

Haldane Philp Tait (1911–1990)

Haldane Philp Tait MD, FRCP (Edin), FFCM, DPH, was born and educated in Edinburgh, graduating MBChB in 1933. He had a distinguished career in preventive medicine in relation to child health as Principal Medical Officer for the Child Health Service, Edinburgh. He was particularly interested in the training of medical and nursing staff and in 1966–67 he spent a year as Visiting Lecturer at the University of Baroda in India, under the auspices of the World Health Organization.

He made an enormous contribution to the study of the history of medicine. He was a founder member of the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine (SSHM) and was appointed its first secretary in 1948, running its affairs single-handedly for the next 15 years and as Joint Secretary for many years thereafter. He was President of the SSHM, from 1977–1979 and was made Honorary President in 1981 in recognition of the contribution he had made to the Society's affairs.

He was a prolific writer on medico-historical subjects and will be remembered particularly for the Annual Report of the Proceedings of the SSHM. This started as an eight-page report covering the first five meetings of the SSHM, but from about 1953 he began to include notes on items of medico-historical interest. By 1970 it was a 56-page publication, which was distributed to medical history societies and libraries worldwide. For some years financial constraints meant that it could only be published in an abbreviated form in *Medical History*, but he was very pleased to see independent publication resume in 1990, when the edition for 1984–1985 was issued.

In addition to many articles he wrote two books: *A Doctor and Two Policemen* (Edinburgh: Mackenzie and Storrie Ltd, 1974), which details the history of the Edinburgh Health Department from its creation in 1862 to its dissolution in 1974, and *Dr Elsie Maud Inglis (1864-1917): a great lady doctor* (Edinburgh: Bridgend Press, 1964).

He had an intimate knowledge of a wide range of subjects and an encyclopaedic memory. He was nonetheless an unassuming man, who was never condescending and always had a word of encouragement and support to new office bearers in the Society and his many friends young or old.

After he died the SSHM decided to hold a dinner in his memory at which an invited speaker would give a pre-dinner talk and this has continued annually since then, with speakers such as Magnus Magnusson and Professor Tom Devine. The 24th dinner in the series took place in May 2014.



FIGURE 1 Haldane Philp Tait

The Proceedings of the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine, including early numbers with Haldane Tait's notes on medical history, can be found on the SSHM's website at sshm.ac.uk

A collection of Haldane Tait's papers, correspondence and scrapbooks is lodged with the Lothian Health Service Archive at the University of Edinburgh Library http://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk/collections/GD39/GD39_tfla.htm

In addition, thanks to the generosity of the Tait family, a number of his books are in the RCPE library, where they are distinguished by a book plate based on the cartoon above, which was drawn for Haldane's retirement in 1976 by the Edinburgh cartoonist Harry Gilzean.

Acknowledgement

Much of this information comes from notes for an obituary for Haldane Tait, compiled by Dr AHB Masson in 1990.

David Wright