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On the Shoulders of Giants (Editorial)

The Editor

Abstract

Cullen, Syme, Simpson, Lister, Littlejohn, Lauder Brunton, Dunlop; all names synonymous with the history of medicine, all names synonymous with the history of Edinburgh medicine, all names synonymous with the history of the Royal Medical Society.

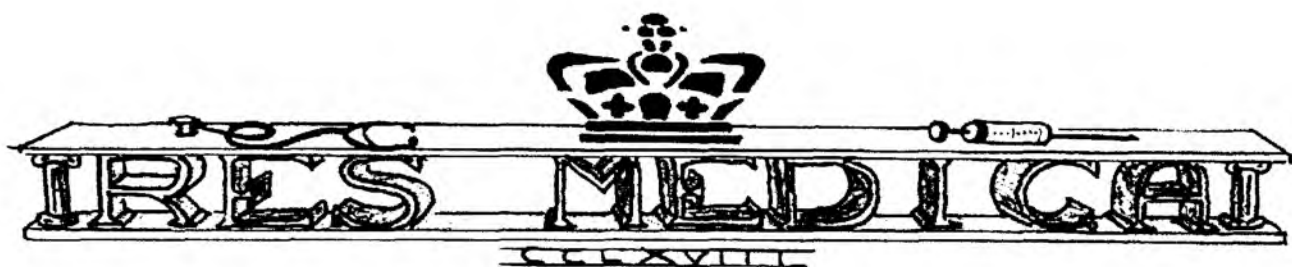
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• THE ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH, 5/5 BRISTO SQUARE, EDINBURGH, EH8 9AL •

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

Cullen, Syme, Simpson, Lister, Littlejohn, Lauder Brunton, Dunlop; all names synonymous with the history of medicine, all names synonymous with the history of Edinburgh medicine, all names synonymous with the history of the Royal Medical Society.

When being educated in such a beautiful city such as Edinburgh, one feels the history seeping out from the walls. Nearly every lecture starts with history, and more often than not, Edinburgh was there. The Royal Medical Society is not immune from this. Just step into the Low Room and one is surrounded by over two hundred years of history – the Dissertations of our members dating back to the 1770's. There, everyone who has submitted a dissertation can be found, including most of the names mentioned above. One can pick up one of the weighty tomes and immediately be transported back to a time when medicine was little more than throwing stones in the dark and theories on this and that were two a penny. The handwritten dissertations are on many and varied topics, both medical and non-medical although it must be said that the earliest members had a particularly keen interest in how the female body works and functions.

Sometimes the history can get the better of the establishment. Who can forget the hounding of a member of this fine Society when he dared to suggest that one could hear two heart sounds instead of one? So much was that hounding that instead of taking a prestigious career path one would expect for such a pioneer, he became a local doctor in the North-East of Scotland.

This year is an important year for Edinburgh medicine. The Royal College of Surgeons which is just across the way from

the Society's own rooms is to celebrate five hundred years of existence, far more than her English compatriot. The University is also not to be outdone this year with the tri-centenary of the Chair of Anatomy, a post currently held by a former Senior President of this Society and a frequent contributor to this journal.

However, history has taught us that change is essential to continued survival. Medical education has embraced the new internet age with the development of CALs, which stand for Computer Assisted Learning. In Edinburgh, the medical students use PathCAL, the development of which is described in this journal. This follows in the tradition of the teachers of old. Many of the old books that the Royal Medical Society still have are old teaching aids from hundreds of years ago. Our front cover shows just such an aid, this book being one of the few copies left in Edinburgh today. What is more, if you look carefully, you will see that the little sketch on the title page is of the same view as the location where the book is photographed. It is little things like this that make Edinburgh an exciting place to study medicine. While full of history, the medical school is still at the cutting edge of many subjects, and through this all the medical students benefit.

It is imperative that while medicine moves on apace and everything moves with it, the history that has helped such institutions gain their reputations be cherished. It is very easy to dismiss history as just old cloth, but once gone it can never be recreated. Everybody should make the effort to learn the history to allow it to flourish and continue throughout the ages to come.

Floreat Res Medica

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