

## The Edinburgh College Senior Fellows Club

Why should you become a member of the Senior Fellows Club? Senior is an ill-defined concept that can be classified by age, years of work (full or part-time), or official (or for some unofficial) retirement. A less official marker of seniority might be those who find themselves commenting “When I was young.” In practice, it seems that Senior Fellows have a common distinguishing factor in that we now have no juniors!

Why should you join? There are numerous benefits. For retired Members and Fellows, there is an opportunity to visit the College in a relaxed mind frame, as most Senior Fellows have no mandatory time constraints. Gone are the days when a visit to the College was usually for a time-limited specific purpose. Some Fellows will remember being examined, being examiners, or even both. I wonder what the shortest time between the two might be. Senior Fellows also have the opportunity to study and savour the occasional idiosyncratic features of the College building and contents. Some examples: The Great Hall can receive external illumination no matter how dark the sky is – there are external floodlights that shine downwards onto the frosted glass window skylights. On percussion the ‘marble’ columns in the Main Hall turn out to be hollow, the outside tube being modified linoleum that hides inner girders. A tunnel beneath Queen Street allows an escape into Queen Street gardens without the risks of traffic. There is a Physic Garden containing a selection of politically correct medicinal plants (poppies and Marijuana are notable by their absence).

The Physician’s Gallery opposite the entrance has rotating exhibitions. Currently, there is an exhibition on Skin that is an in-depth account of what is paradoxically a “superficial” subject. Immediately interior to the College entrance there is a showcase of College Mementos for sale. These include College ties, which these days ties are seldom worn by juniors, seniors, or even Presidents. Is this a desire to appear fashionable or is there data to suggest that tie tips are a microbiological hazard? The book compiled by Stefan Slater “Medical Lives: Memories and Musings,” is a collection of reflections and reminiscences of members of the Senior Fellow Club is on sale and highly recommended (non-conflict of interest. I was a contributor). Surprisingly there are teddy bears on sale, wearing identifying evidence of College allegiance. Perhaps these teddy bears are for a sub-junior Cub College membership, thus enhancing a “cradle to grave” approach in caring for anyone affiliated to the College? It seems that visiting lecturers often purchase these for children and grandchildren: one presumes they, the teddy bears, will in due course be heirlooms and “Seniors Bears”.

Senior Fellows also have time for quiet repose in the College Libraries. Adjacent to the Main Hall there is the New Library, and at a higher level the Old Library (where the ever-helpful librarians work). Confusingly the New Library is older than the Old Library, or is it the other way round? To confuse matters further there is a Top Library. There is a surprising range of books available to suit every taste including selections of books on witchcraft and a selection on the care of horses. The explanation for the latter is that while the College now has a small car park at its rear that site originally provided stabling where Senior College officials ‘parked’ their horses. Times have changed, though we still discuss cars in terms of horsepower.

College rooms can be rented for meetings, conferences, and social functions. But be warned, you might have to be historically informed - one of my daughters married an American and, on entering the College, the Groom's parents demanded a potted history commencing with the question "Gee, how old is this place?" A potted history therefore follows.

The College, although not in the current building, was first mooted in 1617 when King James (6<sup>th</sup> of Scotland and 1<sup>st</sup> of England) visited Edinburgh. In 1681 King Charles II granted the College a Royal Charter. A College Library was initiated in 1682 when Robert Sibbald donated a collection of books. In 1781 the College moved to a purpose-built hall on George Street and in 1844 work started at Queen Street which was formally purchased in 1868. In 1929 Dr Ella Pringle became the first female member and subsequently first female Fellow. In 1986 Queen Elizabeth opened the Conference Centre and in 2019 the International Conference Centre was opened.

The Senior Fellows Club meets monthly during university term times with talks, usually with only a slight medical flavour, before a communal lunch at which one can meet erstwhile colleagues to discuss medical and non-medical matters of general import. All talks can be watched online but the College is easily accessible by public transport for Edinburgh residents be it surface rail, buses, and trams. The St Andrew Square tram stop is two minutes walk away and Waverly train station five minutes. Medical matters discussed over lunch can range from the serious "Whatever are the politicians aiming to achieve for the NHS?" and "Is it reasonable for doctors to take industrial action?" Some, possibly incorrectly, would claim we are not an industry whilst others, possibly correctly, opine that industrial action should be termed industrial inaction. Other topics have been "Is the rise of Artificial Intelligence a threat to genuine medical intelligence?" "Does gout affect one side of the body more than the other?" (answer was there none). "What are the consequences of the increasing electronic takeover of medical communications?"

Although the ability to touch type is an unassailable requirement there are no requirements for touch typing ability for doctors. Perhaps an "MRCP(UK) 56wpm" has a future. In one prandial discussion it was remarked that only single questions should be asked by email - if more were asked then replies to all questions were hardly ever forthcoming. Similarly, those of us who continue with editorial responsibilities find that it now takes about eight requests to obtain the required two peer reviewers, whereas previously it only took five. No doubt clinicians are now busier and cannot find time for this unpaid voluntary work. It is literally apparent that junior staff often have tattoos but as far as one can see, none of the Senior Fellows have them. I am willing to be corrected (photos please!). Golf, a chronically relapsing condition, seems to be an occupational hazard for Senior Fellows. Other, more personal discussions, include such questions as "What tablets are you taking now."

Once a year there is a guest lunch accompanied by music, sometimes provided by a local music school and sometimes provided by Fellows. Prior to the lunch, there is an exhibition of works by Fellows or their spouses, ranging from paintings, photographs, sculptures, quilts, and cartoons. Other activities include a walking group, and a regular summer outing

to a site of interest. Recent outings pre-Covid included the Pitlochry Festival Theatre, the Fife Nuclear Bunker and Paxton House, and this year was to the Burrell Collection.

For those who live further afield, the College can offer accommodation. Four bedrooms are available. *Very sensibly* exam candidates are not allowed to stay when examinations are being held! Book by e-mail [reception@rcpe.ac.uk](mailto:reception@rcpe.ac.uk) or phone 0131 247 3600.

You can join the Senior Fellows Club by a form on the College Website (<https://www.rcpe.ac.uk/membership/join-senior-fellows-club>) or approaching any of the Club Committee. Membership can be extended to those who have done valiant work out with the College and wish to join the Club.

Philip D Welsby