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The Foundation of a College*

The conception, birth, and early days of the College of General Practitioners

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I MUST begin by thanking the Council of our College for inviting me to give this lecture, and also the Editor of *The Practitioner* for endowing it. The last time that I was in this hall of the Royal Geographical Society was 25 years ago to hear my father, who was a surgeon in India, talking about some of his archaeological work.

The famous general practitioner whom we honour today—James Mackenzie—was born in 1853. He entered general practice aged 26, in Burnley, Lancashire, where he did most of his research on the pulse and on heart disease. He became very fond of his practice, and of his patients. Aged 54, he moved to London where he was often forced to do battle with the leaders of his profession whom he nicknamed “the Giants”.²⁵ He became, soon, the leading heart specialist and teacher of cardiology in this country and, indeed, in the world.²⁶

After many honours had been showered upon him, including the Fellowship of the Royal Society, and being in charge of the new Department of Cardiology at the London Hospital, he amazed everyone when he was 65 by returning to general practice, this time in St Andrews where he applied for a job on the staff of the local cottage hospital.

James Mackenzie’s name is the thread woven through my lecture. He was always praising the family doctor. “Get thee to general practice . . . even five years”²⁷ was his call to medical students. I feel sure that he would have approved of our College, and that he would have supported us had he been alive when it was founded. Some of his most eminent pupils did so.

The first conception of a College

Our work on the College had been in progress for a little time before I realised how very carefully, and to what extent, the possibility of a College of General Practitioners in Britain had been explored in the first half of the last century. That first conception was about 1840; and it was with the greatest interest 112 years later, in 1952, that I spent many evenings in the basement of the library of the Royal Society of Medicine looking through 100 or so references in old volumes of *The Lancet* and the other journals of that time, to learn about the sincere attempt which was made, then, to found a college or other academic body for general practitioners. My searches were reported shortly in 1953 at the beginning of our College’s first Annual Report⁶ and in its appendix.

We said there that these references would well repay more careful study. R. M. S. McConaghey²⁴ has recently done this in *The Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*. We learnt a great deal from this previous attempt; and I believe that we were able to avoid many pitfalls and blunders through the bitter experiences of our predecessors so many years ago, whose conception of a college ended in an unhappy and unfortunate miscarriage.

The next phase

In discussing, now, the next phase more than a century later, in the 1940s and early 1950s, I shall do my best to be strictly accurate in the detailed story I have to tell. We have

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the originals, or copies, of nearly all the letters and reports to which I shall refer. My account must necessarily be based on one doctor's experience and impressions; and it is much more personal than I would have wished. I have tried to give full credit to many others. If I have made mistakes, or have missed out anything or anybody important, I apologise now, and I hope to be told later.

I shall try to give some idea of the romance of the years 1951–53; of our feelings of helplessness at first, and of ignorance of how to set about the task of founding a new college; of our frustrations and disappointments when things went wrong; of anger when people laughed at us unkindly, or were unnecessarily rude (some of my acquaintances would not speak to me for a year or more); of our deep-felt gratitude for the encouragement and help we received from our true friends; and lastly of the excitement and feelings of fulfilment towards the end. If, in this talk, I can give you some idea of all this, I shall have achieved my purpose.

Early suggestions

The introduction of the National Health Service in the late 1940s, and the publication of the Collings Report⁷ in 1950, focused attention once again on the academic plight of family doctors. William Pickles was lecturing up and down the country. Geoffrey Barber was talking about general practice to medical students at St Mary's Hospital. In 1944 Frank Gray⁹ mentioned a possible 'College of General Practitioners'. Others took up the cudgels. In 1947 the American Academy of General Practice was founded. In 1949, W. Edwards⁸ suggested a 'Royal College of General Practice'. G. Ralston mentioned a 'Faculty of General Practice' in a letter to *The Lancet*, and signed himself FFGP^{33, 34, 35}; and T. B. Layton suggested a 'Fourth Royal College'.²⁰ Then there was a talk by P. K. Murphy to the Chelsea and Fulham Division of the British Medical Association which was followed up by a letter from him in the *British Medical Journal* which was headed 'Royal College of General Practitioners'.³⁰

Geoffrey Barber discussed a possible new college with Sir Wilson Jameson one evening at Oxford, outside The Mitre, after a meeting of the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. After I had attended one of his lectures at St Mary's we dined together and talked about this. On another occasion soon afterwards, we dined with Aleck Bourne (gynaecologist to St Mary's Hospital) who gave us some good ideas and encouragement.

In 1950, the Report of the Cohen Committee on 'General Practice and the Training of the General Practitioner' was timely.³ In June 1951 at the Annual General Meeting of the Medical Practitioners' Union a resolution was passed urging the development, without delay, of a 'College of General Medical Practice.' Bruce Cardew, the Union's general secretary at that time, was one of our most loyal and enthusiastic supporters for the next 20 years.

The executive director of the American Academy of General Practice, Mac Cahal, wrote to me offering to come to London to help us found our College. But it was thought that to introduce into our problem, then, aspects of general practice as it was conducted in the USA would merely complicate matters for us. So I wrote and asked him to postpone his visit. He came a few years later, and I went to the United States to see their splendid Academy in Kansas City with its 30,000 members.

For several years I had been thinking about how the academic aspects of general practice could be improved, and I had mentioned a possible college, somewhat light-heartedly, at a dinner at the Royal College of Surgeons four years before. But I became seriously interested in this idea when I was appointed to the Committee on General Practice of the Royal College of Physicians on 26 April, 1951. This met three times—in May, June and July. On one occasion I mentioned a possible college for general practitioners,

but the suggestion was not well received and it was not minuted. Professor J. M. Mackintosh of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine was, however, also a member; he and I had several private talks about this. We both realised how disadvantageous it had been for general practitioners, when the National Health Service was being planned, not to have had behind them an academic body of their own.

In June 1951 Dr George MacFeat of Douglas, Lanarkshire, published a paper in the supplement of the *British Medical Journal*²¹ in which he suggested a Royal College of General Practitioners. I wrote to him. Stephen Hadfield, who was travelling around Britain at that time collecting material for his Field Survey of General Practice,¹⁰ was talking soon afterwards to the Glasgow Division of the B.M.A.; he spoke to MacFeat about his paper; the latter pulled from his pocket some letters he had received, and on the top one Hadfield recognised my handwriting, for we had been medical students together.

General Practice Review Committee

As a direct result of this, I was invited to submit a memorandum to the General Practice Review Committee of the General Medical Services Committee of the B.M.A. Fraser Rose from Preston, in Lancashire, had previously approached the chairman of that committee, and also Stephen Hadfield, about a possible college, and had been invited to submit a memorandum which was dated 23 June. The request for those memoranda by this committee was, I think, the first positive, active step taken towards the foundation of our College. I telephoned Rose the day before that committee met—the first time I had spoken to him.

We attended that historic meeting of the General Practice Review Committee in committee room A at B.M.A. House at 15.00 hours on 3 October, 1951. Rose sat on the right of the chairman (Dr C. W. Walker, from Cambridge) and I sat on the left. Rose spoke first to his excellent memorandum which set out very clearly what some people had been thinking a new college might do, with several ideas of his own.

I told the meeting that I had drafted a letter which I had considered sending myself to the medical journals, the first 11 lines of which were almost the same as the third paragraph of my memorandum; but, on consideration, I had thought that Fraser Rose should sign it too, because such a letter would carry more weight coming from two doctors with different kinds of practices and from widely different parts of the country. The letter had been typed that afternoon at 149 Harley Street, by my brother Alan's secretary: I brought it to the meeting, and the committee agreed that Rose should be a joint signatory. This is recorded in the minutes, and also in Rose's diary.

A long, interesting, animated and, on the whole, favourable discussion about our two memoranda took place which lasted an hour and a half. Fourteen members of the Committee spoke. Annis Gillie is minuted as saying "A College of General Practice may be a good idea so long as it does not demand more time from the general practitioner". Little did we know what time-consuming work we were letting ourselves in for! Many of us owe a great debt to our patients, partners, and to our wives and families for all their forbearance, understanding help and support during the next 20 years.

After the meeting, Rose, Barber and I met Sir Wilson Jameson who was waiting for us in the common room. We gave him our news and he told us how The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, of which he was shortly to be Master, might be able to help us.

The first announcement

Rose and I, having signed the letter, took it up to the office of the editor of the *British Medical Journal* and posted one to the editor of *The Lancet*. I still have among my papers an extra copy signed by us both. I then drove Rose to his hotel.

This letter to the *British Medical Journal*³⁸ and to *The Lancet*⁴¹ appeared on 13 October. Hugh Clegg and Theodore Fox, the editors of these two journals, could not have been more helpful than they were then, or during all our College's formative years, in publishing our letters, papers, reports and notices.

Our letter read:

“There is a College of Physicians, a College of Surgeons, a College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, a College of Nursing, a College of Midwives, and a College of Veterinary Surgeons, all of them Royal Colleges; there is a College of Speech Therapists and a College of Physical Education; but there is no college or academic body to represent primarily the interests of the largest group of medical personnel in this country—the 20,000 general practitioners. Many practitioners sadly felt the lack of such a body when negotiations about the National Health Service were taking place. . . .” Our letter went on to explain what was happening and ended:

“ We are anxious to collect evidence upon this subject of a possible College of General Practice. If any of your readers have suggestions or comments to make, for or against this proposal, will they please communicate with us?”

This letter attracted considerable notice, favourable and otherwise. We received much private correspondence about it; and many letters appeared in the *British Medical Journal* and in *The Lancet* during the next three months. Our two memoranda were published in the *British Medical Journal* on 27 October.^{37, 11}

Links in the chain

I would like to put on record, now, what an immeasurably important part Fraser Rose played at this time and during the later stages of the building up of our College. His friendship and wisdom, his generosity and unselfishness, his influence on the Council of the B.M.A., his readiness always to help and advise, his quiet humour and good sense, and his judgment of character, were a very great help to us during many years.

His and my training, fields of interest, practices, and connections were quite different, but in many ways they were complementary. I have several most interesting letters from him and a 16-page hand-written extract from his diary covering his college activities. I got to know him well, quickly, and we never had any significant disagreements; we met on a great number of occasions and we were good friends. He had to travel a long way from Preston to be with us, and more than one illness made things particularly difficult for him.

I wrote all that before his death four weeks ago which was a cruel blow, as he had planned to be with us and I wanted him to hear this lecture. Since then I have written obituary notices about him in which I have said more than I can here (*December Journal*).

So much that so many people did forged links in the chain of events which culminated in the formation of our College, that I hope we shall hear no more about who was responsible for founding it. *All* these people were responsible in different ways, including those who gave this matter so much thought more than 100 years ago, those on the General Practice Review Committee, and those on our own Steering Committee. It has been a joint effort of many practitioners over several generations, helped by some consultants.

If George MacFeat had not written to the *British Medical Journal*, and Stephen Hadfield had not recognised my terrible handwriting, I might not have met Fraser Rose, and would certainly not have submitted a memorandum to the General Practice Review Committee. Stephen Hadfield was the catalyst bringing Rose and me together. If Geoffrey Barber had not known Sir Wilson Jameson we might never have had the great

help we did from the Society of Apothecaries. Without Talbot Rogers, who was chairman of the General Medical Services Committee, our relations with the B.M.A., which were vital for our survival, might not have been nearly so friendly as they have been over the years; and we might even have had another name, for it was he who persuaded us to call ourselves The College of General Practitioners.³⁶ It was James Mackintosh who suggested to me that we should form a 'steering committee', a term with which I was not familiar. He said that it was coming into use, and it seemed most appropriate for what we wanted.

Preliminary discussions

November and December 1951 were busy months. Mrs Geoffrey Evans and Ancrum Evans, old friends of mine, offered us the use of the ground floor of 7 Mansfield Street, and also gave us the late Dr Geoffrey Evans' library. Angus Macrae (then Secretary of the B.M.A.) and Stephen Hadfield invited me to dinner to discuss, further, our possible relations with the B.M.A. On 3 November there was an encouraging editorial in the *British Medical Journal*.¹

On 7 November I wrote to Sir Heneage Ogilvie (Editor of *The Practitioner*) requesting help from his journal for our publications. Over the years he and his co-editor, William A. R. Thomson, were two of our keenest advisers and we owe a great deal to both. In a long and thoughtful reply Sir Heneage pointed out all the many difficulties which faced us. It made me more than a little despondent.

On 15 November I invited Fraser Rose and Ernest Busby, Clerk of The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, to dinner; and six days later Rose and I visited that Society and were shown round. On 17 November we published a second letter in the journals^{39, 42} asking for reports of any meetings at which a college was discussed.

On 19 November I read a short paper on the proposed college to the St Marylebone Division of the B.M.A. which was published.¹² On the 22nd Sir Russell Brain (President of the Royal College of Physicians) invited me to dinner at the Athenaeum when we discussed in detail Sir Heneage's letter. Sir Russell thought that an autonomous joint faculty or academy of general practitioners with the three Royal Colleges would be better than a separate college.

What part was the new Section of General Practice of the Royal Society of Medicine going to take? Before our first letter appeared in the journals I had written to the President, Lord Webb-Johnson, among others, telling him what we were doing. He replied "I feel very strongly that to found a college would be a great mistake". On 25 November I wrote to George Abercrombie (first President of the General Practice Section) suggesting a meeting there, so that we might discuss a possible college with several other general practitioners. But after careful and sympathetic consideration, and after consultation with the executive of the Royal Society of Medicine, this request was turned down because it was thought that such a meeting might be too 'political'. That was a disappointment because political was the one thing we hoped we were *not*! Nevertheless, later on, seven members of the first two councils of that Section were on our Steering Committee, so there was close liaison between ourselves and the Society.

The Steering Committee

It was comparatively easy to suggest names for most of the members of our Steering Committee for which we wanted, at first, five practitioners and five consultants; but it was much harder to find a really good chairman. We were looking for a clever, independent-minded person, who was outside the medical profession but who knew something about it, and who could influence other people. Michael Fletcher (Managing Director of *The Practitioner*, who died last March) wrote to his brother-in-law, The Rt

Hon. Henry Willink, Q.C., Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, outlining the position. Willink had been Minister of Health from 1943–45, and had presented to the Coalition Parliament, in draft, the first White Paper on the National Health Service in 1944.

On 3 December Willink replied that he had known me since we were introduced by Henry Brooke during the war and that he would not give an immediate ‘dusty answer’ because, he said, “I think that improvement of the conditions of general practice is of great and urgent importance”. But he pointed out that he lived in Cambridge; an hour’s meeting in London took him away from his College for half a day; the Vice Chancellors of the University was looming on his horizon; the business we had in mind was particularly tricky and needed great knowledge of medical matters; and, as he had been a Tory M.P. from 1940–1948, that might be disadvantageous politically. Would not Sir Wilson Jameson, who had been Chief Medical Officer at the Ministry of Health, or Henry Brooke be better? I contacted the latter who was an old friend of mine from Oxford days; he also was an M.P. and destined for the House of Lords later: but he said he was too busy with his parliamentary duties and with an impending London County Council election. So I wrote to Henry Willink on 7 December asking him to be our chairman. I invited him to dinner on 18 December; but he suggested that, as he was already dining in London that evening, we should meet at 18.00 hours at the United University Club. This we did and we had a long talk on a sofa. In the end he said that he had the highest possible regard for Wilson Jameson’s judgement and that he would agree to be our chairman on one condition “That Wilson says I should”. Jameson pressed him strongly to accept our offer.

On 8 December there had been a critical editorial in *The Lancet* under the title of ‘Fragmentation or Integration’.¹⁶

On 12 December Fraser Rose and Talbot Rogers had visited 7 Mansfield Street; we had dinner at The Bolivar Restaurant opposite, during which we discussed many points about a possible college including a regional organisation with faculties which, we all agreed, was essential.

In a few days’ time I was able to write to Fraser Rose to tell him that, after several telephone calls, all those whom we had invited to serve on our Steering Committee had accepted, and that Henry Willink *was* willing to be our chairman. I cannot pay too high a tribute to Harry Willink and all he did to help us that year. He attended every one of our eight Steering Committee meetings, coming to London from Cambridge each time, often at great inconvenience to himself. As I said at the last meeting of the Committee “I am quite certain that no other person in this country could have helped us so much at a time when we wanted help so badly”. Later we made him our first Honorary Fellow and no one could ever deserve this honour more.

On 29 December Rose and I wrote a third letter to the journals^{40,43} announcing the formation and composition of our Steering Committee, and asking for constructive suggestions. The situation was now becoming critical.

The Giants disapprove

A fortnight later, on 11 January, Sir Russell Brain (President of the Royal College of Physicians) wrote to me:

“Dear Hunt,

In view of our talk and your recent letter in *The Lancet* I think I ought to make it quite plain that this College, and I am sure I can here speak for the other two Colleges as well, would not be able to support in any way an organisation which aimed at establishing another college or which it seemed to

us might seek to do so at some future date. I can say this with confidence because this very point has just been settled by the three Royal Colleges jointly in connection with another matter. I want to make this plain now because, while, as you know, the three Royal Colleges would view sympathetically the establishment of a Joint Faculty of General Practice, I do not want those now considering the formation of some institution of general practice to go forward feeling that the three Royal Colleges would be likely to support an independent body without very stringent safeguards against its ever becoming a College.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) W. Russell Brain."

I replied saying "We may have some difficulty in persuading practitioners that you are right in deciding that a Joint Faculty . . . will really serve them better, as their headquarters, than any other form of academic body. It will help us greatly at the first meeting of our Steering Committee if you could send us, please, during the next fortnight, your detailed reasons for this decision."

I was a little afraid of plans for integration with one or more of the Royal Colleges. Someone said once that integration is what the cat offered the canary! If you want the canary to sing it must be as an equal partner. *The Lancet* had a second somewhat unfavourable editorial on 19 January.¹⁷

On 13 February Sir Russell wrote again "While I appreciate your difficulty I find it hard to know how I can help you further. I could not give details of what a Joint Faculty would imply, because I could not commit either this College or the others. Details would have to be worked out if the principle were accepted".

This meant that the Giants were certainly going to oppose us. As Mackenzie had found, the task of rousing them to help us in a positive way was a thankless one from the beginning. They did not much wish to become involved, themselves, with the academic problems of general practitioners; and they did not really want anyone else to take steps, independently, towards a change. We were being asked to accept, in principle, a novel plan for a joint but at the same time autonomous faculty (which in itself seemed a contradiction in terms), about which no details were forthcoming, about which no one on either side knew anything, and which we almost certainly did not want, anyway!

When I wrote to Lord Horder asking whether he thought we should have a faculty or a college, he replied that "I don't favour either!" We were sure, by then, that there was nothing for it but to call the Giants to battle.

The objectives of the Steering Committee

The 59 pages of minutes of the eight meetings of our Steering Committee are bound in our College's archives. My correspondence with Willink, much of it in longhand, is there also. Anyone can read them. I should like now, to pick out just a few of the highlights.

At our first meeting at 17.00 hours at 7 Mansfield Street on 28 February 1952, all but two of those whom we had invited attended: Henry Willink, Sir Wilson Jameson, Professor James Mackintosh (physician), Professor Ian Aird (surgeon) and John Beattie (obstetrician and gynaecologist), with four general-practitioner members—Geoffrey Barber, Talbot Rogers, Fraser Rose and me. Sir Heneage Ogilvie was abroad and our fifth general practitioner, Dr J. MacLeod of Fraserburgh who had accepted, had to withdraw before the first meeting because of illness. Dr Richard Scott of Edinburgh later took his place. The meeting went on till 22.05 with a break for dinner at The Bolivar.

As an introduction to our business I said "The object of the Steering Committee is to guide us towards an academic headquarters for general practitioners in an attempt to

raise the standard and the status of general practice—to keep the better doctors in general practice, to persuade other good ones to join them, and to encourage medical students to regard general practice as a branch of British medicine of which they can be justly proud.”

Defying the Giants

The two letters from Sir Russell Brain were considered. Members of the Committee decided unanimously that they were opposed to the idea of a combined faculty. They thought that the Councils of the Royal Colleges were so busy with their own affairs that they would hardly have the time, or the interest, to deal adequately with the academic problems of 20,000 general practitioners as well. We agreed that our organisation should be autonomous, that the title ‘College’ would stimulate the imagination of family doctors better than any other name, that we should remain academic and far-removed from politics, and that we should concern ourselves mostly with education and research.

We did not wish to wrangle with the Royal Colleges. Sir William Fletcher Shaw had told us how, before the College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists was founded in 1929, the Surgeons and Physicians took them to court.⁴⁵ That was the last thing we wanted to happen to us.

On 3 March Willink wrote a charming letter to Sir Russell Brain. “You will I hope forgive this unheralded letter. . . . Not unnaturally I am troubled by your letters to Hunt . . . in which you express the strongest possible opposition to the whole idea of an autonomous society for general practitioners. . . . You would I feel sure be willing to give me some guidance as to the objections felt by yourself and your fellow Presidents, and I wonder whether you would think it convenient to organise a meeting—possibly between the three Presidents and myself—when I could be shown the error of my ways!” Sir Russell invited him to lunch at the Royal College of Physicians with the other two Presidents—Sir Cecil Wakely and Dame Hilda Lloyd.

At the March meeting of our Steering Committee Willink reported that he had had a frank, friendly and uninhibited discussion with the three Presidents, over this meal. They were unitedly critical of the proposal to found a College of General Practitioners because they thought that this was merely an emotional reaction to the present state of general practice, that financing a new college would be difficult, that many practitioners would feel that it could not do much for them and therefore would not join, that it could not do its job properly if only a small proportion of general practitioners joined and supported it, that the mass of general practitioners did not want further examinations or examination fees, and that such a new college would very soon come up against opposition from the B.M.A.

Some of this was quite correct and these were really formidable arguments which would have quelled a lesser man than Willink. He was not, however, deterred. He asked the three Presidents what they suggested instead. They proposed, as before, an autonomous Joint Faculty, a new concept which Willink asked them to explain. He said that the phrase itself did not give a clear enough picture and that it would be difficult to ask practitioners to accept a mere phrase without any indication of what it meant.

Sir Russell Brain replied that they could not work out a constitution only to have it rejected. The Presidents told Willink that they thought it would be disastrous if the College of General Practitioners went ahead against their opposition: they were against it on principle.

Members of the Steering Committee were, however, all *for* a College of General Practitioners on principle: and the battle was now truly joined. As the Presidents could suggest no adequate alternative, it was agreed by our Committee that we should stand firm and not compromise. This was perhaps the most momentous decision in all our deliberations. And we still held the initiative.

Education

At that second meeting criteria for foundation membership were agreed and possible activities of the college discussed—undergraduate education and the part the College might play in the training of medical students and in vocational training after qualification, the development of trainee-assistant schemes, and the possibility of a new diploma later. James Mackenzie once wrote “There should be in every school of medicine one or more teachers who have been in general practice for ten to twenty years”.²²

Three new general-practitioner members were appointed to the Steering Committee—David Hughes, James Simpson and Robin Pinsent.

On 9 April, with the Steering Committee’s consent, I read a ‘pulse feeling’ paper about the College to the South-west Essex Division of the B.M.A. Rose wrote to say that he considered it “entirely unsuitable for publication”.¹³ On 18 April I wrote to Sir Heneage Ogilvie saying “I feel that only about two per cent of practitioners in this country, so far, know what we are driving at and I hope that the publication of this paper will put the practitioners’ case to the profession and present it in the right sort of way. Of those who have taken the trouble to put their ideas on paper and write either to the journals or to us privately, the proportion of those in favour to those against is over 50:1; so I feel sure that we have behind us the majority of doctors who have given thought to this matter”.

But it was still not easy going. Some people laughed at us, others shunned us and some were downright rude, like the Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons who met me in Wimpole Street and said “It’s absolute nonsense, you might just as well found a college of ingrowing toenails!” There was plenty of good-humoured banter too, like the cartoon in the *Birmingham Evening Despatch* showing a number of family doctors carrying their beds into an examination hall with a bystander saying “They’re taking their bedside manner finals this week!”

Some encouragement

At the May meeting of the Steering Committee it was agreed that I should send yet another letter to the medical journals asking for small subscriptions to cover the expenses of the Steering Committee.^{14, 15} A good response brought in more than £300. A practitioner in Hitchin, Dr Sylvia Chapman, sent us £20. She later became assistant honorary secretary of the Provisional Foundation Council and helped us greatly for many years. Dr George Abercrombie, Dr Richard Scott and Dr J. B. Young of Belfast were to be invited to join the Steering Committee. I rang them up the next day but spoke to the wrong Dr Young, owing to a muddle over initials, and Dr J. Campbell Young was invited by mistake. He accepted, and proved to be one of our most useful and successful members! He served on the College Council later for many years. I stayed with him several times in Belfast. When he died he generously remembered the College in his will.

Sir Francis Fraser (Director of the Postgraduate Medical Federation of the University of London), who was an old friend, teacher and patient of mine, was on our side; and so was Alexander Biggam, his opposite number in Scotland. They felt that while their organisations could arrange postgraduate courses, our proposed new college could, through its criteria for membership and in other ways, encourage general practitioners to attend them. We might also be able to advise on the content of these courses. Other senior members of our profession were sympathetic too, for which we were grateful: Henry Cohen, John Parkinson, Robert Platt, Harry Platt, James Spence, Arthur Porritt, George Godber and Charles Fleming among them: but they were not in power in the Royal Colleges at that time. In his troubles, half a century before, James Mackenzie, too, had been encouraged by some of the great: of William Osler, for one, he always spoke with delight and affection: “Osler came to see me in Burnley”, he said, “when no other among the big physicians would have dreamed of coming”.

Research

About then the Steering Committee had a long discussion on the part which general practitioners could play in research and how a college might be able to help in this. Sir Wilson Jameson told us that the Medical Research Council was willing to help and had arranged a meeting at which four general-practitioner members of the Steering Committee were invited to be present. I remember that meeting well.

We discussed a letter from George Swift (who had previously written to us about the activities of the EC1 Club in Winchester): "I wonder," it read, "if you have ever come across The British Trust for Ornithology? They have done some very interesting research on bird habits by choosing a bird of the year and sending a card to all members of the Trust who, even if they observe only one bird or nest, put down their observations for a year. It occurred to me that perhaps a College of General Practitioners could do research in the same way." Dr Pinsent described to the Steering Committee a helpful talk he had with the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford (Professor Arthur D. Gardner) on this subject of general-practitioner research.

It was pointed out how closely our suggestions in this field resembled those which James Mackenzie had laid down for research in his Institute at St Andrews many years before. "You have the opportunity," Mackenzie had said then, "of seeing disease in the human subject in all its phases. As family doctors, you have the opportunity of knowing the individuals before they become stricken with disease, of seeing their surroundings and their mode of life. You are consulted at the first appearance of ill-health, and you see the patient through the whole course of his illness".²⁸

Legal procedures

Believing that the Royal Colleges could not, or would not, produce definite plans for an alternative, we had the very difficult problem before us, now, of deciding just how we could form a college out of nothing. We had no organisation on which to build, or which we could adapt, like the pathologists and the psychiatrists have had more recently, when they formed their colleges. We got little help from the history of the founding of the Law Society. Even the gynaecologists had their Gynaecological Visiting Society on which to make a start; and they had a very difficult task forming an incorporated company limited by guarantee, with a five-year gestation period and much trouble on the way, a court of enquiry, and with a considerable amount of internal quarrelling during that time.⁴⁵

On the advice of Henry Willink and another good friend of mine, Henry Benson of Cooper Brothers, I approached Sir Sam Brown of Linklaters and Paines inviting him and his firm to help us over the complicated legal procedures inherent in founding a college. Sir Sam Brown and Mr John Mayo attended our fourth meeting when we discussed whether we should form our college as an unincorporated association, as an incorporated company limited by guarantee, or as an unlimited company.

They gave us excellent advice, and after a great deal of thought we decided on the first. It had some drawbacks; but it was quick and we did not want to waste time or allow enthusiasm to dwindle, especially as the Danckwerts Award was to be distributed on 1 January and we thought that practitioners might then feel more inclined to pay our entrance fee! We would not have to put a public notice in the press; we would not need the blessing of the profession, of the Royal Colleges, the Ministry of Health nor of other Government Department, nor even of the Board of Trade, although the latter would have to agree to the name we chose. So long as our constitution was drawn up in the right way, our legal advisers told us that later on—when the value of our work was proven and we were generally accepted and financially sound, and when opposition had subsided—we could change over, with little difficulty, to an incorporated company limited by guarantee like the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists with a

constitution almost the same as the one with which we started and we could, later still, apply for a Royal Charter. This is just what happened.

Slow progress

On 7 June a more helpful editorial in *The Lancet*¹⁸ was followed on 27 June by a most unfavourable one in the *Manchester Guardian*²³ under a heading "F.R.C.G.P."; and another, nearly as bad, was in *The Times*⁴⁶ the following day. I remember that as a sad and worrying time as there was obviously much influential opposition, still, from the Giants and others.

I wrote a personal letter to a number of them about my pulse-feeling paper and said "I am writing now to ask you (indeed to beg you) to withhold, please, any unrelenting or uncompromising disapproval or opposition to our plan for helping general practice, until all the evidence is collected . . . and until our Steering Committee's report is published. . . . Mr Henry Willink, the chairman of our Steering Committee, knows that I am writing this letter. He joins in my request and shares my hope".

None of their replies were encouraging; but on the whole they were not *too* bad. Lord Horder wrote:

"My dear Hunt,

Thank you. I will be good!

Yours sincerely,

Horder."

By mid-September I had written, on my holiday in Cornwall, the first draft of our Steering Committee's Report which was presented to the Committee at its meeting that month.

7 Mansfield Street was soon to be sold, so on 22 September I wrote to Sir Wilson Jameson asking whether The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries would allow us to use its address for our first few years and its lovely Court Room and Hall for a few meetings. Their Court of Assistants, at a meeting on 29 October, very kindly acceded to this request—a wonderfully generous gesture on their part, and a great step forward for us, to be connected in this way with an established and well-known medical institution which had helped general practice greatly since early in the seventeenth century.

In October there was a considerable amount of illness about and our penultimate meeting was a small one. A postcard from an exasperated member of the Committee said "I have nearly 4,000 patients on my list, and every single one of them has a filthy cold and each has given me a share!"

On 31 October I was asked to send 100 copies of my paper to Dr Murray Stalker in Canada who was planning to found the College of General Practice of Canada.

Final arrangements

I wrote to John Mayo, our solicitor, on 23 September saying "I feel fairly certain that the Steering Committee will take your advice (and that of Sir Sam Brown) to form an unincorporated body with a title of 'The College of General Practitioners'. . . . Can you please tell me (i) whether you can arrange all this for us by 1 January, 1953? (ii) whether there is any way in which the Royal Colleges can block us, or impede us before or after 1 January? and (iii) whether news of this move of ours is likely to leak out through the Board of Trade?" He replied favourably to all these questions.

In exactly two weeks he had not only prepared our Memorandum and Articles of Association, but he had obtained Counsel's opinion on them to make sure that we should be regarded as a charity, and that no other organisation could say that we were poaching on its preserves; and copies had been printed for the Steering Committee to study and

approve. He had drafted proposed byelaws, too. He thought that we should plan for perhaps 500-1000 members during the first year of the College's life.

The Steering Committee had agreed that the headquarters of regional faculties of the College, at home and abroad, should be situated where possible in university cities. With the Committee's consent, I accepted an invitation to speak to a meeting of 18 postgraduate deans and directors of postgraduate education in Great Britain held in the Senate House of London University.

By that time many people thought that the foundation of our College was imminent, but very few knew just how or when it would appear. A leading article in the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* said "It is heartening to see that good seems about to rise from the depths to which general practice has been pushed in recent years. The reaction is likely to lead to the founding of a College of General Practitioners—a most salutary development for British Medicine, but one whose late appearance may well puzzle future medical historians".³¹

Fraser Rose had spoken about the proposed college in Preston and in Blackpool; I had done so to the Wimbledon Medical Society, to the Reigate, Redhill and Dorking Medical Society, and at the inaugural dinner of the Medical Practitioners' Union dining club. At these meetings very few people spoke against the idea. I telephoned Sir Russell Brain and asked him if any progress had been made with plans for a possible Joint Faculty of General Practice connected with one or more of the Royal Colleges, and he said that they had done nothing further.

The Foundation of the College

At the eighth and final meeting of the Steering Committee on 19 November, 1952 (less than nine months after we first met, our College was founded, when the Memorandum and Articles of Association were signed by its members, all 16 of whom were present. Henry Willink remarked "It must have been just like this when they signed the American Constitution". That was six weeks before the deadline of 1 January which we had set John Mayo. The College owes him a lasting debt for the magnificent work he did then, so quickly, and for everything he has done for us since. He and Ancrum Evans, our auditor, have attended every one of our annual general meetings and have advised us well whenever we have been in difficulty.

So our College was founded, but no one else knew it. The secret was well kept for several weeks longer—until the Steering Committee's Report was published.

The Provisional Foundation Council

The first meeting of the Provisional Foundation Council, as we called it, was held a few minutes after the Steering Committee was dissolved. George Abercrombie was elected chairman: and what a superb chairman he was. Fraser Rose was vice-chairman, and I was honorary secretary.

Arrangements were made for a great many papers to be printed—application forms for membership and associateship, memorandum and articles of association and byelaws, banker's-order forms, receipt forms, writing paper and so on.

The objects of the Foundation Council would be to lay the foundations of the College in the way that the Steering Committee had recommended, and to build up an adequate early membership so that it could present to the first Annual General Meeting, to be held 11 months later, a strong, firmly-based and united young College which would be ready to take on the enormous amount of work which lay ahead.

At a second meeting, held on 17 December, it was agreed that about 500 courtesy letters should be sent to the heads of all branches of the profession, at the time the Steering Committee's Report would appear, asking for their support and goodwill.

We could only sit back, then, and wait for our report to appear a few days later. I think that it was one of the most anxious and exciting weeks of my life.

Favourable response

Our Steering Committee's Report was published on 20 December, 1952 as the first article in the *British Medical Journal*,⁴ with an enthusiastic editorial.² The news had been announced by the *British Broadcasting Corporation* in its morning bulletin the day before, when that issue of the *British Medical Journal* was first distributed. *The Lancet* had a long and encouraging editorial¹⁹ on the College; and its proprietors sent us a cheque for £100, because they felt that their first editor, Thomas Wakley, who was a general practitioner, would have wished them to give this support. *The Practitioner* published our report in full a few days later as a supplement to its January issue,⁵ and in an editorial³² referred to the foundation of the College as "an outstanding event in the history of British medicine". A *Medical World Newsletter*²⁹ was given up entirely to it. *The St Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*⁴⁴ had a welcoming editorial. On 2 January I wrote to Willink to say that 52 newspapers had made favourable comments, one of them the *New York Times* that day!

A few people were angry; others thought that we had done something illegal, but Henry Willink and our admirable solicitors had seen to that. The favourable response was beyond our expectations. Telegrams and other messages of goodwill, and applications for membership, came flooding in. Dr Ian Watson sent us a cheque for £100 to start a Foundation Endowment Fund, and the Medical Protection Society did the same.

One of the most important personal letters which came to me was from the secretary of the B.M.A. (Angus Macrae) which read "I need hardly say that I shall do anything I can to promote and maintain cordial and mutually helpful relations between the Association and the College". This friendly attitude of the B.M.A. was confirmed by a letter from its Council which read, "The Council expressed itself" (unanimously, so Fraser Rose who was present told us later) "as being entirely in sympathy with the objects of the College, and it noted with satisfaction that the College has no intention of competing with the Association in the medicopolitical field".

Applications for founder membership (with certain criteria) were invited from 1 January; some came in even before that date. By the 14th, two weeks later, I was able to write to Rose to tell him that 1,000 doctors had joined us, each paying an entrance fee of ten guineas. A few of them were consultants and specialists who were interested in the future of general practice or who had been in practice themselves in the past. By the end of six weeks the number had reached 1,655, and £15,640 had been deposited in the bank. One of the most pleasing donations was from Mrs G. K. Abercrombie, mother of our chairman. Another nice letter was from the British Medical Students' Association.

The Giants accept us

The last I shall mention, and a somewhat surprising one, was from the President of the Royal College of Surgeons (Sir Cecil Wakely) which read, "Best wishes for the happy start of the new College. I will always give all the support I can".

May I say that this was typical of the Giants. I think that they all forgave us or accepted us gracefully; and they were generous and kind to us from then on, especially Sir Russell Brain. And Lord Horder, just before he died, sent for me to tell me that he thought we had been right from the start of our endeavours. This was surely a sign that they were great and good men with the welfare of our whole profession at heart. Their antagonism soon changed to friendship when they realised that we had achieved something that had been worth doing; just as their predecessors had forgiven and accepted James Mackenzie about 40 years before.

The Foundation Council

The Foundation Council was enlarged to 21 members by approaching all those general practitioners who had shown a particular interest in the Steering Committee's work—a good example of how our helpers almost chose themselves. From more than 500 names we picked 11, largely on a geographical basis, with one woman. The Fates were certainly looking over our shoulders, kindly, when our small subcommittee of five (George Abercrombie, James Simpson, Richard Scott, David Hughes and I) prepared a short list. Without appreciating it fully at the time we were deciding the future of our College. Perhaps the rest of the 500 would have done as well as those we chose. I wonder? They could hardly have done better.

The names of those 11 were: Annis Gillie, whom we have all got to know and love so well since then, H. L. Glyn Hughes (who was later appointed honorary treasurer—and what an excellent treasurer he was collecting, later, with Sir Harry Jephcott's help, nearly half a million pounds for our College) and his wife, Thelma, found us 14 Prince's Gate, Ian Watson, John Cottrell, George Swift, R. M. S. McConaghey, Douglas French, Guy Ollerenshaw, Ian Grant, John Henderson, and Wilfred Howells. All these played most important parts in the life of our College later on.

There is more to be told even about the Steering Committee days, but this and the full story of the Foundation Council and the work of its 21 members will have to wait until another time:—how we presented Henry Willink with a silver tankard in gratitude for all he had done; how the college office moved from Mansfield Street to a room in 54 Sloane Street above my consulting room, where it remained for five years; how the first meeting of our Liaison Committee with the General Medical Services Committee of the B.M.A. took place; how the first faculties of the College at home and overseas were planned; how the members of the Foundation Council endowed a Foundation Council Award for outstanding services in the field of general practice; of the unhappy and disturbing episode when one of our secretaries forged our signatures on many cheques and went to prison, while the bank refunded us the money; how, at our first Annual General Meeting, His Excellency, the Greek Ambassador, presented us with a gavel made from a plane tree on the Island of Cos; and we elected our first Council and our first President, Dr William Pickles, whose wife James Mackenzie had brought into the world; of our telegram to Her Majesty the Queen and her reply; and how, by the time of our first Annual General Meeting, we had 2,559 members and associates—three times as many as the Steering Committee had expected. And we never canvassed for members. If anyone asked us what he would get out of joining our College, we told him that the doctors we wanted were those who said "What can we give?"

Conclusion

We have been extraordinarily lucky in one respect: we worked happily together. Naturally we have had differences of opinion, but quarrels and real acrimony have been at an absolute minimum. Those who founded our College, in 1952, were fortunate in discovering, during the next two decades, better men and women than they themselves to carry out the work which they felt, so strongly, needed to be done for general practice. Throughout, it has been a most friendly team; and some of our success has, I think, been due to this. But there has been something else, even more important. William Osler once said "The master word is work"; and James Mackenzie himself was a tremendous worker. It has been through the hard work of innumerable helpers that we have attained our present position.

In 1969, Sir George Godber (Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health and Social Security) sent me a letter about our College in which he wrote "I think the achievements of the last 17 years are without parallel in medical organisations in this country". Two years later Sir Henry Willink, then aged 78, said to me in a long

letter "I always feel that the foundation of the College was one of the very best projects with which I have been involved in my life".

The welfare of this College during the years to come will depend entirely on the younger members. You must continually be looking ahead, for there is much truth in Ibsen's dictum—"That man is in the right who is most closely in league with the future". James Mackenzie was always a really humble man; humility was one of the most attractive things about him. On the first page of R. Macnair Wilson's story of his life, *The Beloved Physician*, a book which I bought and read 45 years ago and which has been in my library ever since, Mackenzie is quoted as saying, when he was an old man with all his triumphs behind him, "I think that we have made progress. Perhaps 20 years hence. . . ."

Members of our Steering Committee felt the same when this College was born; and now, just 20 years later, we can see that their hopes and predictions have been more than fulfilled. But this is not nearly enough; and the words of Drake's Prayer are, I believe, particularly appropriate for us all today:

Oh Lord God, when thou givest to thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning but the continuing of the same unto the end . . . which yieldeth the true glory.

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ADDENDUM

A recording of the whole of this lecture, as it was delivered, can be obtained with slides from The Medical Recording Service of the Royal College of General Practitioners, Kitts Croft, Writtle, Chelmsford, Essex.

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