

Editorials

The College and Lincoln's Inn Fields

The announcement, which many will have seen in the press, that Council has abandoned its plans for erecting a large building in Lincoln's Inn Fields will have come as a surprise to those who have been unaware of the increasing difficulties which the project entailed. The prospect of becoming part of a great medical centre on the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields was very pleasant, and the proximity to the Royal College of Surgeons with its library and large hall was an added attraction. When our College Council was forced to abandon its plans, it asked Dr John Hunt to make a personal statement to the president (Sir James Paterson Ross) and the council of the Royal College of Surgeons, of which body he is a co-opted member, explaining the events which had led up to this decision. On the authority of Council we print below the substance of the speech he made on that occasion, as we think the situation could not be better explained.

Mr. President,

When a possible liaison between our two Colleges was first suggested four years ago, in the summer of 1955, many of us had great hopes that one day they would exist side by side. Our anonymous donor, walking round Lincoln's Inn Fields with me later that year, said that he would like to build headquarters for us there; he wrote to say that he would pay the ground rent, too, suggesting a 999 years' lease. The houses were then, as indeed they are now (those which are left of them), four storeys high—the size of the build—we had in mind—and a sum of £160,000 was mentioned as its possible cost. With this generous offer in mind, the plan for our headquarters on the site of Nos. 47 and 48 Lincoln's Inn Fields appeared to be a reasonable undertaking and there seemed, at that time, a good chance of this project being successful. We should have been able to maintain ourselves there comparatively easily, with the kind suggestion that we might use the Great Hall, library and lecture theatres of the Royal College of Surgeons. We appreci-

ated fully all the advantages we should gain by being near you. With the help of Sir Edward Maufe we began to plan; and with our donor's permission a notice was published in the national press.

From that moment troubles began, and circumstances seemed to turn steadily against us. First, the chairmen of the London Society and of the Georgian Group objected to the demolition of the old houses on the site, and after considerable discussion a decision had to be made by the Minister of Housing and Local Government. Next, the London County Council and the Royal Fine Art Commission insisted on a building eight storeys high instead of four, to match the other new buildings on that side of the Square. To obtain planning permission we had to add No. 49 to our project, because a single tall, thin building eight storeys high, with two staircases (which would have been imperative) and a lift, could have been of little use to anyone else. Our building had, at a stroke, become twice as high and half as long again as we had originally intended; and its cost had risen threefold. We received a solicitor's letter about possible damage to the amenities of the Old Curiosity Shop at the corner. The question of "Ancient Lights" of No. 50 arose, and also £18,000 compensation to the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. For reasons outside our control, the price of our proposed new building had already reached more than half a million pounds. The cost of its maintenance, too, would be trebled, so that we should have needed an income of £50,000 per annum to run it and work in it which, as you know, means a capital sum of about a million pounds. At the same time the length of tenure we were offered was only a 99 years' lease—half of that for which we had asked (199 years)—at the end of which our successors would lose the whole building.

About a year ago we were all, including our anonymous donor and legal and financial advisers, becoming increasingly uneasy about the finances of this project; understandably so, I think you will agree. We still based our hopes on the possibility of a successful appeal to raise a million pounds being launched with vision, enthusiasm and enterprise. If we could not afford, at first, to occupy the whole building, we planned to let some floors for a while. There seemed, then, a sporting chance that this appeal would be successful; but the situation is different now—the Royal College of Surgeons is appealing for three million pounds, and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund for a further million, and we cannot help being unhappy over difficulties which might arise if we were to join in this conflict of appeals for the development of the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields. I believe that the appeal of the Royal College of Surgeons has raised, in a year, about one quarter of the sum it is seeking. If you obtain your last million pounds easily,

it may prove us to have been wrong; but the Royal College of Physicians also is now building on a new site, the appeal for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is still in being, the Queen's Institute of District Nursing is asking for a quarter of a million pounds, and there are many other public appeals which have been launched recently, such as that for the Churchill College. Dr Bishop Harman, at the Medical Society of London's dinner this spring, said that all the medical Royal Colleges were undertaking new building programmes, and that they were all now or would soon be "in the red"; he could not understand why the College of General Practitioners wanted to be there too!

Of these nine troubles, the short lease with its insecurity of tenure was the penultimate difficulty which, as you know from our discussions, worried us considerably. Doubt concerning our appeal has been the last straw. Recently our Council has had several long and most serious debates about this whole matter. At a meeting two months ago one of its 45 members suggested that we should drop the Lincoln's Inn Fields project altogether; at that time he could not find a seconder because we all hoped it might still be possible to come here. But all these difficulties made us wonder seriously whether we should not be wiser in the long run to buy a suitable existing freehold property elsewhere, with absolute security of tenure and no building troubles. Soon after that—about the middle of March—this matter came to a head when the sale of the Incorporated Accountants' Hall, on the Embankment, was brought to our notice. Our chairman wrote at once to tell you about this. It was in excellent condition and would have done us well for a hundred years or more; its freehold price was £175,000. There were, however, certain difficulties over its purchase, constitutional and otherwise, and our donor thought we could do better; we had no time to call a general meeting of our College before a decision had to be made, and we turned down the offer. But this possibility convinced us all of the advantages, just now, of acquiring a freehold existing building in good repair, as compared with the difficulties, frustrations and mounting expenses of erecting a new one.

We are in no immediate hurry to move, for our donor has provided us temporarily with 41 Cadogan Gardens—a good house with eleven rooms, about the size of the one which the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has occupied for the last 27 years. For the first five years of our College's life we worked from one room above my consulting room in Sloane Street, from which all the early developments of our College took place. Compared with this one room, the eleven rooms of the house in Cadogan Gardens seem spacious. Later on we shall have to find somewhere

larger, just as the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has done now; but we think we should be sensible to stay where we are until our finances are sound, not only for acquiring a new building but also for its maintenance and for the work we wish to do in it.

The decision not to come to Lincoln's Inn Fields has been a considerable personal disappointment to our President, to many members of our Council and to me, just as it has been, I am sure, to many of you. I have a file of more than 200 letters about this project, and have spent many hundreds of hours upon it. Our architects have prepared no fewer than five sets of drawings. Four years ago Sir Harry Platt spent much time, and took a great deal of trouble, in furthering this idea. The late Lord Webb-Johnson was particularly interested in it, and I had many long talks with him about it, the last only a few days before his death. My position on the Council of both Colleges has been somewhat difficult; but no one could have been more helpful than Sir Harry Platt or you Sir, or your Council; and we appreciate very much indeed the kindness and co-operation you have all shown us. I do want you to know that no single thing which you or your Council have done, or anyone else has done, has led directly to our taking this decision; no one has tried to persuade us to go elsewhere. It has been the inexorable piling up of difficulties which we have been unable to surmount. We felt last week that, in fairness to you all, a firm decision on our part was needed now. To have permitted this enormous commitment to go forward further in the face of the many difficulties I have outlined to you would, we believe, have been both impracticable and uneconomic and, to say the least of it, unwise.

More than two thousand years ago Thucydides said "It is men, not walls, that make a city". Even if our College has to progress rather slowly with its building programme we shall try, meanwhile, from our present headquarters, to maintain and perhaps even enhance the traditional high standard of family doctoring in this country. I do hope, Mr. President, that you will all agree that the course on which we have decided is the prudent one; and I only trust that this decision, forced upon us by developments outside our control, will do nothing to impair the friendly relations between our two Colleges.

The rapid growth in the membership and expansion of the activities of the College will make it necessary for larger headquarters to be found in the not too far distant future, and Council has before it several other

plans. It is hoped that a permanent home consistent with the dignity of the College will eventually be found. Our generous donor has written to say that he still wishes to find for us a suitable building and we are strengthened in our endeavours by this.

Meanwhile, arrangements for the launching of an appeal for an endowment fund are well advanced, and faculties will learn more of these plans before the end of the year.

ON PRESCRIBING

It was after some hesitation that the Council of the College decided to give evidence to the Hinchcliffe and Douglas Committees on the cost of prescribing in the National Health Service. Whilst it was recognized that matters of cost were outside the scope of a purely academic body, the College was naturally interested in maintaining and improving the standard of prescribing, and wise prescribing was *ipso facto* economic prescribing. Further, some of the questions on which the committees sought advice were purely academic.

The reports of the committees were published in May. A comparison of these two reports shows a large measure of agreement. The Hinchcliffe report states: "Our further investigations have confirmed our interim findings that, while there is no evidence of widespread and irresponsible extravagance in general practitioners' prescribing, there is scope for economy; some waste is involved in the present tendency to order larger quantities on each prescription. The aim should be to keep the service as economical as possible, compatible with the best modern treatment, to ensure good value for money and to check waste". And the Douglas committee for Scotland is "of the opinion that, despite the efforts of general practitioners to prescribe as efficiently as they can under the burden of the difficulties in which they at present work, there is undoubtedly a considerable amount of wasteful expenditure on drugs in the general medical services attributable to imperfect prescribing practice".

With these findings there must be general agreement. Wastage in medicine is not a monopoly of the National Health Service. An occasional inspection of the medicine cupboards of our patients

will reveal large quantities of medicine and bottles of tablets only partly consumed; and many of these will be patent medicines bought by the patients themselves over the counter of the chemist and never prescribed by the doctor.

Among the recommendations of the Hinchcliffe Committee are several of interest to the College. The policy of the undergraduate committee of the Council in endeavouring to give medical students short spells with competent general practitioners is endorsed. More systematic postgraduate instruction in pharmacology and therapeutics is urged. The College is probably better placed than any other body to initiate this type of instruction, and Council and the faculties would be wise to give their attention to the means of implementing this suggestion.

For a long time that occasional handout *Prescribers' Notes* has been welcomed by practitioners as a valuable contribution to general practice therapeutics. Its general format and the poor quality paper on which it is produced give it an apologetic and casual appearance unworthy of the information that it carries. The Hinchcliffe Committee recommend that it be replaced by a new "prescribers' journal". Great thought should be given to this suggestion; *Prescribers' Notes* struck the right cord. A similar periodical circular better presented is probably the right answer.

These reports contain much of interest to all doctors and are worthy of study.

HEALTH LECTURES BY FAMILY DOCTORS

The experiments described by DRs L. A. PIKE and G. L. MCCULLOCH on page 268 are of great interest. In the days of the *Penny Encyclopaedia* Dr John Brown of blessed memory went into the Cannongate of Edinburgh and delivered lectures on health in the mission there. We know of no other essay of this kind by practising doctors, though Charles Kingsley published a suitable syllabus for use by other laymen.

The persistent propaganda on therapy and surgery in the lay press makes it important that the normal state of being called Health and its minor variants should be properly understood. Dr Pike was wise to seek the approval of his neighbouring colleagues. Dr McCulloch, being unopposed in his country practice, was able to give his talks without giving professional embarrassment to others. Care to avoid any semblance of a breach of ethical standards is as important as is care in the preparation of such talks. There can be no doubt that instruction of the patient by his own doctor is a most effective method of health propaganda.