the site of the Bishop's Palace and the ancient Castle of Glasgow. During the War of Independence, this was the last English stronghold in the area, defended by Sir Henry Percy, 1st baron of Alwick (1272?–1315). Sir William Wallace (1274?–1305) with three hundred cavalry, at the battle on High Street known as the Bell o' the Brae, overthrew the garrison of over a thousand men and sank his huge sword in Percy's head – not the last severe head injury to occur on the doorstep of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, which has now the busiest casualty department in the United Kingdom!

THE NINETY-FIFTH ORDINARY MEETING

This meeting was held in the Royal Beatson Memorial Hospital, Glasgow, on 19 April 1980, when papers were presented by Drs. R. H. Nuttall and John Paul. Dr. Nuttall's paper was entitled:

THE EARLY SCOTTISH MICROSCOPES

Scottish microscope manufacturers and microscopists have taken an important part in the development and application of the instrument, particularly in the nineteenth century. Opticians such as Alexander Adie of Edinburgh were then making instruments comparable with those made in London, while medical men such as John Hughes Bennett (1812–1875) and John Goodsir (1814–1867) were in the forefront of medical microscopical research. In applied microscopy Henry Witham's work on geological microscopy was a vital initial step in the development of petrology. It is appropriate, therefore, that the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh should have a representative collection of microscopes which well illustrates the development of the instrument.

In the seventeenth century microscope manufacture in Britain was confined to the