

"What happened was this"

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ONLY two people have been entitled to sit on the platform at every annual general meeting of the College since its foundation. They are Mr Ancrum Evans, who is our accountant, and Mr John Mayo, our solicitor. Both also served on the General Practice Steering Committee, which used to meet in Mr Evans's father's house, the late Dr Geoffrey Evans, after whom the college library is named.

The minutes of the Steering Committee from its first monthly meeting on 28 February 1952 until its meeting on 17 September paint a picture of farsighted and dedicated men searching quietly for ways in which to create some new organization that might put fresh blood into general practice "while we still remember the best practitioners and types of practice of the past" (Professor Macintosh). Up till then no feeling of urgency is conveyed by the minutes.

Mr Mayo and his chief, Sir Sam Brown, met with officials at the Board of Trade in early September "but had had to admit that the final details of the College were not yet worked out". Among the several possible ways of founding a college one of the officials "had tentatively suggested . . . that a convenient and suitable way would be to start off as an unincorporated college", a suggestion first put forward by Mr Evans in July. At the September committee meeting Mr Mayo set out in detail all the advantages of this procedure, "and the Chairman, on behalf of the committee, thanked Mr Mayo (and through him Sir Sam Brown) for all the trouble they had taken".

The snowball had started to roll. The October meeting was held earlier in the month than usual. The Honorary Secretary (Dr John Hunt) had written to Mr Mayo, who had replied on 25 September: "I do not think there should be any difficulty in getting the College formed as an unincorporated body by 1 January 1953 as long as the necessary decisions as to constitution are taken in adequate time." "The Honorary Secretary said he had several telephone conversations with Mr Mayo, who had been extremely good and had got on with this matter quickly", and a draft of the Memorandum of Association had been

printed. This prompt work by Mr Mayo "would save us a month or more" and the committee wanted to thank him.

So, not until 9 October would the reader of these minutes get the feeling that a new college might well be formed before the end of 1952. The indefatigable Mr Mayo "had prepared the Interim Constitution to be, as far as possible, the same as it would be when we became an incorporated company". "... this Interim Constitution was in effect an agreement between the practitioner members of the Steering Committee . . . that this college would be formed on, say, 1 January 1953".

"... Because we only had seven or eight weeks in which to complete the business of the Steering Committee", a sub-committee consisting of Mr Mayo, Mr Evans, Dr Abercrombie, and Dr Hunt was elected to consider the outstanding matters of urgency so that, when the Steering Committee met again on the last day of October, Mr Mayo could take them step by step through the second draft of his Interim Constitution; no fewer than 15 separate points were covered in the discussion. "The Chairman then put it to the meeting that Mr Mayo's second draft of the Constitution . . . should be accepted by the Steering Committee. This was agreed". They were almost home and dry. The final meeting was held at 17.00 h on 19 November 1952 at 7 Mansfield Street, Mr Ancrum Evans's home. The agenda was formal. "Item 4: to confirm and sign the final draft of the Interim Constitution . . . Item 5: to confirm and sign the Provisional Byelaws . . . Item 10: to declare the Steering Committee dissolved; and to announce the first meeting of the Foundation Council to elect a chairman, deputy chairman, and secretary".

In our jubilee year the College can look back with gratitude at the flying start which Ancrum Evans and John Mayo gave us in those early months of gestation, and even more for keeping us from straying into any financial or legal wilderness. Our debt to the Master and wardens of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, who gave us our first meeting place and postal address, can scarcely be repaid and is acknowledged in our coat of arms, one supporter of which is a unicorn from that society's arms.

Foundation Council

If the phone rang at precisely 07.55 h, the most likely caller was John Hunt, asking perhaps, "Have you read the leader in *The Times* this morning?" or inviting you to lunch with him, or asking whether a visitor to the College could come and see you tomorrow afternoon. In those days, as he does still, John lived urgently. I believe it was this sense of full commitment to his vision that he conveyed to the teams which he assembled around him in the Steering Committee and Foundation Council.

Yet there was humour too for those who could see it. George Swift recalls how the membership of the first three committees was decided. The three chairmen, former members of the Steering Committee, Geoffrey Barber, Robin Pinsent, and Dick Scott, stood on one side of the Apothecaries' Hall while the rest of us stood on the other. George Swift felt that it was like three captains selecting their teams for a game. Each chairman chose in turn. "Finally there were only two of us left and Geoffrey Barber said to Robin or Dick: 'You have so-and-so and I'll have Swift' ". The practices of the five members of the research committee were widely scattered: two were in London, one in Surrey, one in Birmingham, and the fifth in Devonshire. For convenience, therefore, Pinsent selected Bath as a convenient site for our first meeting and he also arranged the hotel. That was about the only mistake he has made since 1952; he had chosen a temperance hotel!

The Foundation Council used to meet monthly and there was no president during that first year. Very often at the start of a meeting our excellent chairman, Dr George Abercrombie, would announce that "before the formal agenda Dr Hunt had something to tell us". Dr Hunt would then rise and, almost word for word on each occasion, he would say: "Last week I went to call on one of my patients and gave him (or her) a copy of the Steering Committee Report and he (or she) gave me a cheque for £100". At first we were astonished at the number of variations on this money-raising theme which he could play and at last were quite disappointed when the time came for a meeting to start without his usual announcement. Of course money for everything was short and the only expenses allowed were for secretaries and postage for officers and council committees. No travelling expenses were paid. A country doctor had sent a donation of £100 to start a Foundation Endowment Fund and several other practitioners also sent donations, as did the Chairman and proprietors of the *Lancet*, who sent a cheque for a hundred guineas to add to the Foundation Endowment Fund of the College with their "best wishes for its complete success".

The chairman of the Foundation Council, having no gavel, used to call the meeting to order by a knock with whatever was to hand. Perhaps impertinently, I wrote to the Greek Ambassador asking if he could possibly obtain for the College a gavel, preferably carved by an

islander in Cos from some ancient piece of wood. With my letter I enclosed a sketch showing the serpent of medical knowledge entwined around the handle of the chairman's emblem of authority, hopefully signifying the presence of ancient wisdom in our council chamber. The Ambassador took up the challenge with enthusiasm and eventually sent us our unique gavel, carved by an islander of Cos from a piece of the "plane tree of Aesculapius". This ancient tree is thought to be about 2,000 years old; if not the tree under which Hippocrates sat and taught, it must certainly be a daughter of the original tree. The Ambassador kindly attended the first annual general meeting of the College to present the gavel and the speech of thanks to him, which was recorded, is one of the earliest in the college library of tapes.

Robin Pinsent introduced tape-recorders to the research committee and several attempts were made to record our minutes on tape. While the words were often well recorded, however, the various speakers were difficult to distinguish and their pearls of wisdom could not therefore be correctly allocated. It was to be a year or two before Mrs W. Rollason and Mrs J. Mant became the two secretarial props on which the research committee was to rely so heavily.

The first collective inquiry carried out by the research committee with the help of 130 doctors in the College, was the measles investigation to assess the value of sulphonamides and antibiotics in preventing the bacterial complications of measles. One of the people who undertook the coding of about 4,800 measles cards was Dr Valerie Graves. How she went on from this to develop her taste for medical recording is, as Kipling would say, "another story".

I have already mentioned that money was short. When the College of General Practice of Canada was founded in 1954 it was perhaps natural that the president of our College should be invited to the inauguration ceremony in Vancouver on the 17 June. When the matter was raised in Council everyone realized that we could not afford the air fare from our own funds; but we were keen for him to go, so various other hopes or suggestions for alternative sources of money were mooted. Half jokingly, I suggested that instead of Dr Pickles going to Vancouver in person, we should send the Canadian College a tape-recording of what he wished to say. Although it was second best, Council accepted that this solution overcame our financial difficulties and (to quote the Second Annual Report): "Dr William Pickles, our President, sent a recorded message which was delivered over the microphone . . ." at the inauguration ceremony. In his reply, Dr Victor Johnston (Executive Director of the College in Canada) wrote: ". . . I wish to thank you for your message to us . . . it was a particularly happy thought for you to send us this recording". Needless to say this tape-recording is one of the most precious tapes in our College archives.

In those days Council and its committees used to meet

once a month in the Apothecaries' Hall on Wednesdays to coincide with the evening meeting of the newly formed section of general practice at the Royal Society of Medicine. This was convenient for those officers and London members of Council who were already members of the RSM. Others of us would meet somewhere for a meal where we could continue, seriously or light-heartedly, to discuss matters connected with the College. Robin Pinsent is a keen doodler and so inevitably he must have produced some of the earliest drafts for a College coat of arms. On at least two of these that I can recall, we aided and abetted each other in our pursuit of improbable heraldry. For example, the names of our two founders and first president—Fraser Rose, John Hunt, and William Pickles—led us easily to think of a hunting horn entangled in a pickle by a briar rose; or again, a hunting horn surmounted by the red rose of Lancashire and the white pickle of Yorkshire. Another variation which I rather liked was an attempt to contrast an ancient symbol with a modern one; for example, on the left the Recipe sign and on the right the PQRS complex of a normal cardiogram. Try drawing it; they go rather well together. In the end it was not until 1961 during Dr Abercrombie's presidency that this matter was finally settled and the College was granted its elegant and beautiful "Achievement of Arms", full of truly heraldic significance.

Unlike many of us who were little known outside our practices when we were invited by John Hunt to join the Foundation Council, there were others such as Fraser Rose, Ian Grant, and Annis Gillie who were also members either of the Council of the British Medical Association or of one of its principal committees. This fortunate circumstance helped to ensure that our young College and that experienced Association could develop a healthy and mutual respect for each other right from the start. "A liaison committee of four members of the Foundation Council and four members of the General Medical Services Committee met on the 13 May 1953" (First Annual Report) and in the following year Council could report that "every department of the BMA with which the College has come into contact has been most helpful and encouraging".

Another giant on the Foundation Council was Brigadier Glyn Hughes who was appointed Honorary Treasurer of the College and later played such an important part in helping the first appeal of the College to reach the very respectable total of £400,000. Hughie had already made a reputation for himself, not only in medicine and on the rugby field—he was president of the Barbarians—but on the field of battle too, winning in two world wars the Military Cross and three Distinguished Service Orders, as well as the *Croix de Guerre*. For this and all his other work he was in due course appointed Honorary Physician to Her Majesty the Queen and a CBE.

Someone in complete contrast to Hughie was Guy Ollerenshaw, from Skipton in Yorkshire. He counted

himself an 'also-ran' and protested that he never knew why he was invited to serve on the Foundation Council. Perhaps one reason was that, several years before the war, he had already brought into existence at Skipton almost every feature one would expect to find in a modern health centre except, of course, a room for the health visitor, whose attachment to general practice had not yet been invented at that time. As the junior partner and an outsider in a family practice whose headquarters were threatened by urban development, Guy persuaded his three senior partners to buy a row of cottages and convert these into four consulting rooms, each with an attached examination room fitted with one-way door handles, a unified telephone switchboard, a central waiting room, a call system, and a secretariat which made appointments for what in reality became the first group practice in the country. In later years, some of Guy's best contributions to the work of Council were made through the early fellowship committees. In his opinion a candidate for fellowship must, above all, be known locally and to his sponsors as a "good, kind doctor" before consideration is given to any of his other achievements.

From the earliest years Council developed the custom of holding alternately a formal and a private dinner on the evening before the annual general meeting. The formal dinners were attended by the Minister of Health (Mr McLeod was the first), as well as several other distinguished medical and lay friends of the College, in the ancient setting of the Apothecaries' Hall. The first two private dinners, to which our spouses were invited, were rather special occasions. Because our Chairman of Council, George Abercrombie, was a member of the RNVR, he invited us to dine with him on board HMS *President*, where she lies moored alongside the Victoria Embankment just upstream from Blackfriars Bridge. On the first occasion that ladies were present in their nice long dresses, it was drizzling and nearly low water; some of them were wearing high heels and had not realized how steep and slippery the approach gangway might be. Two years later either the fashions had changed, or word had got around, or perhaps Commander Doran had reorganized the Thames tides; at any rate, I don't remember the same difficulties arising. For many of those attending their first Council dinner in the low-ceilinged ward room of HMS *President*, this was the first occasion on which they encountered the naval tradition of drinking the Queen's health sitting down. Many years later the first Council dinner at Princes Gate in 1963 evokes more painful memories. I was just approaching the College when I heard on my car radio the news flash that President Kennedy had been shot, and was the first to break the news to those assembling in his former home; but we did not know when we sat down to dinner either the severity or the outcome of his injury.

The acquisition of our headquarters at Princes Gate was made in the teeth of urgent competition from two embassies, by a triumvirate (Hughie and Thelma Glyn

Hughes and John Hunt) who had been authorized by Council to find and purchase a suitable building for the College. Before finding Princes Gate, they had taken Council to see what some of us called "the Jewel on the Embankment", namely Electra House in Temple Place. After five happy years as guests of the Society of Apothecaries and "through the generosity of our anonymous donor", the College had acquired in 1957 its own temporary premises at 41 Cadogan Gardens. Now the central office could move from its one single room above John Hunt's consulting room at 54 Sloane Street. That year for the first time Council could meet in a room separate from its committees; but by 1963 we had again outgrown our space, so that when we saw the "Jewel on the Embankment" we fell in love with it at first sight. Wiser counsels prevailed, however, pointing out that even here space would be too limited to house many of the activities that were being planned. Meanwhile, to quote our Fifth Annual Report, "negotiations for the purchase of a site in Lincoln's Inn Fields, for the College's permanent building, are progressing smoothly . . .". Then, quite suddenly, Thelma Glyn Hughes found and persuaded the College to purchase 14 Princes Gate. Here we had not only the formal rooms and sufficient space for the offices but we also acquired "the hotel", namely our residential accommodation on the top two floors, which has made us the envy of the other colleges in London. Whether or not they have stayed at the College, not everyone may appreciate that all profits from the charges for accommodation and meals at Princes Gate go into the President's fund. This is the fund which meets the cost of entertaining visitors to the College, either at Council dinners or on special presidential occasions; the rule has always been strictly followed that no subscription income may be spent on entertainment.

One of the most delightful occasions that many of us have attended was in the year after John Hunt finally left the AGM platform as Immediate Past President of the College which he had created. Surviving members of the Steering Committee and Foundation Council were present to entertain him to dinner in the Long Room and presented him with a silver salver on which were engraved the signatures of every member of that committee and Council, taken from their letters in Eileen Phillips's files.

A good start

The Steering Committee put on paper a picture of what it thought a college of general practitioners might look like. The Foundation Council was conscious of being a non-elected caretaking body trying to turn that picture into flesh and blood. Not until its first Council was elected in November 1953 could the College really get under way and its captain take the wheel. One beacon by which we sailed was given to us by John Hunt: "We may not do everything right but we must not do anything wrong during the first five years and until the

College is a good deal older." Some of our critics appear to think that we still have not done anything right, while almost everything is wrong! Surely the majority of impartial observers would be willing to agree that the picture painted by the Steering Committee was a true likeness and that the flesh and blood with which subsequent Councils have clothed the College is indeed healthy. This year we, like our Sovereign, celebrate our silver jubilee with humility, pride, and thanksgiving for what has already been fulfilled, looking forward with vigour to what may lie ahead.

Evidence to the Royal Commission on the NHS from the Medical Practices Committee

The procedure used for classifying areas by the Medical Practices Committee is as follows:

<i>Average list size</i>	<i>Classification</i>
2,500 and above	Designated
2,201-2,499	Open
1,801-2,200	Intermediate
1,800 and below	Restricted

These figures are calculated after taking account of pending resignations and admissions, plus the addition of one more doctor.

7.2 One defect in the present system is that the family practitioner committees while responsible for the direct administration of family practitioner services are dependent on the area health authority for the staff and accommodation required to administer those services. A failure to provide sufficient staff and office services for a joint administration unit serving five committees in the Greater London area has resulted in a continuing local failure to meet certain statutory obligations which are of direct concern to the Medical Practices Committee. There is therefore a need to ensure that family practitioner committees are given sufficient resources as may be necessary for them to carry out their statutory duties.

10.1 The members reaffirm their opinion that there is an urgent need for a procedure to enable them to decline to deal with applications for inclusion in the medical list from doctors who are known to be unfit to practise (generally on health grounds). On a few occasions this has been a matter of acute embarrassment to the Committee. Currently the Committee has no power to refuse an application except where the number of family doctors in the area or part of the area concerned is already adequate.

Reference

Medical Practices Committee (1976). Evidence to the Royal Commission on the NHS.