

HISTORICAL ARTICLE

The Fergus Family and the Scottish Royal Colleges

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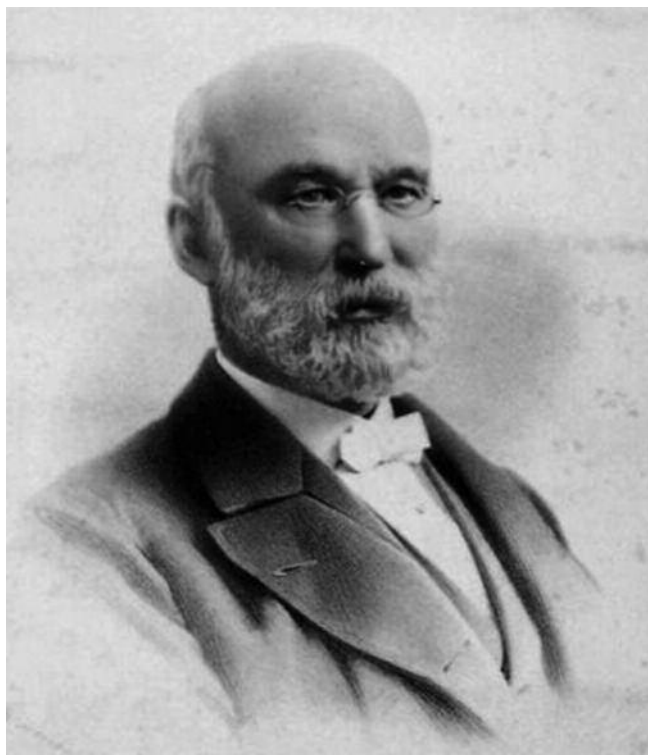


Figure 1: Andrew Fergus (1822–1887)

Introduction

The name Fergus is a distinguished one in the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Anyone observing the list of former College Presidents in the elegant College Hall would be impressed by the family name occurring on four occasions during the period 1874-1931.

The contributions and achievements of Dr Andrew Fergus and his two sons Freeland Fergus and John Fergus, all former Presidents, appear in College histories,^{1,2} notably in Professor Tom Gibson's book of 1983.³ Recently further information has become available about members of the family. It is the purpose of this article to place those in context and summarise the outstanding contributions to medicine, dentistry and the College of this remarkable Glasgow family.

Dr Andrew Fergus (1822-1887)⁴

Dr Andrew Fergus (Figure 1), the father, was the President of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow (as it was called then) on two occasions, in 1874-7 and 1883-6. He was born in Newcastle in 1822, where his father was the Minister of the "Scotch" or Presbyterian Church.

In later life he would refer to his first involvement with medicine, when as a teenager and "in a jacket without tails", he assisted his older brother who was in charge of a parochial hospital in London. This older brother was Dr Walter Fergus, born in Newcastle in 1819, and who graduated MD from Edinburgh University in 1842. In 1849, he was appointed Medical Officer to Marlborough College School in Wiltshire, where he remained until his death on 8th December 1886.⁵

Andrew Fergus attended University College School London and his medical education took place at King's College, London, and he became MRCS Eng in 1845. Two years later in 1847 he moved to Glasgow, and was appointed one of the district surgeons to the City. This involved him in the investigation of epidemics of typhus, relapsing fever and cholera which were prevalent at that time. In 1850, he became a Fellow of the Faculty (later, Royal College) of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.

These early experiences of infectious diseases led him to devote much of his career to public health issues and in particular the relationship of infectious diseases to sanitary problems. He published widely on these subjects and in 1866, he was awarded the degree of MD by the University of Glasgow.

From 1870 to 1874 he was an elected member of the Glasgow Town Council representing the Seventh Ward and served on the Health Committee. He retired from the Council in 1874 when he was appointed President of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.

Dr Andrew Fergus was widely respected for his contributions to medicine and public health. He was a close friend and colleague of Lord Lister. As well as serving as Faculty President for two periods, he was a member of the General Medical Council, President of the Glasgow Philosophical Society in 1877, succeeding Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) and he was President of the Anderson's College Medical School, Glasgow's best-known 'extramural' medical school.

In 1850, three years after he came to work in Glasgow, Andrew Fergus married Margaret Naismith from Hamilton.⁶ Margaret's ancestors were farmers in Hamilton and she was the daughter of Mr and Mrs John Naismith of Auchencampbell Farm. She had four sisters and two brothers, both medical. Dr John Naismith worked in India for the Indian Civil Service and Dr William Naismith was a general physician in Hamilton.⁷ William's son (Margaret's nephew) William Wilson Naismith, an accountant, became a famous mountaineer and writer. In 1892 he created the eponymous 'Naismith's Rule', still used by climbers internationally, to determine the time necessary to walk a route with a given length and elevation gain.⁸ Interestingly Hamilton Academy School (now Hamilton Grammar) moved to a new purpose-built school in the grounds of Auchencampbell Farm in 1872.⁹

Andrew and Margaret Fergus had five sons and one daughter. The first son, Robert Walter, died aged nine years after a tragic accident and a second died in infancy. Andrew Freeland Fergus, Edward Oswald Fergus and John Freeland Fergus (Figure 2) all attained manhood and distinction in their professional lives. The youngest child, daughter Elizabeth (Bessie) became Mrs Hewat.

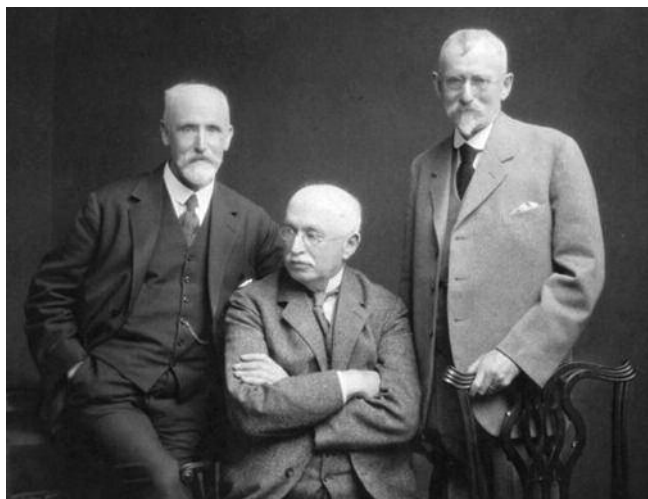


Figure 2: The Three Sons of Andrew Fergus and Margaret Naismith (circa 1927-8)

From (L) to (R):

John Freeland Fergus	(1865-1943)
Andrew Freeland Fergus	(1858-1932)
Edward Oswald Fergus	(1861-1946)

Andrew Freeland Fergus (1858-1932)¹⁰

Known as Freeland Fergus, the eldest of the three sons, was born in Glasgow in 1858. He was educated at the High School of Glasgow and began his medical studies at the University of Glasgow, graduating MB CM in 1881. In 1884 he was elected to the Fellowship of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.

At an early stage in his career, he decided to become an ophthalmologist. After studying in Paris and Utrecht he returned to Glasgow and was appointed Surgeon at the Glasgow Eye Infirmary. For many years, he taught ophthalmology and interestingly, occupied the Chair of Physics in the Anderson's College of Medicine. Later he became Professor of Ophthalmic Medicine and Surgery in the same College, a post he held from 1909-1915.

He was highly regarded, and considered to be an outstanding teacher and clinician. During his years as Surgeon at the Eye Infirmary, he introduced many new clinical techniques, notably the use of the refraction microscope, the sterilisation of dressings and instruments and the bacteriological examination of ocular secretions prior to operation. He also introduced operative techniques such as the removal of the lacrimal sac, and the advancement rather than tenotomy for the correction of squint. He was awarded the MD of the University of Glasgow in 1884.

In the 1914-18 War he served as a Major in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and was mentioned in dispatches. He was especially concerned for the welfare of the blind and played a leading role in promoting the Blind Persons (Scotland) Act of 1920.³

Freeland Fergus was President of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow from 1918-1921. He received an Honorary LLD from the University of Glasgow in 1921. Like his father, he was also President of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

He never married. Away from medicine he had many interests, including art, music, botany and sailing. He adopted the town of Rothesay, on the island of Bute, first as a holiday home and later for retirement.

Edward Oswald Fergus (1861-1946)¹¹

Known as Oswald Fergus, the second son was born in Glasgow in 1861. He was also educated at the High School of Glasgow, and became one of the early Licentiates in Dental Surgery of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1884 at the age of 23.

Thereafter, he worked in general dental practice at 41, Elmbank Street, and was appointed assistant dental surgeon at the Glasgow Dental Hospital and School, which had been established in 1879. His main interest was in restorative dentistry, a subject well developed in the American Dental Schools, and to further his experience in this area, he spent a postgraduate year at the Dental School, University of Pennsylvania, graduating Doctor of Dental Surgery in 1892. On his return to Glasgow, he practised at 27, Blythswood Square.

Oswald Fergus was a pioneer of simulated clinical dental practice.¹¹ In 1894 at the Annual General Meeting of the British Dental Association in Newcastle, Fergus first described and demonstrated his invention, the 'dental phantom' for the use of students and demonstrators.

The 'phantom' (Figure 3) consisted of three parts: a metal rod, which was attached to the back of a dental chair, upon which were fitted two brass representative jaws upper and lower which had grooves in the alveolar region. Into these grooves teeth were inserted in their correct anatomical

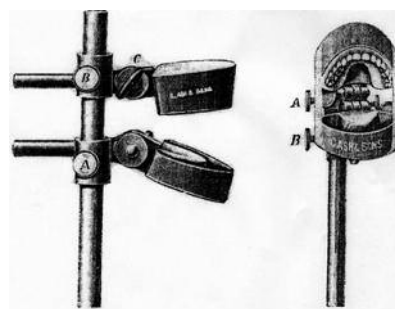


Figure 3: The Fergus Dental 'Phantom' (1894)

relationship to each other and secured by means of plaster of Paris or wax. He emphasised that its purpose was to make conditions similar to chairside work, and artificial rubber cheeks were attached.

Since Fergus introduced his 'phantom head', simulated clinical dental chairside teaching has developed and is an essential component of dental training and education internationally. As clinical techniques and dental materials have improved, so also have the phantom head design and equipment. Many refinements and modifications have been introduced during the past 112 years since his first demonstration, but the principle remains the same.

From 1898 until 1920, Oswald Fergus lived and practised in Glasgow at 12, Clairmont Gardens. This appears to be his last practice address.

Interestingly it is recorded that Charles Rennie Macintosh, the famous architect, designed a fireplace for his billiard room there.¹² In 1906, Oswald Fergus was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Fergus had a special interest in restorative dentistry and his published work, spanning a period 1894-1908, reflects this. In later life he suffered from retinal degeneration, gradually becoming blind, and his clinical career ended prematurely. Latterly he wrote some historical biographical articles and, ever interested in research, he was involved in the creation of Braille books for the blind.⁷

In his personal life, he was married with two children. His wife predeceased him, dying around 1907. His main sporting achievement was in penny farthing cycling. He and his brother, John, were members of the Scottish International Team. (Figure 4) He died at Farnham in Surrey in 1946.



Figure 4: Penny Farthing Cycling (1885)

John Freeland Fergus: Mounted
Edward Oswald Fergus: Starter

John Freeland Fergus (1865-1943)¹³

Known as John Fergus, he was the third and youngest son of Andrew Fergus. (Figure 5) He was born in Glasgow in 1865 and was educated at the High School and then at the University of Glasgow, where he graduated MA in 1883, MB CM in 1888, proceeding MD in 1897.

After graduating in medicine, he studied at medical schools in Jena and Vienna before returning to Glasgow. Thereafter, his professional career was spent in practice and as a physician, latterly attached to Glasgow Royal Infirmary. He became a much respected family physician and clinical teacher. He was also known for his work on the Boards of various institutions, and as a medical historian and poet.

He became a Fellow of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1918, and he was the third member of the family to be President, his term of office covering the period 1929-1932.

He also served as an assessor to the Court of Glasgow University and devoted great energy and time to this office until he retired in 1939. During his time as assessor, he was largely instrumental in securing for the University the playing fields at Westerlands, near Anniesland. He was the Royal Faculty's representative on a number of external bodies, and he was also a member of the Board of the Royal Technical College.



Figure 5: John Freeland Fergus, Aged 13 (1878)

John Fergus was a very modest man, both about his professional attainments and poetic gifts. He characterised some of his poems as "trivial verses". The poems were, however, greatly appreciated when he recited them at medical and social gatherings. He was a regular contributor to "Ye Cronies" the renowned Glasgow artistic society where his recitations had a willing audience. Many of his verses appeared in his publication "Fancies of a Physician" (Glasgow: Brown and Ferguson, 1938). Some are in English, some in Scots and his medical history spills over into some of the poems.

Tom Gibson observes in his book "The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow" that the last poem in John Fergus's book might serve as his epitaph.

*"Carry me forth and let me be
With my dying face to a northern sky
Where the scent of heather, the sound of the bees
The falling of water, the rustle of trees
The whisper of winds flowing soft on the bent
The fragrance of pine trees and bog myrtle's scent
The mavis's song and whaup's plaintive cry
Shall be lullaby, incense and dirge as I die"*

Dr John Fergus was a very sociable man, highly respected for his professional and literary abilities. His sporting interests included salmon fishing and penny farthing cycling, at which he represented Scotland, like his brother Oswald. He was married with a son, Andrew, a medical graduate of the University of Glasgow and a Fellow of the Glasgow College who became a Consultant Ophthalmologist in Surrey. He also had a daughter, Margaret, who married Thomas Kay, a visiting surgeon to the Glasgow Royal Infirmary.

Elizabeth Wilson Fergus

Elizabeth Wilson Fergus, known as Bessie Fergus, was the only daughter of Andrew Fergus and Margaret Naismith.⁶ She was born in Glasgow, but lived most of her life in Edinburgh.

Bessie Fergus married Archibald Hewat, an actuary in Edinburgh. Hewat held office as President of the Faculty of Actuaries, 1906-08.

He was a son of John Hewat, an Edinburgh banker, who introduced the one o'clock gun to Edinburgh in 1861 which is automatically timed and fired at Edinburgh Castle each day.

They had a son, Andrew Fergus Hewat, who became a distinguished Edinburgh Physician.¹⁴ He was born in Edinburgh in 1884 and received his early education at The Edinburgh Academy before entering Edinburgh University where he qualified in medicine in 1907. Among his early honours was the Presidency of the Royal Medical Society and the award of a gold medal for his MD Thesis on the anatomy of the lung and pleura. He was a gifted clinical teacher at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary with a great interest in the welfare of students and younger colleagues as well as his patients. He was a keen sportsman and was President of the Edinburgh University Rugby Football Club for many years.⁷

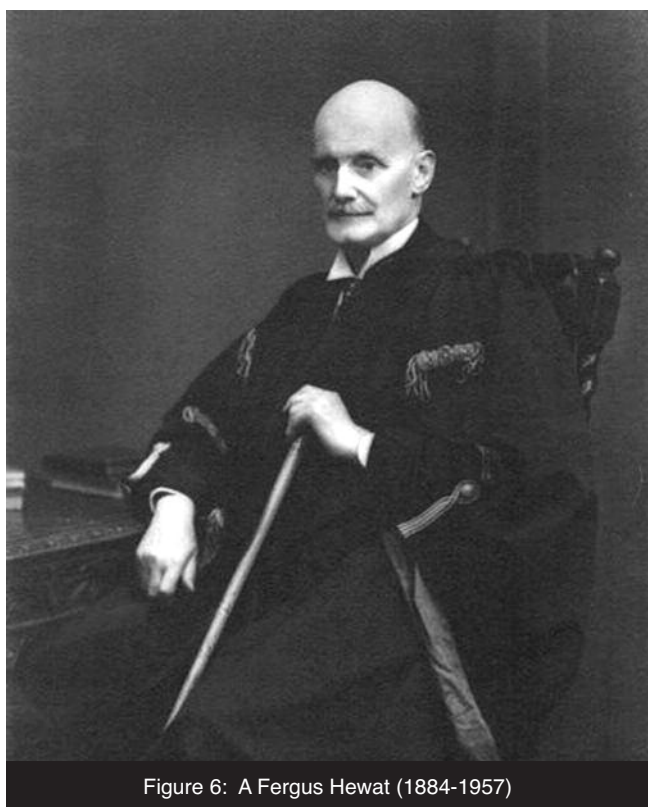


Figure 6: A Fergus Hewat (1884-1957)

Fergus Hewat (Figure 6) gave outstanding service to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh as Secretary, Curator of the Laboratory and he was President from 1943-1945. He was Senior Trustee for many years and died in 1957 aged 73 years. In 1995, Professor Sir Donald Campbell, the then immediate Past President of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, came across an old silver golf cup in a storeroom in the College. It had been presented to Captain Fergus Hewat during his service in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the First World War.

After discussion with colleagues, Drs Fletcher Deane, Jake Davidson and George Beveridge, it was suggested that 'The Fergus Hewat Cup' (Figure 7) could be competed for in a golf match between the retired Senior Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and those of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Edinburgh and this was readily agreed. The match is held annually, alternately at venues in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The first match was held at Prestwick in 1997.

In view of Fergus Hewat's contribution to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and his mother, Bessie Fergus's family association with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, as well as his continuing interest and enjoyment of the game of golf throughout his life, this has been a most appropriate use for this handsome piece of family silver and the match has given much pleasure to all who participate.



Figure 7: The Fergus Hewat Cup

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to record their indebtedness to Mr John Fergus, surgeon, great grandson of Dr Andrew Fergus and grandson of Dr John Freeland Fergus, for his continuing help and interest with this research and for Figures 1, 2, 4 and 5; to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh for Figure 6; to Dr Douglas Briggs for Figure 7 and to Pearl Murphy of the Local History and Reference Department of Hamilton Town House Library.

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