

RES MEDICA

Journal of the Royal Medical Society



Book Reviews

Tom Russ
John Smith

Abstract

Medical Teaching in Edinburgh during the 18th and 19th centuries, Matthew H. Kaufman
The Royal College Surgeons of Edinburgh 2003

Medical Microbiology – Third Edition, Cedric A Mims (Editor)

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ISSN: 2051-7580 (Online) ISSN: ISSN 0482-3206 (Print)
Res Medica is published by the Royal Medical Society, 5/5 Bristo Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9AL

Res Medica, Volume 268, Issue 1, 2004: 27
doi: [10.2218/resmedica.v268i1.1022](https://doi.org/10.2218/resmedica.v268i1.1022)



Book Reviews

This edition, *TOM RUSS*, a fellow of the RMS reviews the latest book to be published by Professor Matthew Kaufman, while *JOHN SMITH*, a second year medical student reviews the new edition of a medical microbiology textbook often used by Edinburgh students.



Medical Teaching in Edinburgh during the 18th and 19th centuries

Matthew H. Kaufman
The Royal College Surgeons of Edinburgh 2003
ISBN 0950362085
RRP £25.00

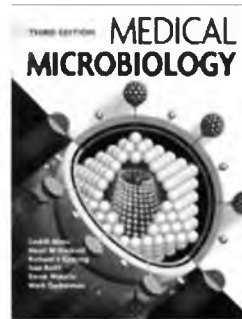
Anyone who has been on one of Professor Kaufman's tours around the area surrounding the Society's rooms will know how much medical history is packed into these few hundred square metres (and can be squeezed into an hour scurrying around the streets). Professor Kaufman has set down all this knowledge and much more in his fascinating new book.

The book is extensively annotated showing the wide range of source material and is filled with many maps and illustrations which really make clear the location of all the important places referred to and how this part of Edinburgh has changed over the years.

At this time of great change for medicine in Edinburgh, with the Royal Infirmary having moved to new PFI premises in Little France, and the historic Faculty of Medicine being replaced after over 270 years existence by the 'College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine', it is timely to be reminded of the development of the discipline in our city. If one looks back over the history of medicine in Edinburgh - the origins of the Faculty in the Netherlands, its establishment in Old College, the building of various hospitals including the first Royal Infirmary, the fallow years under Alexander Monro *Tertius* and the proliferation of extra-academical schools where, at times, it seemed that the real teaching of medicine and especially anatomy took place - one wonders what will be remembered of the 'new' Royal Infirmary and the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine at the end of the twenty-first century.

Half of the book's fifteen chapters describe the function of various buildings on Surgeons' Square (located behind Blackwell's on South Bridge) and the various extra-academical schools established both there and elsewhere in Edinburgh in competition with the Faculty of Medicine. The remaining chapters deal with the establishing of the Faculty in Old College in 1726, the Royal Infirmary (the hospital before the 'old' Royal), the dental hospital and school and the Henderson Trust's Phrenological Museum on Chambers Street. Of particular interest to members, both new and old, will be the chapter on the first hall of the Royal Medical Society at 11 Surgeons' Square. In reading about the Society in its first Hall, one can notice similarities with the 268th session - the free mixing of junior students with more senior students and their professors, the tradition of presenting dissertations before the Society and the Private Business sessions. However the differences are equally visible, including an annual subscription equivalent to over £200. Professor Kaufman includes an interesting analysis of students graduating with the M.D. degree and what proportion of these had joined the Royal Medical Society. It transpires that between 1770 and 1811, 6.6% of matriculated students graduated M.D. In the subset which had joined the RMS the proportion was 46.6%. A seven-fold increased pass rate! In the days of Vision 2000 this is certainly not the case.

Nowadays the training of doctors is highly regulated by the GMC and it seems hard to imagine such a vibrant extra-mural system of education as was the case in eighteenth and nineteenth century Edinburgh.



Medical Microbiology - Third Edition

Cedric A. Mims (Editor)
Paperback, 648 pages
Mosby 2003
ISBN 0723432597
RRP £36.99

For the last ten years, this book has been trusted as one of the most authoritative and influential texts in Medical Student learning. For years, students and teachers alike have come to trust its easy style, informative layout and excellent illustration. Indeed, having used the second edition as both a reference text for specific conditions and also an adjunct to learning the very basics of medical microbiology, it seemed that this fantastic text could get no better.

It was, therefore, with a sense of great intrigue that I peeled back the pages of the new edition. Could this possibly live up to the precedent set by its illustrious forerunner?

Within the bounds of 648 full colour, and immaculately presented pages, Mims et al continue their proud tradition of delivering important and often complex material in a simple and informative style. Replete with new and colourful diagrams, impressively detailed images and totally new chapters, this edition is actually a significant improvement, and many of the new features greatly improve the book's integration into a modern medical course. In particular, the new chapter addition of "Investigating Hospital Infection" shows that Professor Mims and his co-writers have their fingers on the proverbial pulse of modern medical microbiology. With current concerns over growing antibiotic resistance and the MRSA "superbug", realistic information such as that provided in this chapter is all the more important. Other useful features include the new Key Facts boxes at the end of each chapter, which concisely sum-up information in the preceding pages, and also the expanded MCQ-style questions to test your knowledge. The "Pathogen Parade" section is a concise and accessible overview of very many infections, parasites and organisms, listing their key characteristics, cardinal symptoms and how they should be treated.

I find myself wondering whether or not the book could be perfect. Unfortunately I must conclude that, despite a valiant effort, it is not quite so. Undoubtedly it is a superb resource and a phenomenally written textbook, but there is perhaps a single concern that I would raise. The book seems to shun the current trend in textbooks to give access to an updated website of the book. *Medical Microbiology* may be the most up-to-date resource available currently, but with research constantly pushing the boundaries of medical knowledge, one wonders how long this will remain so. An updated website would allow Mims' book to be the most current resource on paper and the internet and would thus prolong the life of the book. (NB: a resources website for the book does exist, but does not contribute extra material to the text itself).

In conclusion, I can recommend the third edition of *Medical Microbiology* as a vital resource to medical learning, and a generally interesting text about basic microbiological and immunological concepts. "Mims'" as it is lovingly known has long been the authority on microbiology, and with this marvellous third edition, its position on Medical Student bookshelves the world over seems assured.