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PAST PRESIDENTS

The Maclagan Dynasty

In the history of the College, there have been several instances when succeeding generations of one family have been Fellows, even Presidents. Few have been Presidents of both the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Edinburgh before or since the Maclagan dynasty.

David Maclagan (1785–1865)

Educated at the Royal High School of Edinburgh and Edinburgh University, he graduated MD in 1805, his thesis entitled *De Sanitate tuenda* before spending some time at St George's Hospital London. By this time the Napoleonic Wars were at their height. Wellington and combined forces of Britain, Spain and Portugal were facing Napoleon's generals in the Iberian Peninsula (1808–1814). David enlisted as Assistant Surgeon, alongside Alexander Lesassier, the nephew of James Hamilton, President of the RCPE and Professor of Midwifery, Edinburgh. He went to Portugal in 1809, and in 1810 became staff surgeon to the 25,000-strong 9th Portuguese Brigade under the command of Colonel Manley Power, seeing service at the battles of Badajoz (1812) Salamanca (1812) and Nive (1813) and was subsequently awarded the Peninsular Medal with six clasps and promoted to 'Physician to the Forces', with a military

career much more distinguished and honourable than that of Lesassier. Records show that, in addition to the horrific wounds, major infections must have challenged him and his staff.

Whether or not he was at Waterloo in 1815 is not known. He returned to Edinburgh and set up in surgical practice in 1816, being elected FRCSEd in that same year, and becoming President in 1826. In 1828 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and appointed Surgeon-in-Ordinary to Her Majesty in Scotland in 1838. Edinburgh was unique at that time in having a Chair of Military Surgery (1806–55), and David joined the second incumbent, Professor Sir George Ballingall (1780–1855), as a lecturer.

At the age of 63 years, by then famous as a lecturer and a surgeon with a thriving practice, he changed his career and became a physician. He was later elected President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1856. He had seven sons, three of whom followed him into medicine. One, Douglas, did so with great distinction.

Andrew Douglas Maclagan (1812–1900)

The eldest of David's seven sons, he was born in Ayr in 1812 after his father had returned from the Peninsular War. It has been said that

he was baptised by the same minister who had baptised Robert Burns, but that is very unlikely.

Douglas, like his father, went to Edinburgh's Royal High School and University, gaining his LRCSE in 1831, followed by his FRCSEd and MD in 1833. After visiting Paris, Berlin and London he returned to Edinburgh as an assistant to his father who by this time was a famous surgeon and academic. He must soon have realised that surgery was not his forte and he gave it up to lecture on *Materia Medica* in Edinburgh's Extra-Mural School of Medicine.

He was appointed by the Crown to the Chair of Medical Jurisprudence in 1862, three years before his father died. He became an authority on the analysis of poisons and, as a result, was involved in many famous court cases.

Although he had not worked as a surgeon for many years, he served as President of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh 1859–1861 and as President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh 1884–87. The Maclagan dynasty continued, with two of his sons becoming doctors. Could any doctor wish for a better epithet: '...not a great physician but a splendid man – a fine musician, raconteur, wit, polished, courteous and lovable'?

Derek Doyle
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