

# RES MEDICA

Journal of the Royal Medical Society



## The Society

**Roger Smith**  
**B.Sc., Scriba**

**Malcolm Macnicol**  
**B.Sc., Librarian**

### Abstract

The 230th Session has passed extremely well, the Society having now settled down in its new surroundings and come to grips with the problems revealed by its first year in Hill Square. But the upheaval is by no means over, and the problems now facing the Royal Medical Society are perhaps the most pressing in its whole history — where to go from here? The Society's future must be reassessed in the light of the recent valuation of the Library and a comprehensive policy of management worked out once and for all.

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# THE SOCIETY

## IN RETROSPECT

The 230th Session has passed extremely well, the Society having now settled down in its new surroundings and come to grips with the problems revealed by its first year in Hill Square. But the upheaval is by no means over, and the problems now facing the Royal Medical Society are perhaps the most pressing in its whole history — where to go from here? The Society's future must be reassessed in the light of the recent valuation of the Library and a comprehensive policy of management worked out once and for all.

The traditional business of the Society's session has this year been supplemented by a new departure — the Symposia. In November the Society, in conjunction with the MSC (our old partners in the management of the Faculty Ball) organised a Symposium on ABORTION, with Sir Dugald Baird and Prof. Carstairs among the speakers; the evening was a great success — once a large enough lecture theatre could be found for the masses that arrived. Unfortunately, it was not possible to join with MSC for a second Symposium, this time on DRUG ADDICTION, to be held early in the Summer term, but the Society looks forward to more co-operation with the Council in the future.

One of the reasons why we could not undertake to help with a second joint symposium was that the Society itself held a Symposium in the first week of the Summer term, on ANGINA PECTORIS, celebrating the centenary of the first use of Amyl Nitrite in the treatment of Angina by Thomas Lauder Brunton while Senior President of the Society, in 1867. By the generosity of the various drug firms the Society was able to invite the leading authorities on the various aspects of research into Angina, from as far apart as Harvard and Oslo; but none of this would have been possible without the invaluable assistance of Dr. Michael Oliver and Dr. Desmond Julian in the planning of the programme, and Dr. C. Dale Falconer of BMA in the appeals for funds. A full report of the Symposium will be run in the next edition of *Res Medica*, and in

"World Medicine", and the proceedings are to be published by Geigy.

Of the rest of the Session's business, perhaps mention should be made of two most interesting Addresses, the Inaugural Address by Sir James Learmonth on "The Wound in Literature and Myth" and the final Address by Dr. Macdonald Critchley on "Some Aspects of the Life and Death of Oscar Wilde". Both Addresses were memorable for their high literary standard and for their excellent deliveries.

The President's Annual Dinner in the Hall of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh was the most successful for some time, both the catering and the speeches reaching a high standard. And again, the Faculty Ball was better than ever, and a credit to its organisers.

Because the Society's official Business is completed it does not mean that the work is finished; the President's Dinner for the 231st Session is about to be organised; Addresses and Talks are in the process of arrangement; and the new Faculty Ball Committee will be appointed by the time this edition of the Journal is off the presses.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Society is co-sponsor of a new medical-ethical group now being formed in Edinburgh, along the lines of the London Medical Group. The other sponsors are Profs. Duncan, Girdwood and Carstairs of the Faculty of Medicine, Profs. Blackie and Macintyre of the Faculty of Divinity, and, naturally, MSC and SCM. The Group, probably to be called The Edinburgh Medical Group, will arrange periodic lectures and seminars on various ethical and moral aspects of Medicine, and the first lecture and follow-up seminar should take place in the autumn term on the subject of Clinical Experimentation.

From the foregoing it is plain to see that the Society continues to be forward looking, with the health of the Edinburgh Medical School very much at heart.

ROGER SMITH, B.Sc., *Scriba*

## THE LIBRARY

The evaluation of the Society's library by Sotheby & Co. towards the end of 1966 revealed that the library (not including the Dissertations, Minute books or Consultation Press) possessed an insurance value of just under £70,000. This thrust into the limelight the need to adopt a positive attitude towards the collection which continues to face the ravages of time on an absurdly small budget.

Immediate action has been taken to safeguard a number of volumes, each worth several hundreds of pounds, and a more realistic insurance policy secured to safeguard the library in the meantime. But there yet remains the question of library policy, linking, as it must, with the future of the whole Society.

To consider the problem more extensively a special Advisory Committee has met several times already; the committee includes Sir Derrick Dunlop (chairman), Dr. Robin Thin (honorary librarian), Dr. Malcolm Low (treasurer), Dr. David Simpson and Dr. Jack Cormack. The Society is most grateful to them for their assistance.

This committee has worked co-operatively with the Library Committee and Council, and four possible courses of action have presented themselves:

1. the retaining of all or a major part of the

collection; this will involve considerable expenditure on renovation and maintenance and must be weighed against the use to which the books are put.

2. the retaining of part of the collection chosen by:
  - (a) reason of relevance of any book to the history of the R.M.S. and the Edinburgh Medical School.
  - (b) rarity and fame of the book, and hence its financial value.
  - (c) authorship and value of autographed inscription.

Acting on this brief Dr. Jack Cormack and the librarian sifted through the collection in its entirety and have subsequently proposed that a list of approximately five hundred volumes be retained.

3. disposal of the collection by sale; the money realised would broaden considerably the future activity of the Society. In 2. above, those books not retained would likewise be sold.
4. loan of the collection to a University or other academic body.

It will now be necessary to debate the intriguing possibilities of the Library's future. This is the concern of all those responsive to the Society.

MALCOLM MACNICOL, B.Sc., Librarian

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## LAUDER BRUNTON

"As I believed the relief produced by the bleeding to be due to the diminution it occasioned in the arterial tension, it occurred to me that a substance which possesses the power of lessening it in such an eminent degree as nitrite of amyl would probably produce the same effect, and might be repeated as often as necessary without detriment to the patient's health."

The "bleeding" referred to in this historic sentence was induced by "cupping or venesection" and the quotation comes from Brunton's article written in the "Lancet" a hundred years ago.

The Symposium celebrating the centenary of his announcement about the treatment of angina pectoris was a considerable success. All those concerned with the enterprise are to be congratulated and it is only regrettable that a fuller account of the proceedings will have to wait until our next number.