EDITORIAL

75 YEARS AT MILLBANK

In the first years of the present century the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital, shortly followed by the Royal Army Medical College and Headquarter Mess RAMC, joined the Tate Gallery on the unique riparian site cleared in 1890 by the demolition of the old Millbank penitentiary along the north bank of the Thames. Sadly, the hospital is now closed and partly demolished to make way for the Tate's new gallery which will eventually straddle Bulington Street and fill the area created by the recent razing of the two ward blocks closest to the river. Despite the changes, the College and HQ Mess live on and flourish, occupying an incomparable situation which is the envy of many, as the spiritual home of the RAMC and its professional endeavours.

The College was opened on 17 May 1907 and the Mess shortly thereafter. For that reason this year, 1982, marks the 75th Anniversary of the College on its Millbank site. All will be aware that an Army Medical School has been in existence for longer than the 75 years now being remembered, indeed for almost 50 years before the move to London. Founded at Chatham in 1860 the School moved to Netley three years later and stood at the edge of Southampton Water for 42 years. The clamour for improvements in the training of Army doctors which followed the South African War brought a recommendation from the Army Medical Advisory Board in 1902 that a College should be built adjacent to the hospital then being constructed beside the Tate Gallery. In September 1902 the School moved to London to await the new buildings and took up temporary residence in the examination halls of the English Conjoint Board on the Victoria Embankment until the completion of the present College in May 1907.

The newly created College was hailed by the medical press as a spectacular advance for the professional status of the RAMC; “The laboratory accommodation will be of the first order, and the whole conception is one which reflects credit on its authors, and its realisation should go far towards promoting the object for which it was designed — namely, the education of the Army Medical Officer.” So wrote an anonymous author in the British Medical Journal. The same author, who clearly had little time for the visual appearance of the new developments, did not wax enthusiastic over the military architecture; “the building will be of red brick with stone facing, of the kind of Georgian Victorian which finds favour with the moribund War Office, as exemplified in the squat military hospital on the side of the Tate Gallery. It is deplorable that three such opportunities of adorning the Thames bank with graceful or noble buildings have been thrown away . . . .” It is unlikely that present day critics would be so severe, and indeed, the College and Headquarter Mess are today considered to reflect a restrained Edwardian elegance infinitely preferable to the amorphous slabs that characterise contemporary public buildings. Officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps are grateful that their professional headquarters is housed in such a distinguished home.
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Purpose and work of the College has changed little over the 75 year span. Pathology has expanded to encompass the Army's central reference laboratories and the training of laboratory technicians, but the main drive of the College effort remains the postgraduate education of RAMC officers.

The principal concerns for the work of the College must exercise our collective minds as we contemplate the future in the light of the past. One is the need for more medical research to be undertaken at the College; research and teaching should be inseparably united for postgraduate progress to be effective and successful, and if the university status of the professorial departments is to be maintained there needs to be an expansion of departmental research; expensive probably, but essential for continued viability. The second concern, expressed when the College celebrated its jubilee, is that "no medical college would be complete without a hospital on its doorstep." The closure of the Queen Alexandra Hospital was an inevitable but unfortunate blow to the cause of Army postgraduate training. But in conjunction with the new Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital—even if the step across the doorstep needs seven league boots—there grows an increasing and valuable bond knitting together the two establishments as the Army's institute of postgraduate medical studies.

REFERENCES


Promotions and Appointments

Brigadier W J Pryn, OBE to be Maj Gen on 3 April 1982. Brig Pryn was also appointed to be an Honorary Surgeon to Her Majesty The Queen on 31 Dec 1981.

Brigadier D D O'Brien was appointed an Honorary Physician to Her Majesty The Queen on 16 Dec 1981.