

ECHOES FROM THE PAST

As readers are aware this year is the bi-centenary of the birth of Sir James McGrigor and in our last issue we published a tribute to him by Lieutenant-General Sir Neil Cantlie.

On the 8th of April 1971 a Special Commemorative Meeting was held by the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society in honour of Sir James McGrigor who was a founder member. Amongst those present were our Director-General of Army Medical Services, Sir Norman Talbot—and Colonel Alistair Whyte (Late R.A.M.C.), who is a member of the Society. The latter has kindly produced a biographical sketch of Sir James McGrigor which we are happy to publish under our 'Echoes From the Past' section. This will fill a long felt want as few, if any, of our readers have access to Sir James's Autobiography published over 100 years ago. Ed.

SIR JAMES McGRIGOR, BART, K.C.B., M.D., F.R.S.

COLONEL A. G. D. WHYTE, C.B.E., F.R.C.S., Late R.A.M.C.

Various medical publications including the Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps have given accounts from time to time of the life and work of James McGrigor, a remarkable man, and not the least for the fact that for 35 years he was Director-General to the Army Medical Services of our country. A later Director-General during the First World War, Sir Alfred Keogh, when on a visit to the 1st Scottish General Hospital in Aberdeen was shown the portrait of Sir James McGrigor in the Court Room of Marischal College. He gazed intently at the portrait of the first Medical Director-General of the British Army and remarked "I have been Director-General for nine years; that man was Director-General for thirty-five years. How he stood it, Heaven only knows." This tenure of McGrigor followed periods of service abroad in Holland, West Indies, India, Egypt and the Iberian Peninsula. In all he spent 57 years of his life in active employment in the Medical Services of the Army.

He was born in Scotland in 1771 and died in London in 1858 "about seven days before the completion of his eighty-eighth year, without pain and almost without disease, for the gradual extinction of the powers of nature can hardly be called disease." The Duke of Wellington, whom McGrigor served so long and faithfully said of him, "I consider him one of the most industrious, able and successful public servants I have ever met." Praise indeed from such a one as the Iron Duke.

McGrigor may well be called the father of the Royal Army Medical Corps for he laid the foundations of the medical services of the Army as they are known today. Moreover, he formed the Corps Museum and its Library and established the R.A.M.C. Widows and Orphans Fund and the Army Medical Benevolent Fund, all still going strong and indeed from strength to strength.

Before McGrigor entered the Army, while yet a medical student at Aberdeen University; with other fellow students, he founded in 1789 the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society. This Society still flourishes with an unbroken record of meetings and minutes, the first minute book in McGrigor's handwriting. The twenty-two original regulations of the Society are likewise set out in his handwriting and signed by the Founders. The Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society remembers McGrigor and the others at its Annual Founders' Dinner and Oration, the high-light of medical life in the city.

In 1847 McGrigor presented to the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society volumes of manuscripts which are jealously preserved at the Society's Hall. They were accompanied by a catalogue of the items and the following letter written by an amanuensis and signed by McGrigor.

The President
of the Medical Society
Aberdeen.

Hand. by Dr. Laing.

London 4th August 1847

Sir

I send by the Ship Volumes of Manuscripts being chiefly Cases of Disease which occurred in the Regimental Hospital of the 88th Regiment and of the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards when I was Surgeon of these Corps and subsequently when I was on the Medical Staff of the Army and which I beg you to present in my name to the Medical Society of Aberdeen. In presenting these volumes I do so not on account of their value which I am very sensible is but small but as holding out to the Junior Members of the Society an instance of the persevering Industry with which I prosecuted my profession from my first entrance into the Army and to which I mainly attribute my success in it. The Clinical Cases are generally in my own handwriting but sometimes in that of my assistants in the two Regiments in which I served as Surgeon viz. nearly 11 years in the 88th Regiment and about two years in the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards. My assistants were:

Mr. Thom of Aberdeen; Mr. Ninian Bruce of Aberdeen; Dr. Peter Nicol of Aberdeen; Dr. M. Brown of Skene Square Aberdeen; Dr. Laing of Golden Square Aberdeen; Mr. Tonera of Ireland and Mr. Peach of Somersetshire.

I was I believe the institutor of the Medical Society of Aberdeen for after my return from Edinburgh where I had been a Member of the Medical and Chirurgical Society in a conversation with the late Dr. James Robertson I suggested such an Institution as I had been a Member of in Edinburgh and in a short time after the Society commenced its sittings. With my warmest wishes for its prosperity.

I have the honour to be

Sir

Your most obedient servant

J. McGRIGOR.

Manuscripts belonging to Sir James McGrigor, Bart.

- No. 1. Case Book from 11th January 1802 to 31st January 1802. 88th Regt.
- No. 3. Case Book from 25th June 1796 to 8th December 1796 in quarters in York and Halifax.
- No. 4. Case Book 88th Regt. from 9th December 1796 to 23rd May 1797. At Halifax, Yorkshire, on the march to Chatham, at Chatham Barracks in quarters at Rochester, on the march to Hilsea, in Hilsea Barracks and on ship board at Portsmouth.
- No. 5. Case Book 88th Regt. from 24th May 1797 to 18th August 1797—On board transports from Portsmouth to Jersey and at St. Owens Barracks in the Island of Jersey.

- No. 6.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 17th July 1797 to 31st December 1797 containing chiefly the cases of an epidemic and contagious fever which raged in the 88th Regt. St. Owens Bay, Jersey.
- No. 7.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 15th August 1797 to 31st December 1797 containing an account of cases that occurred in the Hospital of 88th. St. Owens Bay, Jersey.
- No. 8.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 14th September to 31st October 1797 containing cases chiefly surgical which occurred in Regimental Hospital of 88th. Jersey.
- No. 9.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 19th August to 30th November 1797 containing detail of cases chiefly surgical which occurred in the Regt. at St. Owens Barracks, Island of Jersey.
- No. 10.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 2nd December 1797 to 28th January 1798 containing cases chiefly surgical which occurred in Regimental Hospital at St. Owens Bay, Jersey.
- No. 11.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 1st January to 28th February 1798 containing chiefly febrile cases which occurred in Regt. Hospital.
- No. 12.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 29th January to 25th April 1798. Cases admitted into Regimental Hospital. St. Owens Barracks, Jersey.
- No. 13.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 26th April to 13th July 1798. St. Owens, Jersey.
- No. 14.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 1st August 1798 to 14th February 1799 commencing when the Regt. was in Barracks at St. Owens, continued during voyage to Portsmouth while lying at Hilsa Barracks, and contains such cases as were embarked on board the Taunton on voyage to India.
- No. 15.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 15th February 1799 to 15th September 1799 containing an account of the cases that occurred in the Regimental Hospital, while at sea on board the Taunton Castle Indiaman continued during the stay of the Regt. at the Cape and until their arrival at Bombay.
- No. 16.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 16th September 1799 to 21st March 1800, while the Regt. was quartered in Colabah and Old Women's Islands.
- No. 17.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 21st March to 12th August 1800 while the Regiment was quartered in the Islands of Colabah.
- No. 18.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 6th July to 8th October 1801.
- No. 20.** Prescription and Case Detachment 88th Regt. Bombay from 5th July to 5th December 1801.
- No. 21.** Hospital Case and Prescription Book of a Detachment of 88th Regt. from 6th December 1801 to 24th July 1802 kept at the Garrison Hospital, Fort of Bombay including the Sick of Detachments of 61st, 75th, 77th and 84th Regts.
- No. 22.** Prescription Book of a Detachment of 88th Regt. from 25th July to 20th November 1802 at Bombay.
- No. 23.** Case Book, Hospital 88th Regt. Bombay from 21st November 1802 to 28th February 1803.

- No. 24.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 25th July 1803 to 13th September 1803 containing a continuation of the cases with remarks which occurred in the Cumbrian at Sea.
- No. 25.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 17th May 1803 to 19th October 1803.
- No. 26.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 9th November 1803 to 28th January 1804.
- No. 27.** Case Book 88th Regt. from 29th January to 24th April 1804 at Pevensey, Sussex.
- Copies of reports as given in to Medical Boards, The Inspector General of Hospitals and the Commanding Officer of the 88th Regt. from the 20th February 1797 to the 4th February 1798.
- Volume Miscellanies. Results of trial of various articles in Dysentery in 1799. Table of the deaths and diseases of the Indian Army in Egypt. Letter of Adjutant Thomson on the total deaths in 88th Regt. A register of the weather from February 1801 to December 1804. Notes on the morbid appearance on dissection of 17 men. Yearly return from June 1800 to May 1801 of diseases and mortality in 88th Regt.
- No. 28.** Case Book Royal Horse Guards Blue from November 1803 to 20th July 1805.
- No. 30.** Case Book Royal Horse Guard Blue from 1st January 1805 to 31st June 1805 at Windsor.
- Volume.** Miscellanies. Statement of appearances on dissection of fatal cases in the hospitals in the Severn and South Western Districts for the Summer Quarter in 1811.
- Volume.** Miscellanies. Statement as above for Autumnal Quarter 1811. Dissection reports and cases of disease. Spring Quarter 1811 from 11th February to 9th May.
- Dissection reports and cases of disease among Troops in the Severn and South Western Districts during the Winter Quarter 1810/1811.
- 2158.** Letter Book from 8th September 1813 to 15th June 1815.
- 2157.** Letter Book from 25th April 1812 to 3rd June 1815.
- 2165.** Letter Book from 26th April 1812 to 25th April 1813.
- 2167.** Letter Book from 9th September 1809 to 25th July 1811.
- 2166.** Letter Book from 30th November 1811 to 31st March 1812.
- 2161.** Letter Book from 25th August 1809 to 31st January 1811.
- 2163.** Volume 1. Correspondence Book from 20th August 1805 to 17th February 1808.
- 2160.** Volume 11. Correspondence Book of the Deputy Inspector of Hospitals Portsmouth, Severn and South Western Districts from 22nd February 1808 to 20th August 1809.
- 2156.** Prevailing diseases which occurred amongst the British Troops in the Peninsular.
- Letter Book (E) from 31st March 1812 to 3rd March 1814.

- 2164.** Reference and subjects of letters received in 1809, 10, 11, 12 and 13 from Army Medical Board and Military Secretary, Adjutant General, Quarter Master General, Commissary General, Deputy Inspectors, Physicians, Purveyor and Department Apothecaries, Staff Surgeons and Hospital Officers, Regimental Medical Officers, Officers and other individuals. Returns and miscellaneous, Papers, Sundries from May 1813. Papers first sent to St. Andrew.

A Register of the weather from January 1805 to December 1811. Abstract of the Sick in General and Regimental Hospitals and various abstracts relative to the Admissions, Discharges and Deaths which occurred in all the hospitals on the Peninsular, Regimental as well as general from 21st December 1811 to 20th June 1814.

Thirteen Books unbound containing journal of events which occurred to the Army in the Peninsular from December 1811 to June 1813.

Looking through the catalogue, there is obviously much of interest and worthy perusal in the manuscripts¹, its last item is meantime engaging attention in detail, viz. "13 Books unbound containing Journal of Events which occurred to the Army in the Peninsular from December 1811 to June 1813."

The foolscap size notebooks are in McGrigor's large but not always easy to read handwriting, the pages being numbered consecutively, but not a few are blank.

After his death in 1858, there was published in 1861, the "Autobiography and Services of Sir James McGrigor Bart," dealing with his life till his appointment as member of the Army Medical Board in 1815. A few months later the Board was re-cast and he was placed at the head of it as Director-General. This Autobiography is well worth reading. Use of it may be made to amplify and make comparison with the Journal. The two are to some extent complementary.

¹ *Action is in hand to produce microfilm copies of the more interesting items of the McGrigor manuscripts for the Historical Library of the R.A.M.C.*

(to be continued)