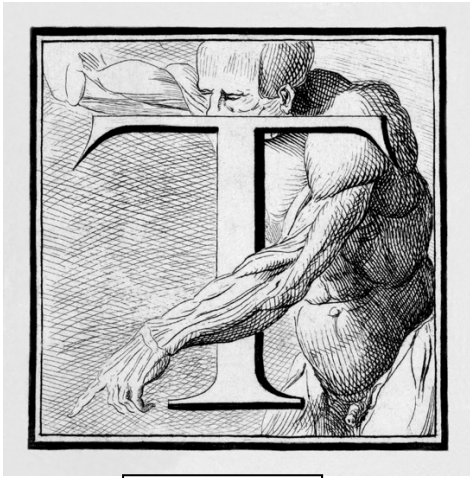


History of the Surgeons' Library



Cowper 1724

The first recorded evidence of the existence of the Library is dated 1696, when provision was made for the "*books and other certain rarities*" in the new Hall of the Incorporation of Barbers and Chirurgeons being built in High School Yards.

In 1699, the surgeon apothecaries, announced in the Edinburgh Gazette that they were "*erecting a library of Physical, Chirurgical, Botanicall, Pharmaceuticall and other curious books...if any person have such to bestow let them give notice to ...Treasurer to the Society...names will be honourably recorded...*"

There were about 120 books in the Library when, in 1709, Thomas Kincaid donated his collection of nearly 200 books. His note about the gift said he "*thought it reasonable that he should do everything that lay in his way to advance the honour and promote the interests of the Society and being*

persuaded that a full and compleat Library of such books as relate to the profession will not only be a good ornament to that stately fabrick (the 1697 building) ... but would also contribute towards the emproving and protecting of this most useful and Necessary Art". Many of his books were printed in the 16th century. At that time, successful examination candidates were required to provide a "banquet" for their examiners but it was ordained in 1723 that they should instead provide a contribution to buy new books. "*Every member at his admission should pay £5 stg, £2 to the Library Keeper and £3 to the Treasurer instead of the treat formerly given and that the Intrans be advised by the Clerk that the Calling are to meet with him and give him a glass of wine and that the Intrans be Distinctly told that the calling will take it amiss if he offer to pay anything on this occasion*".

By 1760 the stock of books had risen to 350 but the College had fallen on hard times. The separation of the Barbers from the control of the Surgeons meant the loss of a considerable income to the latter. The Surgeons advertised old Surgeons' Hall for sale but had no offers. They then let out parts of the building and since the let had to be without any reservations as to use, a place of safety had to be found for the preservation of the Library and Museum.

Negotiations began with the University and in 1763 an agreement was made by which the Library and Museum would be handed over to the University and the Incorporation would pay a small annual sum to allow the purchase of new books. The University Library would be freely accessible to the Surgeons. However, this agreement became increasingly irksome to the University and it complained about the "overuse or abuse" of its Library facilities by the Surgeons: "*thirty was the number of surgeons when this wretched contract was made; but they now amount to ninety, of whom about sixty are in the daily habit of frequenting the library, they roam about the different rooms, distracting the attention of the order-librarian and they borrow more than six hundred volumes of all kinds for themselves and their apprentices*". The University appealed to the University Commissioners to allow the contract to be terminated and although final annulment of the contract did not happen until 1887, it had been long obvious to the Surgeons that they should again have their own library.

In 1832, the College was made aware of the complaints the University had made to the Commissioners. In that year that the Playfair building was opened and a serious effort made to form a new Library. In January 1834, the Librarian reported that the College had about 150 volumes. In 1845, the Library was transformed when the Misses Abercrombie presented it with their late father's library of nearly 1,000 volumes. Thereafter the Library grew apace from gifts and purchases and especially from the increasing number of medical journals - the Lancet, British Medical Journal, Edinburgh Medical Journal to name but the more obvious, until about 1900 when the Librarian began to complain about shortage of space. The representations he made to the College resulted in the Balfour Paul extension of 1908.

The long discussions with the University and the University Commissioners centred on the availability of the University Library to the Surgeons and little mention was ever made of the books which the Surgeons had originally given to the University.

Those books have considerable interest and historical value to the College and so an attempt was made about 1990 to sound out whether and under what conditions, the University would be willing to consider their return to the College. Unfortunately, no agreement was reached as although the books were in the University Library, they were not listed as a collection nor were their exact whereabouts known. The College therefore paid £2,000 to the University to allow this specific collection to be listed. The books themselves are clearly identifiable since they have the imprint of the Incorporation on them and most of them are listed in the old College minutes; mainly they are the books Kincaid donated in 1709.

The College Library today contains about 40,000 books, some of which are very rare. Among those in the Abercrombie collection are *Sepulchretum sive Anatomia Practica ex Cadaveribus Morbo Denatis* by Theophilus Bonetus, published by Lugduni, Cramer & Perachon in 1700. Among the others are a copy of the *Nuremberg Chronicle* dated 1493, two Books of Hours dated 1450 and 1490 and a first edition of William Harvey's *Exercitatio anatomica de motu cordis* (1628). Other classical works include books by Vesalius, Scultetus, Taliacotius, Fabricius, Paré, Peter Lowe's *Discourse of the whole art of chyrurgery* and Richard Lower's *Tractatus de Corde* (1669).

Nineteenth century classics include Richard Bright's *Reports on medical cases* (1827 and 1831) and Thomas Addison's *On the Constitutional and Local Effects of Disease of the Suprarenal Capsule* (1855). The latter is a presentation copy from the author to Sir Benjamin Brodie. There is also a fine copy of Cranmer's Bible including order of Prayer, Litany and Collects which dated from 1566. This belonged to James Haig Ferguson and, before that, to his father. There are case-books and student notes of the lectures of such notable teachers as the Monros, William Cullen, Lord Lister and James Syme.

Outstanding features of the Archive include the original Minute Books of the College which form a continuous record from 1581, its business papers from 1504 and a large collection of the memorabilia of Sir James Young Simpson.

The debt owed by the College to the Abercrombie family has been mentioned but many other generous donors must also be mentioned. The Royal Odonto-Chirurgical Society, for instance, donated 400 books in 1956 and 100 came from the Library of Sir Henry Wade. Individual donors include Dr John Sturrock, John Roberston Sibbald and Surgeon-General Andrew Semple, Sir John Bruce and Robert Kirk. Dr Robert Kirk became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh in 1881, and practised medicine in Bathgate where he was Parochial Medical Officer, Medical Officer of Health and Public Vaccinator and Surgeon to the Post Office. During the 1914-1918 war, he was a Lieutenant Colonel in the RAMC (Territorials) attached to the 10th Battalion Royal Scots (Cyclists) and was a keen curler and golfer. He died in 1920 and bequeathed to the College the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, the Books of Hours as well as a copy of Monro's *De Tetano* (1783). John Robertson Sibbald FRCSEd (1829) had a lucrative practice but no near relatives and left his money for charitable purposes. He died in 1866 and was buried in Greyfriars Churchyard. He had presented the College with a 1604 copy of Vesalius' *Fabrica* and 1694 Salmon's *Anatomy*.



The Library and Archive continue to benefit from papers and books being donated or loaned, such as Professor James Miller's book of autographs, the papers of Sir Michael Woodruff, John Boyes, Joseph Bell, Henry D Littlejohn and items formerly owned by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The Adopt a Book project is in place to attract funds for the repair and conservation of antiquarian books, binding and papers.

We welcome enquirers and enquiries, on all aspects of the College's buildings, portraits, books, collected papers, historical figures and the history of medicine and surgery.