

# The Residency Mess at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh: history and traditions

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**ABSTRACT** For almost 250 years the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary was staffed with resident physicians and surgeons. This paper traces the history and the traditions of the Residency Mess, its inhabitants' lives, duties and leisure activities and how these have changed over the years.

**KEYWORDS** Edinburgh Royal Infirmary Old Residents' Club, Residency Mess, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh

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Few, indeed there must be, among the numerous old residents, who do not look back upon their period of duty in the Royal Infirmary as the most noteworthy and the most epoch making in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Could an entity such as the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh's (RIE) Residency Mess really mould careers and remain a special place in the hearts and minds of those who worked there? Would the first year or two of postgraduate medical practice really be influenced by and benefit from such an institution? Perhaps an explanation of this special place will provide an answer.

## A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

Starting in August 1729 there have been four Royal Infirmarys in Edinburgh. The first was a house at the head of Robertson's Close, rented from the Town Council to form a four-bed hospital which in 1736, under a Royal Charter, became the first Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. In 1741 patients were admitted to a nearby, purpose-built, second Royal Infirmary, which had 228 beds. Two surgical buildings were added in 1832 and 1853, but growth and overcrowding on the site led, in 1879, to a third Royal Infirmary being built at Lauriston Place, incorporating medical, surgical and support facilities, with a Residency as an integral part of the construction. This was the first voluntary hospital in Scotland, with a manager and hospital superintendent appointed by the Court of Contributors, an arrangement that continued until the founding of the NHS in 1948. It was designed with 555 beds, although initially only 477 beds were used, with four wards being held in reserve.<sup>2</sup> The infirmary was funded by charitable contributions, and with an annual average cost of £60 per bed the managers sought individuals to endow a bed to be named for them. In 1881 the first endowment came from the scholars of Merchiston Castle School,<sup>2</sup> and subsequently all donors were identified on boards in the main surgical corridor.



**FIGURE 1** Photograph of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh on the 19th annual dinner menu of the Old Residents' Club, from the late 1920s. (With kind permission of the Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University Library.)

Once again, growth, overcrowding and an inability to expand led, in 2002, to the creation of the fourth Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, together with the now adjacent University Medical School, at Little France, on the south-eastern outskirts of the city. As visitors and patients traverse the ground-floor corridor, some may wonder at the three wooden panels hanging on the wall. Carved with names and some dates, they are part of a dining-room table, tangible *vestigia* of the varied and changing life and traditions in the Mess that once housed the residents, an institution that today has been excised from the life of newly qualified physicians.

## THE START OF THE 'RESIDENCY'

In 1743 Robert McKinley became the first 'resident physician' (although his title was actually Clerk of the House), a post that required him to be medically educated and unmarried.<sup>2</sup> He was charged to give all his time to his duties, which included keeping records of patients on the waiting list and maintaining notes of their progress following admission and treatment, as given to him by the physicians and surgeons. He had to acquaint the matron with diets prescribed for each patient and

send a copy of each prescription to the apothecary. At first McKinley received no salary, but two years later he was granted an annual salary of £10. It would seem that he was a vexatious individual, frequently disagreeing with the matron and making accusations against her and the treasurer.<sup>2</sup> Although McKinley apologised, the managers dismissed him from his post in 1747,<sup>2</sup> to be replaced by a Mr Petrie and a Mr Sutherland, who shared the duties of clerk and apothecary for an annual salary of £10 each.

When Petrie resigned in 1750, the infirmary appointed medical students to be clerks to the physicians and surgeons. They lived in the infirmary but were allowed to attend university classes so long as these did not interfere with their clinical duties in the hospital. The role of the medical clerks was the same as that performed by McKinley, but the surgical clerks were, in addition, responsible for the care of the surgical instruments, notification of the operations and the surgeons involved, directing the surgical dressers and even performing minor operations themselves.<sup>2</sup> At this time each 'chief' would have had one clerk.

The medical clerks had rooms in a 'House for Resident Officers', shown in plans of 1853 as being beside the medical wards,<sup>1</sup> but the surgical clerks had no separate dwelling and were given single rooms in close proximity to the surgical theatres, in reality creating two residencies. By 1775 standards had risen and the appointment of clerks was restricted to students who had completed two university terms or 'sessions' and at least one year of attendance at the infirmary.<sup>2</sup> An additional task allocated to them all was the collection of fees from patients, for which the clerks received an annuity of £10 per annum, but this privilege was withdrawn in 1791. In 1773, Wilkinson Manuel, a medical clerk, asked to have his laundry done in the infirmary or to receive an allowance to cover this. A sum of £2 per quarter was authorised for one year but not until 1909 was the allowance formally granted.<sup>2</sup> In 1800 the infirmary insisted that the clerks must pay £20 per annum for 'board and bed';<sup>3</sup> this was increased to 30 guineas in March 1818.<sup>4</sup>

## THE OLD RESIDENTS' CLUB

Although very little has come down to us of residency life at the second RIE, Alexander James mentions the dining-room as a feature with 'the wonderful table bearing on its surface the names of successive batches of residents'.<sup>1</sup> It seems likely that James and his colleagues had been residents around the time of the move to Lauriston Place in 1879, for in 1895 they founded the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary Old Residents' Club, with James as its first president. The initial aim of the club was to provide 'good fellowship, interchange of confidence, and unity of aims between past and present residents and, so far as possible, to further the interests of the Royal Infirmary and medical education in Edinburgh'.<sup>1</sup> Membership was available to any

Edinburgh resident appointed by the managers and who had lived in the residency for the statutory period of six months. The membership fee was one guinea.<sup>5</sup>

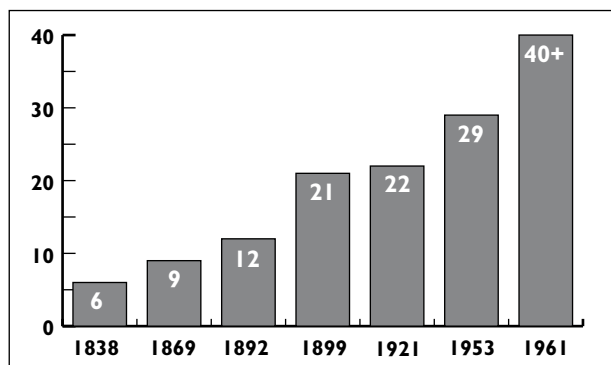
The Old Residents' Club was a dining club that provided an opportunity to meet old friends and reminisce,<sup>1</sup> a chance for 'newly fledged youngsters to associate with veterans'. Such was the bond between members that many travelled long distances to attend the annual dinner in Edinburgh each June. Three menus from the late 1920s survive; on the front of each is a photograph of the current president and on the back a group photograph of the president with his fellow residents. Another photograph shows the RIE, taken from the Meadows, in which flocks of sheep graze contentedly (Figure 1).

But it is for the founders' second objective that we owe the members a colossal debt, for the club became the de facto recorder and repository of material in order 'to make a history of the Infirmary, from the point of view of the residents, a feasible piece of work'.<sup>1</sup> The club records<sup>5-7</sup> provide a chronological list of residents and their activities, while giving us some insight into their lifestyle. The club existed until 2 September 1974, and its records are now part of the Centre for Research Collections (CRC) at the University of Edinburgh.

## RULES AND REGULATIONS

In 1838 university medical professors had three clinical clerks, appointed for three months, while ordinary physicians and surgeons had 'resident clerks' appointed for two years. There were six residents in all; they lived and dined in-house and paid £100 for their board. Regulations and duties for resident clerks were issued in 1843, but it was not until July 1851 that all residents had to be qualified, holding a degree in medicine or a diploma in surgery. From then on they were appointed for six months and there was no charge for board. A name change was instituted in February 1854 when all clerks were designated either resident house physician or resident house surgeon, depending on their degree or diploma, and they continued to maintain the ledgers in which patient histories were recorded, with the authenticity of these notes confirmed by the counter-signature of the relevant chief of the ward. In 1869 resident numbers increased to nine, and in 1892 to 12 (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>

When the new intake of residents arrived to start their jobs in April 1895, the manager of the Court of Contributors produced a volume listing rules governing the residency, and before taking up their position all residents had to report to the superintendent and sign their names in acceptance of these rules.<sup>8</sup> Beneath the printed rules each page had 16 lines for residents' signatures and the identification of the chief with whom they were to work. These books, which ultimately amounted to five volumes, continued to be used until



**FIGURE 2** Resident numbers in the RIE Mess, 1838–1961.

1974 and provide a record of all the residents in the RIE and later the Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion (SMMP).

Initially there were seven rules emphasising that the residents themselves were responsible for regulating the affairs of their Mess and making their own rules for the conduct of these affairs. Each resident was to be Mess president for a week, in rotation, and responsible for maintaining the rules and communicating with the superintendent. Other rules covered the hours at which the dining-room was to open and close and the abatement of noise. On the first page, 12 residents signed their names, one for each chief. On completion of each intake the page was ‘closed’ with a line and comments if necessary, all in red ink.

By April 1899 a pattern was established whereby the residents changed every April and October. Twenty-one residents for 15 chiefs (several surgeons had two residents) signed their names agreeing to the first amendment, rule 7: ‘Every Resident is entitled to the exclusive use of his room or rooms, and he shall be at perfect liberty at any time to retire to same, and to lock or bolt the door or doors. He shall not be disturbed in his room or rooms in any way.’<sup>8</sup>

In August 1914 the rules book recorded the resignations of 12 of the 20 residents appointed in April, together with two chiefs, presumably all called into the Royal Army Medical Corps for the First World War. In the summer of 1915 it was necessary to appoint a final-year student to be a resident, and through 1916 to 1919 almost all the residents were final-year students. After the end of the war, five students continued to make up the number of residents in 1920, until a year later the 22 residents were all qualified again.

In October 1921 Dr Janet Grant was appointed as resident for ward 35 and thus became the first female resident at the RIE. She was given accommodation in the infirmary, not in the Mess. The year 1925 saw another amendment to the residency rules; ‘Undersigned undertakes for as long as he (sic) is a Resident Physician

or Resident Surgeon, he will not be party to any conduct... which may disturb or frighten the patients or members of the Nursing Staff.’

Evidence from the interwar years shows little of note, apart from a 14-page booklet of advice for residents produced by the hospital superintendent.<sup>9</sup> Among the topics covered was advice on how to deal with infectious disease: remove the patient to the City Hospital, get the house steward to have the bed disinfected and the infected bedding removed. If two patients were involved the ward must be closed – advice which could be usefully applied today. Economy featured in calls to restrict X-rays because of their expense, to use drugs from British manufacturers as they were cheaper than imports and to contact patients by letter or postcard where possible and not by telephone. Private calls would be charged to the resident. At this time most anaesthetics were given by the residents, and the notes include advice on chloroform and ether, a reminder to check the patient’s heart, lungs and kidneys before ‘giving anaesthesia’ and a warning that any student giving anaesthesia was to be supervised.

In 1939 the residents in the SMMP, which had its own residency, added their signatures to those of the RIE residents in the rules book, in which the first resignations as a result of call-up for the Second World War appear at this time. A year later all SMMP residents were female, and by 1941 there were three female residents in the RIE, all probably accommodated in the infirmary and not in the Mess.

But all was not plain sailing in the Mess. In June 1944 the secretary wrote to the medical superintendent protesting against the proposal to have a resident clinical tutor, as this would likely create an upper and a lower ‘house’.<sup>10</sup> In January 1945 the secretary wrote again concerning the appointment of female residents to two of the medical charges: ‘The present residents look upon the prospect of women living in the Residency with much concern and annoyance and feel that a vast majority of past residents must hold similar views.’ The author can find no record of the reply.

The foundation of the NHS in 1948 brought a number of changes. Residents were now paid, and all newly qualified physicians were given provisional registration until they had completed two six-month periods as a resident in an ‘approved’ hospital. A rule change granted leave to the house officers with the board of management paying for a locum, provided that he or she was a registered physician and a member of the Medical Defence Union.

In 1953 problems with discipline surfaced in the RIE, with the red ink recording disciplinary action and a resident being dismissed, followed two years later by another

addition to the rules with a warning that misconduct would lead to immediate suspension and dismissal by the board. At this time the SMMP had 11 residents, compared with 29 in the RIE and a further nine in the Chalmers Street Annex. There must have been some concerns about behaviour for the superintendent saw fit to issue a typewritten document<sup>11</sup> explaining why the SMMP had fewer problems with its residents: they were older, had senior residents on site and staff rotated every three months so that newcomers learned from those in place. It is not clear to whom this document was sent or whether any action resulted.

By 1961 there were more than 40 residents in the RIE and around 20 in the SMMP, numbers which remained at those levels until, in 1974, the rules book was closed.

## LIFE IN THE RESIDENCY

### Early days, from 1879

In the third RIE there was a purpose-built 'Residency' for physicians and surgeons, with single bedrooms, a sitting-room, a dining-room with tobacco and liquor cupboards which operated on the honesty principle of each resident signing and being billed for what was taken, a kitchen, a music room with a piano and, outside, a fives court. James<sup>1</sup> gives us an account of life in the Residency Mess, describing the food, the relaxation and the kitchen concerts, which were renowned for the flow of beer, the impenetrable tobacco smoke and the noise, of which he remarks that there were no complaints. In December 1897 the residents had written and performed their own musical play, 'A Trip to Moscow', a spoof aimed at the chiefs who had gone to see how things were done there. A copy of the book and songs, with the names of the cast, still exists.<sup>12</sup> James describes the pranks that the residents played upon each other. For example, they deluded one piano-playing resident into believing he could play so well that even cats would come to hear him. He couldn't, but they did, attracted by the valerian scattered outside.

### The early 20th century

After James there is a break in the story concerning life in the residency, only partially filled by some photographs of individual residents, poems and two photographs of the residents in groups, dated and with their signatures beneath. From September 1911, however, the narrative resumes in the form of the Mess log books<sup>13</sup> in which the president for the week wrote minutes after each dinner. Surprisingly perhaps, many of these minutes are legible, written in a light-hearted vein and uniformly amusing. There were also 18 pages of Mess rules, of which the only extant copy is from 1944. These covered a myriad of topics and situations, including confining female residents exclusively to one bathroom upstairs and prohibiting them from attending the two formal dinners or from carving their names on the table.

It is also clear that the rules were constructed to enhance the coffers of the Mess by a series of 'fines' levied for misdemeanours and transgressions at dinner. Each resident also had a specific role, function and title within the Mess (Table 1). In later years, as the titles of the chiefs were changed, all positions became elected, and a number of titles underwent subtle alteration or even deletion. The weekly rotation of president was cancelled in place of a longer appointment, but the concept of the functions and titles remained.

### Fines

Each evening the Mess gathered for dinner, during which Mess business could be discussed and fines levied, from one penny to half a crown, and even five shillings on occasion. The most heinous crime was to be late or not present at dinner, unless notification had been given on the slate previously, and it was common practice for the chief, usually a former resident himself, to pay the fine if he had kept his resident late. If the president failed to read the list of fines before the end of the dinner he found that they were all automatically charged to him.

Members were fined for miscalling Mess titles, or calling a surgical resident 'Dr' instead of 'Mr' or sitting down before 'Draw In' or leaving one's chair before 'Draw Out', or before 'Salvatore' had been said, except with permission from the president. Those with specific functions could be fined for failing to maintain the standards demanded by their title. From these amusing, tongue-in-cheek records it is possible to read that the Keeper of the Butler was fined for 'tough mutton' at one dinner, but then had his fines cancelled the next evening for 'delicious' salmon. The Deity was fined if the weather was inclement or too hot and once when the sitting-room fire had refused to light, while the Keeper of the Bogies was heavily fined for failing to perform restorative surgery on an incontinent wash-basin which had been leaking for days. Only the Babe was permitted to stand on his seat and would be fined if he failed to do so when he addressed the president. He also had to obtain the permission of the Father before he touched alcohol, while Father was the only member allowed to admonish the Babe or to fall asleep in the sitting-room before 11pm, a privilege granted in respect of his advanced years.

Transgression of these rules resulted in fines all round. Fines could be challenged, and rescinded or doubled as the President and Lawyer decided, but they could also be revoked for meritorious service, which was usually a story, a song, a poem or some other amusement for the members. One resident, when challenged by the Matrimonial Committee, allowed that he had kissed no fewer than six nurses at Christmas. Truly modest, he attributed his success to the mistletoe that he carried with him and was pleased to find his health being drunk in recognition of his meritorious service. He was less pleased to learn that no fines were being rescinded. In

**TABLE 1** Resident's appointments, titles and functions in the Mess, as listed in the Mess log of 1911  
(All residents had at least one appointment)

Mess President	Rotated each week, alphabetically. The Mess contact with the Hospital Superintendent
<b>Hereditary titles</b>	
Mace Bearer	Resident to the Professor of Clinical Surgery
Whisky Jimmy	Resident to the Senior Professor of Clinical Medicine. Purveyor of fine wines and liquors
Keeper of the Billiard Room	Resident to the Professor of Systematic Surgery
Keeper of the Bathroom	Resident to the Professor of Systematic Medicine. At formal dinners had to appear in dressing gown, roller towel and slippers
Keeper of the Bogies	Resident to the Junior Professor of Clinical Medicine. Responsible for the condition and functioning of the toilets
Keeper of the Butler	Resident to the second Junior Medical Chief
Baccy Bob	Resident to the second non-professorial surgeon. Purveyor of tobacco, matches and smoking appurtenances to the members
Keeper of the Catheter	Resident to the most junior surgeon in charge of a ward. At Mess dinners had to wear a catheter, visible, in case it was required
Keeper of the Lizzies	Resident to the most Junior Medical Chief. Ensured no swearing in the housekeepers' presence
Father	The oldest resident. The only person who could admonish the Babe
The Babe	The youngest resident. Had to wear a bib at the table, was permitted to make a mess and had to seek permission to drink alcohol
Limners	Always from the Surgical Outpatients' Dept, these were the 'chuckers out' at the dinners
<b>Elected titles</b>	
Mess Secretary and Librarian	Wrote letters, obtained books, magazines and newspapers
Mess Parson	Gave a sermon at the formal dinners and when requested
Mess Stallion	Often in conflict with the Keeper of the Virgins, below
Keeper of the Virgins	Kept the nurses from being 'frightened and disturbed'
Immoral Thinker	Amused the Mess with vulgarity when called upon
Mess Orator and Mess Poet	Expected to perform when events at dinner were slack
Mess Belcher	Called upon to relieve the Mess during dinner
Mess Prostate	Chosen for the most suitable bodily configuration
The Left and Right Testicles	The tallest and shortest members of the Mess, seated either side of the Vice-President.
The Deity	Rarely praised but frequently blamed
Keeper of the Purse	The treasurer
Mess Lawyer	Provided opinions for disputed fines
Mess Tapeworm	Permitted to have second helpings at meals without being fined
Peeping Tom and Peeping Tit	The secret police
Matrimonial Committee	Challenged engagements, marriages and births

practice, with pages of these complicated rules and explanations, it was impossible not to be fined for something. At the end of each Mess the accumulated funds were used, in theory, to pay for any damage to the Mess; it should be noted to the residents' credit that the February 1918 Mess had a surplus of £50 with which they bought War Bonds and established a trust fund for the infirmary.<sup>14</sup> Reviewing the mass of receipts and bank statements it is clear that each subsequent Mess followed this procedure or something similar and added to the trust fund until the formation of the NHS.

### Formal dinners

Each Mess held two formal black-tie dinners, to which usually two or three guests were invited. On these two evenings medical 'coverage' of the wards was provided by the more senior members of staff, nearly always former residents but now registrars or senior registrars. In deference to guests, fines were not levied on such occasions. At these dinners the Mess silver, pieces that

traditionally had been donated by each departing Mess, was on the table, and formal menus were printed with the names of the guests and the speakers, the list of toasts to the monarch, the guests, the residents and, latterly, the ladies, with appropriate replies. The food and wines were discussed with the Butler, who liaised with the kitchen.

Several copies of the invitations exist in the CRC archives, and quotes from a small selection provide an overview of what was to be expected. One recipient was advised to wear his oldest dinner jacket as 'things get rowdy'. Another who wondered what he should say in his speech was told that brevity and vulgarity were expected and appreciated. It was explained to one invitee that the previous dinner had been a great event but that the current Mess was still settling bills for the damage. There was constant friction at the difficulty the incoming Mess had in getting the outgoing perpetrators of the damage to pay. The infirmary refused to pay and even sent a bill for the cleaning of two statues after they had been 'decorated', to the disgust of



**FIGURE 3** Prince Philip's signature on the residents' tabletop. Just above, the Residency butler, Robert Morris, signed his name.

the Mess members who claimed that the statues had been improved by the decoration.

### Guests

In the early years at Lauriston Place the hospital superintendent and the manager were invited to formal dinners on several occasions, suggesting a degree of affability existed between them all. A favourite guest, it seems, was Professor Sir John Fraser who was invited several times, once with his wife, and at Christmas the couple sent 500 Turkish cigarettes as a gift to the Mess. In April 1961 the Mess invited Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and a former Rector of the University, to be the guest of honour. On this occasion the Infirmary management felt it incumbent upon them to repaint the dining-room, the hallways and the closest toilet, this last being the recipient of a coat of pink paint. All went extremely well, Prince Philip so enjoying himself that he overran the schedule and the London train had to be held for him. Of course he signed his name, a large bold 'Philip', on the table, which was later professionally carved (Figure 3). A visit to the toilet prior to departure reputedly caused him to say to the Mess president: 'Hideous colour, but spanking clean.'

The guest lists offer a profusion of names of younger staff members on their promotion and those of older members who were retiring or moving to a post elsewhere, along with a mixture of non-medical men – lawyers, other professionals or figures of note.

### The dining-room table

The table was constructed as three separate panels; as each became replete with carved signatures it was replaced with a new one. At Lauriston Place the filled panels were hung on the walls of the billiard room. The Mess rules stipulated that a resident must have lived in the Mess for five months before he was allowed to sign and carve his name. Dates could only be attached by those residents who had lived in the Mess for at least two terms. While the date of the first carvings can only be guessed at, Turner<sup>2</sup> suggests this was between 1870 and 1879. In July 1920 King George V and Queen Mary,

accompanied by Princess Mary, opened the university's new King's Buildings and then visited the RIE and the Residency Mess. All three provided a clear signature and date which were later professionally carved and surrounded with an oval. Although at first female residents were prohibited from adding their names, this misogynist injustice was rescinded, certainly by the mid-1950s, and their signatures bear witness to women's assimilation into the Mess.

### Entertainments and activities

In the post-war years the Mess sitting-room was furnished with couches and chairs that may once have been comfortable, a black and white television set and a radiogram. The superintendent had proposed and set up a billiard room. A selection of newspapers, delivered to the dining-room at breakfast time, were removed to the sitting-room later and an attempt was made to get some of the Edinburgh booksellers and publishers to donate medical books to create a library. With their letters of rejection each included their price list of books, so the message was clear. In 1913 the Mess itself had published an in-house magazine called *The Infirmary Independent*, which comprised some poems and stories written by the residents and was professionally printed. Volume one, number one exists in the archives, but it seems that only one edition of this magazine ever appeared.

When, in 1913, ward 22 was empty the residents asked if this could be used for badminton and the superintendent agreed. The fives court fell into disuse, but the superintendent arranged for a tennis court near the Nurses' Home, which proved more popular and involved matches between the residents of the RIE, SMMP, the Nurses' Home and eventually the hospital laboratory staff. In the early years at Lauriston Place several cricket and football matches were arranged against local amateur teams such as Ramsay Lodge and the King's Theatre pantomime actors, hockey matches were played against Craighouse Mental Hospital and, in addition, there were rugby matches between the wards. Sir John Fraser had presented the Mess with a golf trophy for competition between the residents, and in April 1913 some golfers set off by horse-drawn carriage from Edinburgh at midnight, aiming for an early start at Gullane the next day.

The tradition of kitchen concerts was carried on until an extension of the kitchens in 1904 brought them to an end. Visits to the theatre were very popular, especially to Theatre Royal, the King's Theatre and the Royal Lyceum. One president wrote resignedly in the nightly post-dinner minutes: '17 applicants for 17 seats at the theatre. There is a danger of everyone being satisfied but it can't be helped.' A theatre tradition grew up of the residents rising 'as one' at the intervals and entering the bar which they then dominated to the consternation of the staff and the other patrons who were anxious to be served. On one annual visit to Edinburgh the D'Oyly Carte



**FIGURE 4** Residents with members of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company on the roof of the Edinburgh Residency Mess, c. 1920. (With kind permission of the Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University Library.)

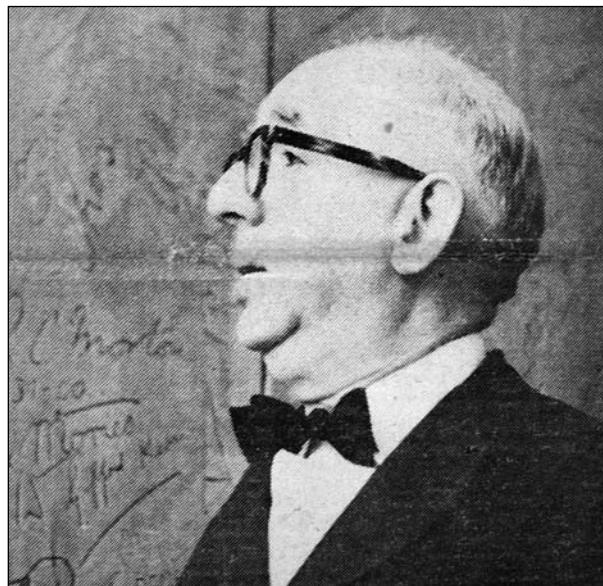
Opera Company gave a concert in the surgical theatre and then repaired to the residency for tea. There is a photograph of the residents with the cast (Figure 4), in which the smiling young ladies of the Company look extremely fetching in their long dresses and large hats. The residents, crowding close to them, also seem very happy.

### 1950 and onwards

Once again there is a gap in the narrative as no log or minutes were maintained in the 1920s, 1930s or the war years. In the 1950s, after the NHS was established, all medical graduates had to complete six months as medical and six months as surgical house officers before obtaining full registration to practise. All house officers were now paid, although this was taxed, and the hospital charged for room and board. The 1960 Royal Commission<sup>15</sup> admitted that the junior staff had been underpaid, and salaries for house officers were increased to £675 for the first post and to £750 for the second post.

Despite this sudden affluence, the system of Mess fines was continued to raise money for the 'Comfort Fund', to pay for the newspapers, records and other essentials. The tobacco and liquor cupboards continued to operate on the honesty system. In 1950 Mess residents showed their social conscience by organising a charity ball in Edinburgh, and a considerable sum was presented to the Scottish National Institute for the War Blinded. This was repeated in 1951 with greater success when 900 guests added a substantial contribution, while the 1952 funds were donated to the Forces Help Society. The charity ball was dropped in subsequent years.

By the time that the author's class of 1961 became members of the Residency Mess the deprivations and rationing of the war and immediate post-war years were over, and all chiefs in medicine and surgery had two residents. The weekly rotation of the Mess president had been abandoned in favour of two presidents elected



**FIGURE 5** Butler Robert Morris, who served the Residency Mess for 43 years. (With kind permission of *Pulse* magazine.)

for three months each, culminating in their formal dinner. Several of the Mess titles had been 'retired' or their names changed for various reasons, but the main principles from the 1880s were maintained. Fines were still enforced at every dinner, and all the egregious restrictions on female residents had been rescinded. There were six or seven tabletops on the walls of the billiard room, but the theatre visits and outdoor activities were sadly diminished.

### RESIDENCY STAFF

With the move to Lauriston Place the RIE hired the first 'Steward', Mr Macpherson, in 1879. Mr Boyd, who replaced him as Mess Butler, retired around 1915 and was replaced by Mr Whatmore, who served the Mess until 1924. From 1905 the Butlers were assisted by the Housekeeper, Miss Kate Allan, who, with her charges known as 'Lizzies', served the Mess for 43 years before retiring in 1948. In 1924 Mr Robert Morris, lately of the Seaforth Highlanders, became the Mess Butler (Figure 5). At first all his charges were male but by the time female residents joined the Mess, Morris was set in his ways and continued as though nothing of significance had occurred. All residents were treated with the same courtesy and given the same attention, regardless of gender. Morris oversaw the three daily meals, although these were prepared in the main kitchen and sent to the subsidiary kitchen of the Mess. No one needed to tell him that a resident was going to be late: he already knew and had set food aside to be kept warm. If, on occasion, a resident was ill, he arranged special meals to be delivered to the bedroom. In short he ran the Mess as if the residents were his own children.

At the formal dinners Morris came into his own. The Mess silver was polished until it glowed, the table placements

were immaculate, all the 'named' chairs were in their correct positions around the table and the decorations, menus and place cards for the visitors and speakers were in their proper positions. The meal itself was presented and the speeches completed usually with much merriment until its high point – the recitation by Morris of 'The Saga of Pete the Piddling Pup'. Such was his fame that in 1965 the medical magazine *Pulse* published an article about him with three photographs, including one of Morris standing before the sideboard which he and 'Pete' had so often graced.<sup>16</sup> When finally, after serving the Mess for 43 years, Morris retired on 4 May 1967, he was given a party in the large surgical theatre with a presentation from generations of grateful residents.

## AD FINEM

Medical education and training have undergone many changes over the years, nearly all of these for the better. In the early years of the NHS the residents, like McKinley, were expected to devote all their time to the hospital with no official leave. In reality, they covered for each other outside what might be called 'regular working hours', and the Residency fostered a spirit of camaraderie that lasted throughout entire careers. Senior staff, past residents

themselves, regularly asked about the lives and activities in the current Mess, rekindling their own memories and stories, and education was expanded by discussions of patients and treatments. Being totally immersed in one ward the resident knew the details of each patient, monitoring response to treatment or surgery, and seeing them again when they returned as outpatients for follow-up, a microcosm of awaiting medical careers in the wider world. Every evening was shared around the table over dinner. In discussions with colleagues, there is general agreement that residency life provided numerous advantages, relationships, insights and opportunities which have been helpful throughout our careers. By the excision of the Residency Mess from the start of their career new graduates today are denied an opportunity to acquire responsibility for their actions and patients, which may yet prove to have unwanted repercussions.

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