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36 Dundee Road  
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The Editor  
Scottish Medical Journal

Dear Sir

***Scottish Society of Physicians***

I enjoyed reading the archivist's account of the origin of the Scottish Society of Physicians (M.M. Steven, Scot Med J., 53 (2) p37). As the last surviving member of the ad hoc group that met first in Perth and then at subsequent committee meetings, I must congratulate Dr Steven on his faithful account of how it all came about. He has captured the spirit of our early planning meetings and especially their conviviality and the enthusiasm of their members.

There was certainly a need for such a society as we envisaged. At that time most physicians appointed were general physicians. Dr Steven rightly stresses the exclusive nature of the Association of Physicians which favoured distinguished elder physicians and academics, mostly from teaching hospitals. Similarly, the British Cardiac Society and kindred speciality groups restricted their numbers. We envisaged an inclusive society where the great majority of physicians could meet annually for interchange of ideas, good fellowships and the presentation of papers for discussion.

Hospital staffing structure was still hierarchical and distinguished senior physicians, whose needs were already met by membership of elitist societies, were on the whole lukewarm to our plans. And so it fell to Fitzgerald Peel to show the generosity of spirit to set things in motion. He was fortunate to have as a younger colleague Tommy Semple, our hardworking and jovial secretary, who did so much in the formative period to ensure success for the committee.

One of my tasks was to approach some of our elders, such as the formidable Rae Gilchrist in Edinburgh and my own chief, Professor (later Sir) Ian Hill, in Dundee (the Medical School was then part of St. Andrews University) and to persuade them that the society we planned would be "a good thing". I must have succeeded, because Gilchrist and Hill subsequently presided at memorable meetings of the Society held in Edinburgh and St. Andrews respectively. Society meetings at peripheral non-teaching centres such as Inverness and Dumfries were a particular pleasure for those of us in teaching hospitals.

It was an honour to be elected President for an annual meeting and one could depend on a local secretary. When I presided at the first meeting in Dundee in 1973, I had the good fortune to have as a local secretary the energetic and enthusiastic Ronnie Harden (later to become a prominent medical educationist). In the following year, Hugh Conway of Paisley presided over a very enjoyable meeting in Oban that I remember with pleasure.

At the first meeting of the Society in 1959, it fell to me to read the first paper. It was on the subject of acute renal failure and, as the "artificial kidney" (renal dialysis) was coming of age, we had some interesting discussion and I duly published an expanded version in the Scottish Medical Journal.

I can look back over the past fifty years in which society, the National Health Service and universities have changed so much. Our Society has no doubt moved with the times and it continues to flourish.

It is a sobering thought that if the upward trend in longevity continues, some members attending this year's meeting will still be around to celebrate the Society's centenary.

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