

The excoriation of Benjamin Bell: who was ‘Jonathan Dawplucker’?

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ABSTRACT Because of a perceived lack of continuity of care of the surgical patients in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, James Gregory, one of its managers, suggested that from 1800 a total of only six surgeons should be appointed full-time to that institution. As considerable animosity existed between Gregory and John Bell, a senior Edinburgh teacher and surgeon, a pamphlet that was extremely hostile to his activities was posted in prominent locations throughout Edinburgh. While the author was named as ‘Jonathan Dawplucker’ it was speculated that Gregory, or one of his close associates, was its real author. The contents of a second Dawplucker pamphlet, in the same style, but probably written by John Bell, was subsequently published. This was extremely hostile to Benjamin Bell, one of Gregory’s close surgical colleagues. While much distress was caused at that time, the real authors of these pamphlets are unlikely ever to be established.

KEYWORDS Benjamin Bell, care of surgical patients, Dawplucker pamphlets, James Gregory, John Bell, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh

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INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, an enormous amount of bad feeling existed in the Edinburgh medical community. This was principally because of the suggestion that had been made by one of the managers of the Royal Infirmary, Professor James Gregory (1753–1821) (see Figure 1A), that the arrangements then in force for looking after the surgical patients in the House were both unsatisfactory and unacceptable. Gregory was a particularly influential figure on the Board of Managers of the Infirmary. From 1790 he had been Professor of the Practice of Physic in the University of Edinburgh, and subsequently held this post until 1821. He was also President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh from 6 December 1798 until William Wright was elected to this office on 3 December 1801, and until his death was First Physician to the King in Scotland.

The managers recognised from an early stage, after the establishment of the Infirmary, that it was of critical importance that there was both continuity of patient care and an adequate standard of clinical teaching achieved in the medical wards. Accordingly, from 1751, they appointed two Fellows of the College of Physicians who were to be styled Physicians-in-Ordinary to the staff of the Infirmary. The College of Physicians also arranged that some of its Fellows should visit the Infirmary on a regular basis. These men acted in a purely consulting capacity, were readily available, and could always be consulted by the Physicians-in-Ordinary should this be needed. From 1757, four of the professors of the University medical



FIGURE 1A One of the three of the individuals who might have authored the first Dawplucker pamphlet. Professor James Gregory, portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn, by courtesy Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

faculty agreed to give a joint series of didactic lectures each year. They each lectured for five weeks, and in this way covered the subjects of Anatomy and Surgery (Alexander Monro *primus*), Chemistry in relation to Medicine (William Cullen), the Institutes of Medicine, or Physiology (Robert Whytt) and the Practice of Physic, or Medicine (John Rutherford). The managers also assigned



FIGURE 1B One of the three of the individuals who might have authored the first Dawplucker pamphlet. Mr John Thomson, by courtesy Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, artist unknown.

them special wards from where they could select individual patients to illustrate their lectures.¹

A feeling had for some time existed amongst the managers, as well as amongst many of the surgical patients, that they experienced little in the way of continuity of care in the Infirmary. For the previous three or more decades, all Fellows of the Edinburgh Incorporation (later Royal College) of Surgeons were entitled to look after the surgical patients there. In order for this arrangement to function properly, the surgeons were required to work a rotation system.

ATTENDANCE OF THE SURGEONS AT THE EDINBURGH ROYAL INFIRMARY BEFORE 1800

The attendance of the surgeons was on a number of occasions a cause for concern. In December 1793, for example, the Board of Managers felt it necessary to set up a committee to enquire into the effectiveness of the rotation system. They had noted that an increasing number of recently qualified surgeons were placing their names on the register for service in the Infirmary, while the older and more experienced surgeons were declining to do so. The Board was forced to recommend:

'That no future Intransigent Member of the College of Surgeons shall be admitted to practise as an Attendant Surgeon in the Infirmary till after the lapse of five years from the time of his being admitted a member of the Incorporation of Surgeons.'²

This was a theme approved by John Thomson (see Figure 1B). He was a young and ambitious surgeon, who had previously attended the Edinburgh Medical School, and gained the fellowship diploma of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons in 1793. He had previously spent a year in London attending the Great Windmill Street School, and gained a large circle of Whig friends in the Capital. In 1800, he was the youngest of the six surgeons appointed to the Infirmary. Shortly before this time, Thomson had indicated in his pamphlet that he was distressed:

'by the present mode of allowing indiscriminately every young member of the College of Surgeons to take his turn of public duty in the Infirmary, some of them must be supposed to have but little previous preparation for so important a trust, so very arduous an undertaking.'

He did, however, express his reservations about the selection of the most senior and experienced surgeons, stating that:

'If the permanent surgeons were selected from among the older and more experienced members of the College, and who of course must be supposed to be much occupied in private practice, they could not give that punctual, constant, and regular attendance, which is necessary in the conduct of the surgical department of the Infirmary.'

In this regard he was in agreement with Gregory's more recent view on this topic. Thomson further indicated that, in his opinion, there were considerable advantages to be gained by appointing permanent surgeons to the Royal Infirmary.³ In 1804, he was elected Professor of Surgery to the College of Surgeons, and in 1806, due to the influence of his Whig friends in London, he was appointed the first holder of the Regius Chair of Military Surgery in the University of Edinburgh.⁴

Two of the most distinguished surgeons who attended the Infirmary between 1770 and 1800 were Benjamin (1749–1806) and John Bell (1763–1820). While both shared the same surname, they were unrelated.⁵ Both were skilful surgeons and impressive teachers of the subject, although, as will be seen below, for the latter part of this period they were not on particularly friendly terms. It is likely that one of the reasons for their animosity was because Benjamin Bell was a close ally of Gregory, and had written a pamphlet in support of the latter's views on the staffing of the surgical wards of the Infirmary,⁶ while John Bell strongly opposed Gregory's views on this topic. He also acted as the spokesman for the younger members of the College of Surgeons.⁷ As the century drew to a close, difficulties were encountered due to the increasingly irregular and less frequent attendance of the senior

surgeons at the Infirmary. Gregory came to the conclusion that continuity of patient care was the greatest priority, and could only be achieved if an entirely new system of surgical cover was implemented in the Infirmary.⁸ When his views were offered to the College of Surgeons they gained little sympathy from that and other quarters, and numerous acrimonious pamphlets were published, most of which were directed towards the managers.⁹

SUGGESTIONS BY PROFESSOR JAMES GREGORY FOR THE STAFFING OF THE SURGICAL BEDS OF THE INFIRMARY

It all came to a head in about 1800, when Gregory published his *Memorial to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary*.¹⁰ In this substantial pamphlet, he recommended that a total of six full-time senior surgeons should be appointed to the Infirmary by the managers. All were required to be Fellows of the College of Surgeons of at least three years' standing, and all had to be both resident and practising in Edinburgh. He proposed that the rotation system previously employed by the surgeons should end. Its principal aim was to improve continuity of patient care in the surgical wards, which he believed did not work efficiently under the arrangement then in force. Despite its obvious deficiencies, his proposal had considerable merits, and was strongly supported by the other managers. The appointment of only six surgeons to the staff of the Infirmary inevitably resulted in the loss of many of its most well established and competent surgeons. Furthermore, for many years, as the Monros were not themselves practising surgeons, the teaching of Surgery had been undertaken by members of the extra-mural staff.¹¹

Because of irreconcilable differences between the views held by the managers of the Infirmary and the majority of particularly the more junior members of the College of Surgeons, the managers decided to proceed unilaterally according to Gregory's suggestions. This proposal not only guaranteed continuity of patient care, but also the presence of senior men who could be called upon to advise their more junior colleagues should complex surgical cases be encountered. The first two individuals to be appointed by the Board of Management would be termed Surgeons-in-Ordinary to the House. These men would act for two years, and would then be succeeded by the two next surgeons on the list. When they in turn retired at the end of two years, the next two individuals on the list would succeed them. At the end of every two-year period, two new individuals would be appointed, and their names would be added to the bottom of the list. It was also arranged that no individuals who had retired after serving for two years would be eligible to serve again until a gap of at least four years had elapsed. Should, for one reason or

another, one of the Surgeons-in-Ordinary be absent from the Infirmary, his, or their, posts would be filled by the surgeon or surgeons next on the list. Their successors in office were required to attend the Infirmary for one month before taking over their duties on a regular basis in order that they should become fully acquainted with all of the patients in the wards. The latter feature of his proposal was of particular importance in ensuring that continuity of patient care was maintained.

Despite a substantial degree of opposition from many of the junior members of the College of Surgeons, on 23 December 1800, the managers appointed six members of the College of Surgeons of appropriate standing to the six vacant posts. The six surgeons appointed, in the order of their seniority, were James Russell, Andrew Wardrop, James Law, Andrew Inglis, William Brown, senior, and John Thomson. On the following day, they all took the oath, *De Fideli*, on accepting the terms of service offered by the managers. Once this new arrangement was implemented, it soon settled down and functioned entirely adequately for almost 20 years. In 1818, minor amendments were recommended, and these were implemented in 1820.

PAMPHLETS SUPPORTIVE OF AND AGAINST GREGORY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

During the period between 1799 and the early 1800s, and at least one some years later, a substantial number of pamphlets, some of them extending to over five hundred pages in length, were published. The majority were hostile to the changes recommended by Gregory, a few of them strongly supported his view, while others offered suggestions that involved relatively minor changes.¹² Thomson, for example, was entirely sympathetic to Gregory's view, believing that it was inappropriate:

'to continue a plan of surgical attendance [that was potentially] injurious to the patients. ... I am convinced that the sick and diseased poor, admitted into the surgical wards of the Royal Infirmary, do not receive all the benefit which that institution holds out to them, which the public intended they should receive, and which a different arrangement in the plan of surgical attendance might undoubtedly insure.'¹³

Several of the pamphlets were extremely acrimonious documents.¹⁴ Because of their contents, two were published under the pseudonym of 'Jonathan Dawplucker',¹⁵ although it is believed that their authorship was generally known at the time. Furthermore, feelings were obviously running so high that both parties instituted legal proceedings against each other.¹⁶ Although it is now difficult to prepare a complete list of these pamphlets, an attempt has been made to prepare a list of most of the more well-known of them. Because of the strength of feeling generated on both sides, the animosity

soon became polarised. For example, in one of Gregory's lengthier pamphlets, he stated as follows:

'Any man in his senses, if himself or his family were sick, would as soon think of calling in a mad dog into his house, as a practitioner who held the principles which they have so strongly avowed ... Their case is as hopeless, and fully as much to be lamented, as if they had all, with Mr John Bell at their head, run violently down a steep place into the sea, and been choked in the waters.'¹⁷

CRITICISM OF GREGORY BY THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF EDINBURGH

While the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh later severely and publicly censured Gregory for his activities and the substance of his various pamphlets,¹⁸ John Bell's case was already lost, with his exclusion from the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh from 1800. Both Benjamin and John Bell were excluded from the Infirmary at that time.¹⁹ John Bell, however, never forgave Gregory, and Henry Cockburn's observations, although inappropriately amusing,²⁰ are still apposite. He stated that:

'Mr John Bell, the best surgeon that Scotland had then produced, a little vigorous creature, who wrote well and with intense professional passion, was generally put forward by his brethren to carry on the Gregorian battles. Perhaps he had the best both of the argument and of the clever writing; but the public sided with the best laughter; and so Gregory was generally held to have the victory.'²¹

According to Craig:²²

'For a period extending over a number of years prior to this [as well as in another and later] outburst [in 1808], Gregory had indulged in a series of vicious if clandestine guerrilla attacks on the College and on those of his Collegiate 'brethren' [and previously on many others, but particularly John Bell]²³ who had undeservedly roused his personal animosity. ... His [i.e. Gregory's] own explanations provide little evidence that is reliable because of the extent to which he gave rein to his unbridled emotions, indulged in rhetoric intended to confuse, and resorted to ingenious but inaccurate use of facts ...'²⁴

WHO WAS (WERE) THE AUTHOR(S) OF THE DAWPLUCKER PAMPHLETS?

The views of those on both sides of the argument are relatively well known, but considerable difficulties are now encountered in attempting to establish who might have written the two pamphlets published under the pseudonym of 'Jonathan Dawplucker.' These were both



FIGURE 1C One of the three of the individuals who might have authored the first Dawplucker pamphlet. Dr John Barclay, by courtesy Edinburgh University Special Collection, engraving by Edward Mitchell.

published in 1799, and were entitled: *Remarks on Mr John Bell's Anatomy of the Heart and Arteries*, and *Number Second, Being remarks on the first volume of Mr Benjamin Bell's System of Surgery*. The aim of the first of these pamphlets was clearly to discredit John Bell's reputation as a teacher of Anatomy and Surgery, and his competence as an author, although as will be seen below, its authorship has yet to be unequivocally established. The second Dawplucker pamphlet is now believed to have been written by John Bell to discredit both the surgical and literary competence of one of Professor Gregory's principal supporters, Benjamin Bell.

The first Dawplucker pamphlet

According to Comrie, the author of the first pamphlet was in his view James Gregory.²⁵ This is not consistent with the information provided in the *Index* in the National Library of Scotland and in the *Wellcome's Catalogue of Printed Books*. Both of these texts indicate that 'Jonathan Dawplucker' was in fact the pseudonym used by Dr John Barclay (1758–1826) (see Figure 1C).²⁶ These sources would also appear to suggest that Barclay was the author of both of the Dawplucker pamphlets. It is of interest to note in the present context that Barclay's Edinburgh MD thesis of 1796 entitled *De Anima, seu Principio Vitali*, was dedicated to both Dr Gregory and to Mr John Bell. In the light of the vigorous arguments that ensued between these two individuals over the following decade or so, the impression is gained that Barclay was either backing both parties, or more likely that he was entirely oblivious to the cataclysmic events that were to occur so shortly afterwards.



FIGURE 2A One of the two injured parties. Mr John Bell, by courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.

For a number of years John Barclay had attended Professor Monro *secundus*' course as well as studying anatomy under John Bell, and he even became the latter's assistant.²⁷ This seems somehow inconsistent with the suggestion that in 1799 he would be prepared to write an extremely critical account of one of John Bell's books.²⁸ In one of the copies of the first Dawplucker pamphlet located in the Edinburgh University Library's Special Collection, an early owner has written Barclay's name in capital letters above that of Dawplucker. This has been scored out apparently by a later owner, and been replaced by a possibly more likely candidate, namely 'Thomson.'²⁹ Clearly, the other favoured candidate for the authorship of this volume was Gregory himself, as suggested by Comrie (see above).

According to Struthers, the first attack on John Bell (see Figure 2A) was an anonymous pamphlet (but believed by John Bell to have been written by Gregory) entitled *A Guide to the Medical Students attending the University of Edinburgh* that 'openly and impudently professed but one object, viz., to warn students against attending Mr Bell's lectures.'³⁰ While Bell did not respond to this attack, he might have been wiser in seeking legal redress against Gregory at that time, or at the least drawing Gregory's scurrilous activities to the attention of the University's authorities. The next attack, the first Dawplucker pamphlet, Bell took more seriously, as this was directed against his reputation as an author. Bell claimed that:

'This malignant attack [he believed that this pamphlet had been written by Gregory], was stuck up like a



FIGURE 2B One of the two injured parties. Mr Benjamin Bell, engraving based on a portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn, by courtesy Edinburgh University Special Collection.

Play-Bill in a most conspicuous and unusual manner, on every corner of this city; on the door of my lecture-room! on the Gates of the College, where my pupils could not but pass! and on the gates of the Infirmary, where I went to perform my operations. ... The criticism was every way contemptible; but this extraordinary and most conspicuous advertisement, stuck up ostentatiously, as if by some public authority, on every gate of the College! And of the Infirmary! might have done much, and might imply a suspicion of want of spirit, or want of capacity, which was no longer to be suffered.'³¹

He later referred to Gregory in the following terms:

'The first Professor of our school does not revolt from tasks unworthy of the lowest pamphleteer; from calumnies connected plainly with his interests. It is a city where a man, in a place of seclusion and undisturbed study, must watch over his reputation, be ready to repel continual malignity, and to struggle for his life. The threshold of your College ... is the scene of those ruthless attacks ...'³²

The second Dawplucker pamphlet

Struthers in his *Historical Sketch of the Edinburgh Anatomical School*³³ published what is believed to be the most authoritative account that provides what little is known of the authorship of the second of these two Dawplucker pamphlets. In this, he drew attention to the fact that John Bell in his *Letters on Professional Character and Manners* had

made no attempt to disguise the fact that he had been the author of the pamphlet entitled *Remarks on Benjamin Bell's System of Surgery*.

The view expressed by Struthers³⁴ that John Bell was the author of the second Dawplucker pamphlet on Benjamin Bell (see Figure 2B) is shared by Russell. He stated as follows:

'This attack on John Bell was part of a campaign launched by Dr James Gregory and his friends, notably Benjamin Bell. Using the same pseudonym of 'Jonathan Dawplucker', John Bell replied with *Number second ...*³⁵

This is based on the following statement by John Bell:

'No alternative then was allowed me; a second pamphlet! [i.e. the first Dawplucker pamphlet] unremitting attacks in every form upon my reputation! Were dangers not to be overlooked. I, for a few weeks, left this thing, in the likeness of a Play-Bill, stuck up on every conspicuous place in the city, and took my measure in silence. I continued to perform my operations with composure, and to deliver my lectures. I then favoured the world with such a critique as my avocations would allow, on the works of my worthy colleague, Mr BENJAMIN BELL, and entitled it *No. 2 being a review of the SURGICAL WORKS of Mr BENJAMIN BELL, by JONATHAN DAWPLUCKER*.

In the first number was reviewed one volume of Mr John Bell's *System of Surgery*. In the SECOND was reviewed, in like fashion, the SIX VOLUMES of Mr BENJAMIN BELL'S *System of Surgery*. The advertisement was of the same form, and of the same size; it was stuck up on the same board, and on the same gates and sticking places with the first. But this, Sir, was not like the advertisement of your friends, a mere *brutum fulmen*: I neither mistook my bird nor missed my shot: down came the offensive advertisement, which had been renewed and carefully kept in the public eye for many weeks! And down came SIX VOLUMES, the whole covey at one shot, and never a leaf has fluttered since.³⁶

It is unclear whether the author of the second Dawplucker pamphlet intended publishing a series of pamphlets each of which would address the perceived deficiencies of one or more of the various volumes of this six-volume work by Benjamin Bell³⁷ or, as appeared, only a single pamphlet directed at the deficiencies in the first volume of his *System of Surgery*. Comrie, in his *History of Scottish Medicine*³⁸ indicated that Benjamin Bell's work was an attempt to rival Lorenz (or Laurence) Heister's *System of Surgery* published nearly half a century earlier.³⁹ Comrie also noted that Benjamin Bell's book had been unfavourably criticised

by both Benjamin Bell's contemporary John Bell and later by Sir Benjamin Brodie. It nevertheless went through seven editions and was translated into French, Italian and German.

Possibly the most devastating part of this pamphlet is the fictitious *viva* examination conducted between Benjamin Bell and four College of Surgeons Examinators, ostensibly along the lines of the fellowship examination, including a translation from Latin into English. The latter was the only part of the *viva* that caused the Examinators mild amusement.⁴⁰ This would appear to be consistent with the views expressed in the introductory section of this pamphlet, in which the author provided an overview of Benjamin Bell's qualities. 'He is a dunce in science, a pretender in anatomy, a puppy in surgery, and a plagiarist in every thing.'⁴¹

IN DEFENCE OF BENJAMIN BELL'S SYSTEM OF SURGERY

According to Miles, with reference to Benjamin Bell's *System of Surgery*:

'It was the first attempt in English "to bring together the art of surgery in broad and orderly form," and was designed "to exhibit a view of the art of surgery as it [was then] practised by the most expert surgeons in Europe." Despite its singular lack of systematic arrangement, which the author avowed and defended, it furnished a comprehensive, if somewhat diffuse, exposition of the subject, and contained much that was of permanent value.'

Miles believed that the criticism by Benjamin Brodie of Benjamin Bell's work was completely unjustified. He continued:

'[It] was for long a standard authority alike with students and teachers of surgery, disposes of the inept and callow criticism passed on it by Benjamin Brodie, who, when a lad of nineteen, borrowed it from a friend and found it "a most unreadable production," and doubted "whether it was ever read by anyone." Such an immature judgment might well have been modified when this distinguished surgeon came to write his [auto]biography in more mature years.'⁴²

Benjamin Bell's grandson, who from 1863–1865 had been President of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, wrote an article in support of his grandfather's *System of Surgery* and other works, which was published in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*.⁴³ This item was reprinted as an Appendix to his biography of his grandfather, which was published in 1868.⁴⁴ Neither Benjamin Bell nor Miles makes any mention of the criticisms of his grandfather's *System of Surgery* by John Bell, principally that as a

surgeon his knowledge of anatomy was negligible. Considering the extent of the mauling Benjamin Bell's *System of Surgery* had received from John Bell, and his character assassination, it is of interest that his grandson only felt able to conclude his Appendix with the following paragraph:

'It cannot be doubted, I imagine, that, had Benjamin Bell done nothing more for surgery than introduce and establish the important innovation of saving skin, as a rule, in the majority of operations, he would have deserved an honourable place among those worthies of our profession who, besides performing its duties creditably, have also enlarged its power for doing good.'

REFERENCES

- 1 Turner AL. *Story of a Great Hospital: The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh 1729–1929*. Edinburgh & London: Oliver & Boyd; 1937; 119; Kaufman MH. *Medical Teaching in Edinburgh during the 18th and 19th Centuries*. Edinburgh: Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh; 2003; 47–50.
- 2 Turner *op. cit.*, ref. 1, 125–6. In 1505, the Town Council granted the Barber-Surgeons a Seal of Cause, and King James IV confirmed this on 13 October 1506. The Incorporation of Surgeons as it was then termed received their second Royal Charter in 1567 from Mary Queen of Scots. The Incorporation of Surgeons later received a Royal Charter from King George III on 22 May 1778, so that the formal title of the latter institution became the Royal College of Surgeons of the City of Edinburgh. For further details, see: Cresswell CH. *The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh: Historical Notes from 1505 to 1905*. Edinburgh & London: Oliver & Boyd; 1926.
- 3 Thomson J. *Outlines of a Plan for the Regulation of the Surgical Department of the Royal Infirmary. Submitted to the Consideration of the Managers of that Institution*. Edinburgh: C Stewart & Company; 1800; [14 pp], 7–10.
- 4 For additional biographical details, see: Thomson J. *An Account of the Life, Lectures, and Writings of William Cullen, M.D., Professor of the Practice of Physic in the University of Edinburgh. In two Volumes. Volume I. First Published in 1832. Now re-issued along with the second volume, and having pre-fixed to it a biographical notice of the author*. Edinburgh & London: W Blackwood & Sons; 1859 [For biographical notice of Dr John Thomson, see 5–84]; Kaufman MH. *The Regius Chair of Military Surgery in the University of Edinburgh, 1806–55*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi; 2003; 54–105; Anon. Thomson, John (1765–1846). *Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1963–64; 19, 740–2. He resigned from his College Chair in 1821 and his University Chair in 1822. In 1831, he was appointed the first holder of the Regius Chair of General Pathology in the University of Edinburgh, but resigned due to ill health in 1841. Cockburn thought very highly of him, and indicated that he had the reputation of being 'the most learned physician in Scotland.' See: Cockburn H. *Journal of Henry Cockburn: Being a Continuation of the Memorials of his Time 1831–1854*. In two Volumes. Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas; 1874; Volume 2, 163.
- 5 John Bell's younger brother Charles (later Sir Charles) Bell was both an anatomist and a surgeon, while Benjamin Bell founded a

CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult now to justify the view that the first of the Dawplucker pamphlets was authored by John Barclay, rather than by Gregory or Thomson, or even by another party, such as Benjamin Bell, and the true authorship is unlikely ever to be unequivocally established. The view is now generally held, however, largely based on John Bell's admission in his *Letters on Professional Character and Manners*, that he was the author of the second Dawplucker pamphlet.⁴⁵ How different the situation might have been had John Bell felt able to make a formal complaint to the Senatus of the University shortly after the initial slur against his character appeared, or even taken Gregory to Court to obtain legal redress against him.⁴⁶ We can only speculate what the outcome might have been. The possibility exists that Benjamin Bell and his *System of Surgery* might be remembered because of its contents, rather than because of the criticisms it received – justified or otherwise.

dynasty of surgeons. Five of his descendents within the nineteenth century were fellows of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, while his grandson, also Benjamin Bell, was President of that College from 1863–65.

- 6 Bell B. *Observations on the Mode of Attendance of the Surgeons of Edinburgh on the Royal Infirmary; in a Letter Addressed to the Royal College of Surgeons*. Edinburgh: A Neill & Company; 1800 [24 pp associated with an Appendix entitled *Appendix containing Further Remarks on the Surgical Department of Hospitals* [11 pp]].
- 7 Bell J. *Answer for the Junior members of the Royal College of Surgeons, to the Memorial of Dr J Gregory, Professor of the Practice of Physic in the University of Edinburgh, – Physician to the King for Scotland, – and one of the Managers of the Royal Infirmary of this City*. Edinburgh: Peter Hill; London: Cadell & Davies; Longman & Rees; 1800 [Section I, 57 pp; Section II, 50 pp; Section III, 52 pp] [for obscure references to Dawplucker pamphlets, see: Section I, 35].
- 8 Gregory's proposals for the amended system of attendance by the surgeons at the Infirmary and the perceived need for the end of the rotation system are discussed in detail by Turner. See: Turner *op. cit.*, ref. 1, 126–9.
- 9 According to Cockburn 'Most of the medical profession, including the whole private lecturers, and even the two colleges, who all held that the power of annoying the patients in their turn was their right, were vehement against this innovation; and some of them went to law in opposition to it.' See: Cockburn H. *Memorials of his Time*. Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black; 1856; 105.
- 10 Gregory J. *Memorial to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary*. Edinburgh: Murray & Cochrane; 1800 [iii–v; 1–260]; see also: Gregory J. *Additional Memorial to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary*. Edinburgh: Murray & Cochrane; 1803 [iii–xxx; 1–513].
- 11 As all of the practising surgeons who attended the Infirmary were members of the Incorporation of Surgeons, and later of the Royal College of Surgeons, it was technically the members of the extra-mural staff who undertook the teaching of this discipline in the Infirmary at that time. While the Monros initially held the Chair of Medicine and Anatomy, they also taught Surgery to the students of the Faculty of Medicine. Applications to the Crown to establish a Regius Chair of Surgery in the 1770s were blocked by the Monros and by the Senatus, and in 1777 Monro *secundus* obtained from the Town Council a new Commission that allowed him to be styled the Professor of Medicine, Anatomy and Surgery. Despite these blocking tactics, James Russell was appointed to the Regius Chair of Clinical Surgery in the University of

- Edinburgh in 1803. See: Wright-St Clair RE. *Doctors Monro: A Medical Saga*. London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library; 1964; 83–5; Anon. Russell, James (1754–1836). *Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1963–64; 19, 439–40; Kaufman *op. cit.*, ref. 1, 47–8.
- 12 Jackson R. *Memorial Addressed to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: Mundell & Son; 1800 [14 pp]; Wardrop A. *An Address to the Members of the Royal College of Surgeons, on the Regulation of the Surgical Department of the Royal Infirmary*. Edinburgh: D Shaw & Co; 1800 [16 pp]; Arrott J. *Remarks on the Present Mode of Chirurgical Attendance in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh Submitted to the Consideration of the Royal College of Surgeons there*. Edinburgh: Adam Neill & Co; 1800 [14 pp] [This author suggested a plan in which the members of the College of Surgeons were divided into two classes. Seniors, who had taken charge of the Infirmary for four terms or more, of which there were about ten, and Juniors, who had not had charge so often, of which there were about twenty. He proposed that a total of six members should be elected by the managers to take charge of the Infirmary: two from the Senior Class, and four from the Junior Class. He proposed that the Senior members would principally act in an advisory capacity. This arrangement may well have been easier to implement than that recommended by Gregory]; The Royal College of Surgeons. *Plan for a Better Regulation of the Surgical Department of the Royal Infirmary Submitted to the Consideration of the Managers of that Charitable Institution*. Edinburgh: D Willison; 1800 [20 pp.] [See: Edinburgh University Special Collection (EUSC) Reference Number: RQ.3.28/2].
 - 13 Thomson *op. cit.*, ref. 3, 5.
 - 14 Bell J. *Letters on Professional Character and Manners: on the Education of a Surgeon, and the Duties and Qualifications of a Physician: addressed to James Gregory, M.D. Professor of the Practice of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: John Moir; 1810 [v–xxiii, 1–636].
 - 15 Dawplucker J (pseud). *Remarks on Mr John Bell's Anatomy of the Heart and Arteries*. London: GG & J Robinson; 1799, i–viii, 9–68 [dedication: to John Bell, Esq Surgeon in Edinburgh]; Dawplucker J (pseud). *Number Second, Being remarks on the first volume of Mr Benjamin Bell's System of Surgery*. London: no publisher cited; 1799, v–xxiii, 1–176 [dedication: to the Author of the *System of Surgery*]. The term 'Dawplucker' means a slanderer or critic. It is used in the following contexts: 'Pluck a crow' i.e. tackle someone about a disagreeable or awkward matter; quarrel with someone. It is also used in the following context: 'I've a crow to pluck with you' i.e. an accusation to which there can be neither answer nor evasion. See: Wilkinson PR. *Thesaurus of Traditional English Metaphors*. London & New York: Routledge; 1993; 240.
 - 16 *Memorial for the Managers of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh – Charges, against the Incorporation and Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh – Suspenders* [72 pp and Appendix, 28 pp] [See: Bill-Chamber. 28 January 1801. *Memorial for the Managers of the Royal Infirmary*. Ro. Boswell, VWS Agent. See: EUSC Reference Number: RQ.3.28/11]; *Memorial for the Royal College of Surgeons; against the Managers of the Royal Infirmary* [38 pp and Appendix, 11 pp] [See: Bill-Chamber. February 13 1801. *Mem. College of Surgeons, against Managers of the Infirmary*. Wm Balderston, VWS Agent. See: EUSC Reference Number: RQ.3.28/12]; Bell J & Bell C. *Memorial for John Bell and Charles Bell, Members of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, against the Managers of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: Mundell & Son; 1801 [78 pp and Appendix, 30 pp] [26 February 1801. MEM. – John & Charles Bell, against the Managers of the Royal Infirmary. Home – Clerk. D McLean VWS Agent. See: EUSC Reference Number: RQ.3.28/13]; *Answers for the Managers of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, to the Petition of the Royal College of Surgeons* [68 pp] [20 August 1801. ANS. – Managers of Royal Infirmary, to PET. – College of Surgeons. Ro Boswell VWS Agent H Clerk. See: EUSC Reference Number: RQ.3.28/14].
 - 17 Gregory, *op. cit.*, ref. 10, *Additional Memorial*, 512–3.
 - 18 Gregory J. *Censorian Letter to the President and Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: No publisher or printer cited; 1805 reprinted 1809 [156 pp]; see also: Duncan A. *Opinion delivered by Dr Duncan senior, in the College of Physicians. On the 13th of September 1808, Upon a Charge Against Dr Gregory, for Wilful and Deliberate Violation of Truth*. Edinburgh: A Neill & Co; 1808 [55 pp.].
 - 19 Turner *op. cit.*, ref. 1, 124–5. While John Bell was excluded from the Infirmary because of his differences with Gregory, it is believed that Benjamin Bell did not wish to become one of the surgeons associated with the Infirmary. While he had a large private practice, he had been intermittently unwell for a number of years, and died in April 1806. For many years he also engaged in agriculture, and wrote a number of essays on this topic between 1783 and 1802. These were collected together and published at the suggestion of the then late Dr Adam Smith in a single volume. See: Bell B. *Essays on Agriculture, with a Plan for the Speedy and General Improvement of Land in Great Britain*. Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute; London: G & J Robinson; Dublin: Archer; 1802; Anon. *Bell, Benjamin (1749–1806)*. *Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1963–64; 2: 153–4.
 - 20 All of Cockburn's comments on Gregory that were published in his *Memorials* were extremely sympathetically written.
 - 21 Cockburn *op. cit.*, ref. 9, 105–6. It is a sign of the times that Cockburn should have found this affair amusing. It is likely that these days Gregory, as Professor of Physic in the University would have been severely censured by that body. A Disciplinary panel would have examined his activities and at the least would have found him guilty of letting down the good name of the University. Had John Bell formally gone to Law, there can be little doubt that he would these days have won significant pecuniary damages from him. Alternatively, these days John Bell could have gone to the General Medical Council for redress. In any case the end result was that Gregory severely damaged Bell's long-term clinical prospects and his good name. In another characteristically sympathetic but nevertheless inappropriate reference to Gregory, Cockburn indicated that 'The controversies [engaged in by Gregory] were rather too numerous; **but they never were for any selfish end** [author's emphasis], and he was never entirely wrong. Still a disposition towards personal attack was his besetting sin.' See: Cockburn *op. cit.* ref. 9, 105.
 - 22 Professor Stuart Craig (1903–1975) was approached by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh to write a history of the College on the approach of their Tercentenary. He died suddenly when the proofs were coming off the press, and very shortly before this volume was published. For details of his history of the College of Physicians, see reference 24.
 - 23 According to Comrie, 'So successful had his anatomical classes proved, that a combination, led by Dr James Gregory, professor of the practice of medicine in the university, was formed against him, and he was pursued in a manner which for audacity, if not for bitterness, would be wellnigh impossible at the present day.' See: Comrie J. *History of Scottish Medicine*. Two Volumes. 2nd ed. London: Baillière, Tindall & Cox; 1932; Volume 1, 324.
 - 24 Craig WS. *History of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*. Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications; 1976, 420.
 - 25 Comrie *op. cit.*, ref. 23, Volume 1, 324.
 - 26 Anon. Barclay, John (1758–1826). In: *A Catalogue of Printed Books in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library. II. Books from 1641 to 1850. A–E*. London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library; 1966; 99.
 - 27 Struthers J. Barclay. In: *Historical Sketch of the Edinburgh Anatomical School*. Edinburgh: Maclachlan & Stewart; 1867; 56–70.
 - 28 Bell J. *The Anatomy of the Human Body. Volume 2. Containing the Anatomy of the Heart and Arteries*. Edinburgh: Printed for Cadell & Davies; 1797.
 - 29 He was certainly known to be a member of Gregory's camp, and was rewarded for his loyalty by his appointment to one of the six surgeoncies in the Royal Infirmary in 1800 under Gregory's new arrangements.
 - 30 It should be recalled that extreme exception was taken by James

- Gregory to an earlier pamphlet entitled *A Guide for Gentlemen Studying Medicine in the University of Edinburgh*, by J Johnson, and published in 1792. Its contents were said to have reflected injuriously on some of the professoriate. Gregory attributed the authorship initially to Alexander and then to James Hamilton, who at that time was University Professor of Midwifery. Gregory charged James Hamilton with writing it, and the latter provoked Gregory into beating him with a stick. Hamilton brought an action against Gregory, and the latter was required to pay damages to him of £100, equivalent to about £5,250 in modern terms [information from Enquiry Office, Bank of England]. While the sum involved would have been insignificant to Gregory, there was a principle at stake here. Very few copies of this manuscript are known to survive, as they were withdrawn from circulation, but one is said to be located in the Library of the Royal Medical Society. A recent attempt to locate this pamphlet at the Royal Medical Society was unsuccessful. See: Comrie *op. cit.*, ref. 23, Volume 1, 305, see also: Bell *op. cit.* ref. 14, 503. It appears that Hamilton had a similar pugnacious and quarrelsome personality to Gregory, and brought lawsuits for defamation against a number of his colleagues, as well as against Gregory. See: Comrie *op. cit.*, ref. 23, Volume 2, 485, 488.
- 31 Struthers J. John Bell. In: *Historical Sketch of the Edinburgh Anatomical School*. Edinburgh: Maclachlan & Stewart; 1867; 41, Footnote 1; see also Bell *op. cit.*, ref. 14, 503.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 502.
- 33 Struthers *op. cit.*, ref. 31, 37-44.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 41-2.
- 35 Russell KF. Barclay, John (1758–1826). In: *British Anatomy 1525–1800: A Bibliography*. Parkville, Victoria: Melbourne University Press; 1963; 43.
- 36 From the venom of this attack against Benjamin Bell in the second Dawplucker pamphlet, the reader might wonder whether John Bell was of the opinion that Benjamin Bell might have been the author of the first Dawplucker pamphlet.
- 37 Bell B. *A System of Surgery*. In: 6 Volumes. 2nd ed. Volumes 1–5, Edinburgh: Charles Elliot; London: GGJ & G Robinson. Volume 6, Edinburgh: Charles Elliot; London: C Elliot & T Kay & GGJ & J Robinson; 1785–88 [Volumes 1 & 2, 1785; Volumes 3 & 4, 1786; Volume 5, 1787; Volume 6, 1788] [This ultimately consisted of seven volumes octavo, and passed through seven editions. It began to appear in 1783, and was completed in 1788].
- 38 Comrie *op. cit.*, ref. 23, Volume 1, 331–2.
- 39 Heister L. *A General System of Surgery, in three parts. Containing the Doctrine and Management ... Being a Work of Thirty Years Experience. Translated from the Author's last edition, greatly improved*. 2 Volumes bound into one. 7th ed. London: J Clarke, J Whiston & B White, L Davis & C Reymeis, R Baldwin, W Johnston & H Woodfall; 1763 [Volume 1, 456 pp; Volume 2, 414 pp].
- 40 See: Dawplucker *op. cit.*, ref. 12, Number Second, 118–50.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 42 Miles A. *The Edinburgh School of Surgery before Lister*. London: A & C Black, Ltd; 1918; 59.
- 43 Bell B. A Brief Review and Estimate of the Professional Writings of Benjamin Bell, FRCSE, FRSE, Author of 'A System of Surgery,' and other Works. By Benjamin Bell, FRCSE, Surgeon to the Eye Infirmary, and Non-professorial Examiner in the University of Edinburgh. *Edin Med J* 1869;14:408–33.
- 44 Bell B. *The Life, Character & Writings of Benjamin Bell FRCSE, FRSE Author of a 'System of Surgery,' and other works*. Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas; 1868 [See: Appendix III, 123–70].
- 45 Bell *op. cit.*, ref. 14, 504.
- 46 According to John Bell, when Gregory was drafting his Memorial to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary, 'he was defending himself in the Consistorial Court, from a prosecution for calumny in regard to an anonymous pamphlet.' It is possible that this was the pamphlet entitled *A Guide to the Medical Students attending the University of Edinburgh*, which John Bell was certain had been a product of either Gregory himself or one of his disciples, his 'Copartnership of Surgeons'.