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# A HISTORY OF THE OLD SURGEONS' HALL, EDINBURGH, 1697 TO THE PRESENT

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The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd) has existed in some form since 1505 when the 'surregeanis and barbouris'<sup>1</sup> of the city were formally recognised as a Guild of the Burgh, the first of Edinburgh's fourteen incorporated trades.<sup>2</sup> The Guild acquired a Royal Charter in 1567, and over the next four hundred years evolved into an internationally recognised postgraduate surgical training college.<sup>3</sup> During this time the Surgeons have occupied a number of buildings on the South Side of the Old Town of Edinburgh. These have included the modern Surgeons' Hall from 1832 to the present day, and the Old Surgeons' Hall, the subject of this article, between 1697 and 1832.

The Surgeons had several other meeting places before their acquisition of the Old Hall site in 1656. Until 1647 the Incorporation had no permanent accommodation, often congregating in the house of its Deacon or occasionally in part of St Giles' Kirk on the Royal Mile.<sup>4</sup> In August of that year, they acquired for the first time 'three rowmes of ane tenement of land' in Dickson's Close<sup>5</sup>. They added a fourth room in 1649, but vacated the property in 1650 in favour of new lodgings at Kirkheuch, near St Giles. The Incorporation tried to leave this property after only six months, but they were prevented from doing so by the landlord Robert Hardie, who would not allow the removal of their goods. It was only possible for the Surgeons to leave the property in 1654, when they moved to 'two front rooms in John Scott's House' and later to a 'chamber' owned by Thomas Kincaid in 1655.<sup>6</sup> However, in the following year this instability came to an end when the Surgeons

acquired the land on which Old Surgeons' Hall was to be built some forty years later.

The site was tucked into the far south-eastern corner of the Flodden Wall,<sup>7</sup> which at that time still contained the city of Edinburgh. In the twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries this area was part of a larger portion of land belonging to the Crown which was later granted to the religious Order of the Black Friars by Alexander II in 1230. From that date onwards, a Friary grew up on the site which remained there until 1559, when it was demolished and the Friars expelled in the course of the Reformation. At this point the land passed to the Town Council, and from 1578 a portion of the site to the west of the future Surgeons' Hall became the first permanent home of the Edinburgh High School.<sup>8</sup>

In the early seventeenth century the eastern part of the site was bought by Sir John Skene, Lord Curriehill, who built a substantial house there. On the death in 1633 of his son Sir James Skene, also Lord Curriehill, the house was vacated and it was acquired again by the Town Council in 1641. This purchase came about as a result of the donation in August of that year by Mr Bartholomew Somervell of 20,000 merks for the endowment of a Chair of Divinity at the University, along with a further 6,000 merks to build a house for the professor.<sup>9</sup> However, as the latter sum was not adequate for a new building, the Council bought up the mansion formerly owned by Lord Curriehill instead.<sup>10</sup> For the next fifteen years the house was used for accommodating not only the new Professor of Divinity but also numerous other University staff. A contemporary map executed

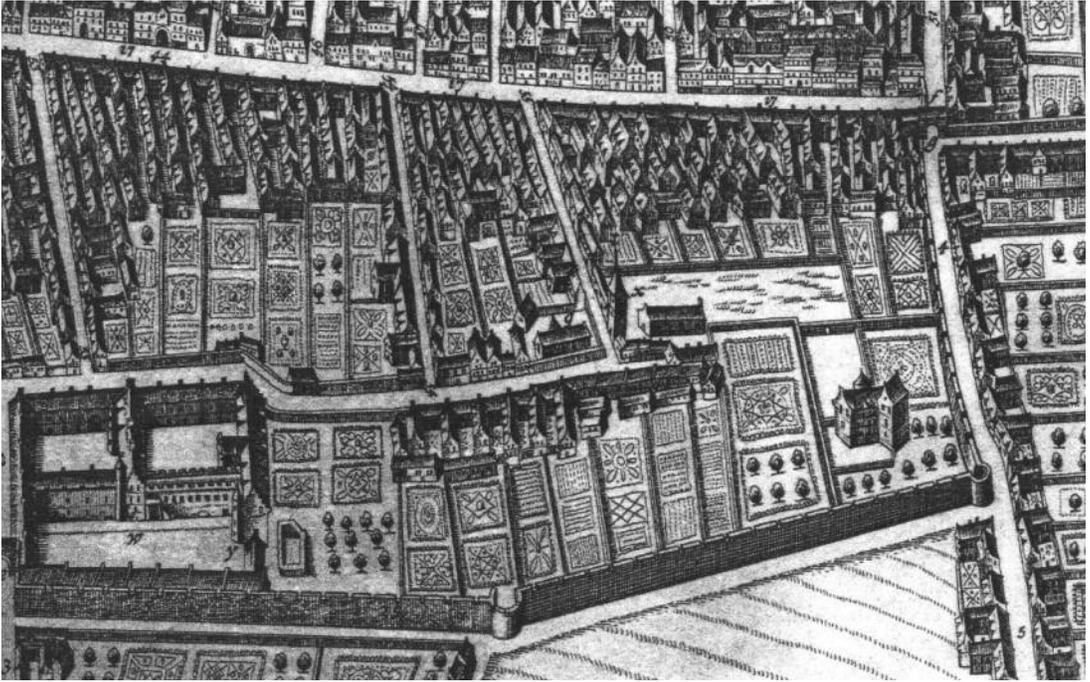


Fig. 1. James Gordon, extract from *Edinuoeduensis Tabulam*, 1776. Copyright: National Library of Scotland.

by James Gordon of Rothiemay in 1647 shows the building in its grounds.<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 1) It appears to have been an impressive L-shaped tower with three main floors, ogee gables, several large windows, and formal gardens with some tree plantations. Despite this appearance, the building was in poor condition, and in 1656 it was decided that it was no longer adequate for the Council's purposes. As a result it was put up for sale and was bought by Thomas Kincaid, Deacon of the Surgeons.<sup>12</sup>

Over the next few years the Incorporation undertook wide-ranging alterations to Curriehill House, especially in the grounds. It was here from 1658 onwards that they developed the first physic garden in Edinburgh. The garden contained several different varieties of 'medicinal herbs and flowers' and required a full-time gardener whose only payment was the rent-free occupation of a newly built house in the grounds.<sup>13</sup> Plans for the modernisation or

rebuilding of Curriehill House are hinted at by the presence of late seventeenth-century drawings in the RCSEd archive. These depict an L-shaped house belonging to the Surgeons, but of a far more modern appearance than that shown on Gordon's map. However, they are only labelled as 'Plans of House Belonging to RCSEd' and they are not visibly signed or dated (Fig. 2).

In any case, despite the investment made by the Surgeons in the site there were concerns about the safety and suitability of the building itself as early as 1669. At a meeting on 18 May there was discussion of 'what they would do anent the building of the Convening House', and attempts were made to collect funds from the members in order to allow a new building to be constructed. However, for reasons which are unclear, the project did not go ahead, while Curriehill House continued to decline. In 1676, some of the roof slates were removed to

prevent further deterioration, and whole sections of the building had to be demolished 'where it was faulty and likely to fall'. By 1686, it was accepted that Curriehill House was 'neither wind tight nor water tight,'<sup>14</sup> and although determined efforts at repair continued right up until 30 March 1696,<sup>15</sup> it was obvious that a new building was urgently needed.

The initiative for the building of Surgeons' Hall had finally come from the Town Council in 1694.<sup>16</sup> At the request of the Incorporation, the Council granted them 'the bodies of fundlings who dye betwixt the tyme that they are weaned and thir being put to schools or trades; also the dead bodies of such as are stiflet in the birth, which are exposed, and have none to owne them, as also the dead bodies of such as are *felo de se*, and have none to owne them; likeways the bodies of such as are put to death by sentence of the magistrat, and have none to owne

them.' However, this offer was made on condition that 'the petitioners [the Surgeons] shall before the term of Michaelmas 1697 years build, repair and have in readiness an anatomical theatre where they shall once a year (a subject offering) have a public anatomical dissection as much as can be shown upon one body, and if they fail these presents to be void and null.'<sup>17</sup> This offer represented a unique opportunity for the Surgeons to expand their practice and teaching of anatomy,<sup>18</sup> although for some reason they did not decide to accept it until 1696.

On 29 February 1696 a meeting of the Surgeons was told that 'The Deacon... had mett with Mr James Smith who had drawn a draught of the house the Calling [the Surgeons] intended to cause build and according to the Callings orders had paid him a Guinea and given him a glass of wyne for his advice anent the building of the house which the Calling approves of.'<sup>19</sup> James Smith (1646–1731) was a well-known architect in Edinburgh at this time and had recently built his house at Whitehill, now known as Newhailes, just outside the city.<sup>20</sup> By 7 July 1696 he had completed the plans for Surgeons' Hall, and a meeting of the Surgeons was informed of 'a scheme and design of an house done by Mr James Smith which he offers to build for the sume of 500 *l* Sterling and to finish the same all except glass and finishing the great hall and one other room.' The meeting was then asked 'whether they would agree to the said offer and accepting thereof,' which those present unanimously did. A committee was then appointed 'to agree with the said Mr James Smith anent the way and manner of building of the said house and to enter in contract with him for that effect and ... to borrow money for carrying on the said work as shall be that needfull not exceeding the sume of five hundred pounds sterling.'<sup>21</sup>

The drawings which Smith produced for the Incorporation in July 1696 no longer exist. As a result very little is known about the interior of the Hall, although a lecture given by John Gairdner at the RCSEd on 19 January 1860 explained that

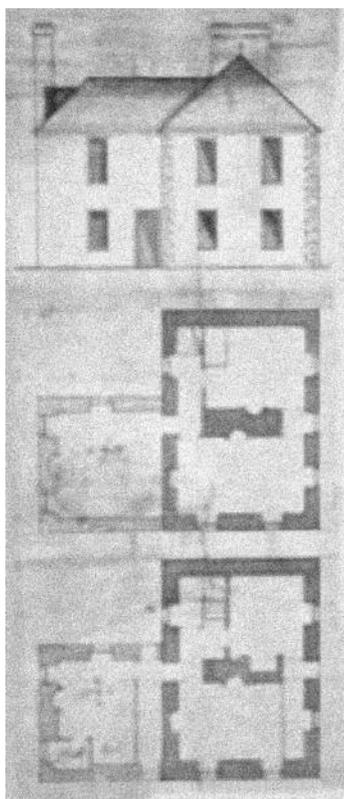


Fig. 2. Unknown Draughtsman, 'Plans of House Belonging to RSCed', late 17th century

'Monteath's chemical rooms were three in number, and were in the west wing and ground floor. The two windows immediately to the West of the centre one lighted the great hall, which had also windows from the back.'<sup>22</sup> However, more is known about the exterior of the building, which is well recorded in Paul Sandby's engraving of the Hall of 1753 (Fig. 3). This has been combined with conjectural reconstruction in a convincing model of the building by John Baird in the RCSEd Museum.

The Hall was nine bays wide and two storeys high with a steep roof and two large chimney blocks, one at either end of the roof flat. An unusual feature (which remains today) was the addition to each side of the main block of an octagonal stair tower with a pointed roof, giving the building a rather flamboyant skyline.<sup>23</sup> The walls were harled throughout, with quoins both at the corners and separating the central five bays from those at the edges. Within the central section, the upper storeys of bays three, five and seven were emphasised by large rounded windows, which were repeated at the rear of the building in bays three to seven. Returning to the front façade the upper storeys of bays four and six were treated differently, with large round headed niches containing small round windows above carved square panels.

The building was (and still is) entered on axis through a door below a pediment carved with the date 1697, and the axial arrangement was emphasised in the original design by an avenue of trees leading through the courtyard from the entrance gates to the building itself. The gate piers consisted of alternating smooth and vertically channelled sections, each pier being topped with a carved urn producing an effect similar to the surviving gateway of William Adam's later but immediately adjacent Royal Infirmary of 1738–1748.<sup>24</sup> To either side of the gateway at the Old Surgeons' Hall were the two pavilions which marked the northern outer corners of the courtyard, which was bounded to the south by the Flodden Wall. The pavilions were plain, small, two storey buildings with

three bays to the front and two to the sides. The entrance to each pavilion was by a single door which faced northwards away from the main Hall, and like the main building itself they were harled with quoins at the corners and steep roofs. The overall plan of the building and its site can be understood by consulting William Edgar's map of Edinburgh of 1765, on which the Hall, pavilions, courtyard and avenue are all clearly visible.<sup>25</sup>

The design of the Surgeons' Hall and its arrangement on the site bears some relation to late seventeenth-century country house and garden planning in Scotland as exemplified by the work of Smith's contemporary Sir William Bruce (c.1630–1710).<sup>26</sup> The placement of the building on an axis emphasised by an avenue of trees, the use of pavilions to either side of the main block, and the division of the main Hall into three allowing the central bays to be emphasised by extra features such as carved stonework are all characteristic of houses such as Bruce's Kinross of 1679 onwards.<sup>27</sup> This similarity may be explained by Smith's close involvement with country house building, or by the simple fact that the country house was the most common large building type of the period on which other large commissions would naturally in part be modelled. Alternatively, the setting of a building somewhat like a country house on the edge of a very crowded city where few people could afford any open land might have been intended to emphasise the status of the owners.

In any case, Smith's design was agreeable to the Surgeons, Curriehill House was demolished, and building work on the new Hall was begun with considerable speed. A meeting of the Incorporation on 6 August 1696 was informed that 'The Deacon ... had mett with Mr James Smith and Andrew Paterson Wright whom the sd Mr James Smith had taken in as a partner with him that they had agreed with them anent the way and manner of building of the house ... and had entered into contract with them.' At the same meeting it was agreed that 'The Calling allows

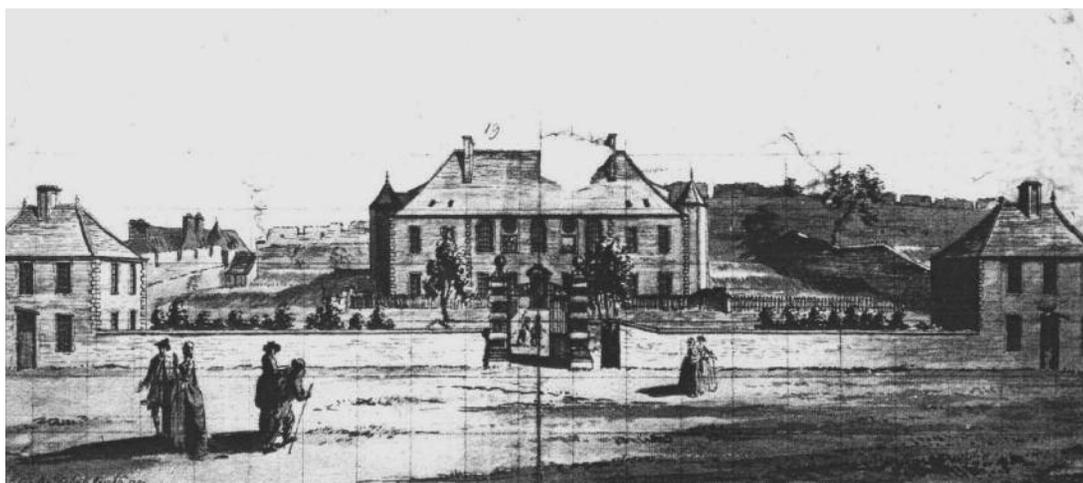


Fig. 3. Paul Sandby, *Front of the Surgeons Hall at Edinburgh* (1753)

the Boxmaster [Treasurer] to cast in a Guinea under the foundation stone of their house when the same is first layed.<sup>28</sup> Later that year the Surgeons needed to request minor alterations to the design as the building work progressed, the minutes of a meeting of the 2 October recording that 'the deacon represented to the Calling that there was wanting in the two gabels of their house four windows which were omitted to be insert in their contract...and that the Chimney in the laboratorie was too little and therefore desired the Callings advice how the same might be made good while the house was yet abuilding. The Calling ordains Mr James Smith to make two windows in each gabell of the house more than what is in the draught of the house...and to make the Chimney in the Laboratory pended and as large as can be had.<sup>29</sup>

This alteration seems to have been executed successfully, and work continued over the winter of 1696–97 so that on 18 February 1697 the Deacon was able to report to a meeting of the Surgeons 'that the house is come to such a length now that it is expected that the rooffe will be put upon it against Whitsunday next.<sup>30</sup> Before the roofing was completed, however, another alteration was decided on by a meeting of the 'Committiee for building of the house' which

took place on 12 March 1697. The Deacon explained to the committee 'how necessary it would be that the Garrets of the house might be made good lodgable roomes if there were chimneys in them and that now was the only time for ordering the same.' The committee 'approv[ed] of the said proposal and impoweres the deacon to agree with Mr James Smith for putting up chimneys in the Garrets as he as he shall think fitting.<sup>31</sup> This alteration, too, seems to have been successfully implemented.

Soon afterwards, an unexpected opportunity arose to improve the quality of finishing of the Hall. A meeting of the Surgeons on 16 April 1697 was informed by the Deacon 'that those windows that are to be arched might be made... with French glass for beautifying of the house.' Furthermore, it was suggested 'that there being a stranger now upon the place who was very skilful and cuild work very well in carving of timber... if the Calling thought fitt (while that man was here) to take occasion to employ him for cutting out a Chimney peece and door peeeces for the great hall.' Having considered the Deacon's advice, it was recorded in the minutes that 'The Calling unanimoslie approves of the said report.<sup>32</sup> The 'stranger' was duly employed for

interior timber carving work, while at a meeting of 3 August it was decided 'to agree with any wright they please for making the frames of the . . . windows.'<sup>33</sup>

By July 1697, the structure of the Hall was largely completed and work on the roof was in progress. However, this stage of construction seems to have caused some tension between the Surgeons and their contractors. On 23 July the Deacon, Alexander Monteith, and Boxmaster, Walter Porterfield, submitted a petition to the Dean of Guild of the City alleging that Smith and Paterson had failed to fulfil the part of their contract which bound them to roof the new Hall with 'good bleu sclaite.' The Surgeons claimed that contractors had instead 'laid down a considerable quantitie of gray sclaite and resolves to sclaite the said house therwith contrair to the said contract.'<sup>34</sup> It is unclear how this dispute was resolved, but it seems that the roof had been completed and relations with the contractors improved by 25 October, when the minutes of a meeting of the building committee record 'having mett with Mr James Smith and having consent with him anent the covering of the rigging of the house whether it should be done with ston or lead. It is agreed and considered that the same shall be done with lead and conform with that Mr James Smith to doe the same in the best manner not exceeding five pounds sterling.'<sup>35</sup> It seems likely that the dispute had been resolved by the employment of an outside contractor to finish the roof, as an account dated 4 February 1699 instructs 'Walter Porterfield, treasurer, to pay to Peter Simson, slater, the sum of two hundred and seven pounds, twelve shillings and six pennies.'<sup>36</sup>

Once the difficulties over the roof had been resolved, by 9 November the building was 'nigh finished',<sup>37</sup> and it was declared to be complete on 17 December 1697,<sup>38</sup> in accordance with the conditions of the Council's offer of three years before. However, the interior was not completed for more than a year afterwards. At a meeting on the 10 November 1698 the Surgeons 'ordain[ed] Walter Porterfield their

Boxmaster to pay to John Wardrop wright five hundred merks for laithing and plaistering the rooffe of their great hall for making a large oval table to the said hall and for making and putting up the Ravell to the Stair that enters up to the hall.' The quality of workmanship had clearly been high, as the minutes then refer to 'the said John Wardrop his good and faithfull work therein the Calling ordains the said Boxmaster to pay to the said John as a gratuity to his wife five pounds sterling.'<sup>39</sup> The minutes of a meeting of the Surgeons as late as 31 March 1699 record an instruction to Walter Porterfield 'to buy that carpet for the table of the great hall.'<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, substantial work continued inside the Surgeons' Hall on its most unusual feature, the two Turkish baths known as the 'Bagnio'. This innovation seems to have been intended to provide extra funds for the college, but the project was fraught with difficulty throughout. A meeting of the Surgeons on 9 November 1697 was told that 'the Bagnio will shortly be readie for use.'<sup>41</sup> However, it is clear from the minutes of a meeting held ten days later that the 'Bagnio' did not yet even have a water supply. On that occasion the Surgeons decided to 'try for watter from their own well in the yeard that is betwixt them and the High Schoole and to cause cleanse it and dig it deeper and therefore ordains that the same be done with all conveniencie.'<sup>42</sup>

It seems that this did not provide an adequate supply, leading the Surgeons to request permission from the Town Council to utilise the overflow from a well at the top of Niddries Wynd, a nearby street.<sup>43</sup> The necessary work was authorised by a meeting of the Surgeons on 26 May 1701, which decided that 'having mett with Patrick Skirven plumber anent the inbringing of the watter and the expenses therefore It was agreed that the boxmaster was to furnish lead for making of the pypes and Patrick Skirven was to make and lay the same and lay the causey and to furnish all there necessary for the same and to cover the pypes in every part.'<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, although the work was completed

Skirven was dissatisfied with his pay, a dispute which was not resolved until November 1701.<sup>45</sup>

Over a year later the Incorporation was still in the process of finishing the interior of the 'Bagnio'. A contract of 17 March 1703 between the Surgeons and John Valentine, a Venetian by origin, bounded the latter to 'finish an compleat workmanlyke the present little room in the new house... designed for a bathing roome, within the new Royall Bagnio or bathing roome to be made twenty foot square without the walls to the eastward of the said house as shall be advised and as he best can both with furnaces and cupulas.'<sup>46</sup> From this time onwards, work seems to have progressed quite rapidly. On 12 June a further contract was made between the Incorporation and John Forrest, requiring the latter 'to buy at Holland for the use of the said Incorporation their Bagnio the number of four hundred good and sufficient white marble stones and four hundred good and sufficient black marble stones all free of cracks and veins of the bigness and quantity of an Amsterdam foot square for pavement of the floor of the bagnio as also to buy the number of seven thousand white lyme tyles without any other painting on them about five inches square.'<sup>47</sup>

Soon afterwards, on 21 July 1703, the Surgeons paid Thomas Warrender £26 for metalwork including 'Gilding with English Gold ane large copper Glob, and the Sun [the crest of the Surgeons], which finishes the top of the cuppilla of their Bathouse'. The payment also included painting the doors, the pedestal of the globe, and other paintwork with 'reid lead and oyll'.<sup>48</sup> On 4 September, John Forrest's shipment of tiles from Holland arrived,<sup>49</sup> while on 9 September Joseph Forster completed the lead work on the bath house which included seventeen brass cocks, five bath tubs, and new lead piping.<sup>50</sup> Further metal work was completed on 29 September by James Miller, coppersmith in the Canongate, whose contributions included a copper bottom for the bath, and a new copper globe.<sup>51</sup>

By the end of 1703 the 'Bagnio' was nearly ready for use, and a meeting of the Surgeons on 4 November

outlined the remaining work which needed to be done, including 'the cornish and pillars of the Tables within the Bagnioes to be painted in oyle coullor black and white and to have white veynes'. However, the bath house was already causing financial difficulties, as the minutes go on to note that 'It is their oppinion that there should be borrowed two thousand merks at this terme of Martinmes for clearing of severall accompts upon the account of the Bagnio and otherwayes.' Eventually, the Bagnio was opened to the public on 26 January 1704,<sup>52</sup> with the following public announcement:

'There is now erected at the Surgeon-Apothecaries' Hall in Edinburgh Two fine Bagnios after the Turkish Fashion, where all Noblemen, Gentlemen, Ladies and others may be conveniently sweated and bathed-The men on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and the women on Tuesdays and Fridays (on which two days no man is allowed to come within the garden). The price for each person is 3 pounds Scots. And if any person desires the use of a Bagnio alone they are to pay 6 pounds. The prices for the beds in the upper rooms of the Bagnio is to be two shillings ster. per night for a single person and if two shall lay together they are to pay three shillings ster. each night. There is nothing to be given to the Servants.'

Although the opening of a public 'Bagnio' was an unusual and original attempt to improve the Incorporation's finances, it never quite achieved the popularity that the Surgeons had hoped for. It required continuous maintenance, especially between 1709 and 1710, during which time John Wardrop was paid £82 Scots. for installing two wainscot casements for the windows of the great bagnio and one for the little bagnio, for 'plaister lyme and a plaisterer in helping all the cornish round pictures,' and for facing the doors between the two 'Bagnios'.<sup>53</sup> By 1729, the 'Bagnio' was proving to be a serious financial liability, and at a meeting on 15 January the Surgeons decided that it should be dismantled, 'The Calling considering that the incomes of their Bagnio Does

not sufficiently answer the charges they are at about it. They therefor Resolved to give up the same against Whitsunday next.' From January 1731 use of the 'Bagnio' was discontinued and its various parts were gradually sold off.

However, the meeting of 15 January 1729 went on to discuss even more serious financial matters than those associated with the bath house. The minutes record that 'By Plurality of voices [the Surgeons] Agreed to sett [rent] the whole house to any person who shall think fitt to take the same And for that End Appointed the same to be advertised in the Edinburgh Courant and Mercury.'<sup>54</sup> Although no suitable tenant could be found on this occasion, the Surgeons continued attempting to lease the Hall for several years until 1734 when it was finally decided that they should retain the building for their own use.<sup>55</sup> The Incorporation had already leased the western pavilion some years before in 1728,<sup>56</sup> and it seems that the Surgeons were in a state of almost permanent financial crisis during this period. The reasons for this are unclear, but it is certain that the Incorporation lost a great deal of revenue when it split from the Barbers of Edinburgh in 1722 and became a purely surgical College.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the Surgeons' resources were drained by an ongoing conflict with the Royal College of Physicians over their respective privileges in Edinburgh.<sup>58</sup> For whatever reason, the financial crisis continued into the 1740s, forcing the Surgeons to lease over the course of the decade first the eastern pavilion<sup>59</sup> and later the east and west gables of the Hall itself.<sup>60</sup> Although these measures did provide a greatly improved income, the Surgeons found that as landlords responsible for the accommodation of their tenants they incurred new financial responsibilities. A meeting of 24 July 1751 'Authorized the Treasurer to prevent the rain from sipping through the wall of Lord Elchis's lodging and stagnateing there, and to mend the locks and Doors of Mr McDougalls Lodging as he shall Judge proper. Recommended to and Authorized the Treasurer to cause mend the Iron gate, And repair

the Timber pailings in their yeards, in such a manner as he shall Judge best.'<sup>61</sup>

Despite the burden of these commitments, the Surgeons continued to regard leasing of their property as a solution to their financial problems. In 1764 this policy was extended to feuing parts of the courtyard to builders who would develop housing, the occupants of which would pay the Surgeons an annual feu duty. On 9 May two lots of ground to the east and two to the west of the Hall were to be feued to the highest bidder at the Exchange Coffee House. Although the feus to the west seem not to have been taken up at this point, those to east were obtained by the architect William Mylne, who proceeded to build two houses on the site. This development was the first of a series of major alterations to the Surgeon's Hall site which substantially altered the nature of the courtyard and ultimately of the building itself. In 1773, the Dean of Guild reported that the east pavilion was unsafe, and as a result it seems to have been demolished as there are no further records of it and it no longer exists today.<sup>62</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 14 June 1776, a meeting of the Surgeons decided to remove the avenue to the entrance of the Hall and replace it with a more fashionable circular garden design.<sup>63</sup> The following year, Dr Duncan built a house on the west side of the courtyard.<sup>64</sup> Simultaneously, the western pavilion seems to have been absorbed into Alexander Laing's New High School which was rising adjacent to the Courtyard of Surgeons' Hall from 1777 onwards.<sup>65</sup> Further changes came in the years up to 1786, during which the remaining feus were taken up, almost all by medical professionals, and the Courtyard became known as Surgeons' Square.

By the early nineteenth century the Old Surgeons' Hall was falling into decay despite the fact that it had become the centre of a thriving medical community in Surgeons' Square, recorded in T.H. Shepherd's drawing of 1829 (Fig. 4).<sup>66</sup> Although improvements to the Square were still being considered by the Incorporation in 1817<sup>67</sup> and even as late as 1824,<sup>68</sup> an



Fig. 4. Thomas Shepherd, *Surgeon Square in 1829*

architect's report eventually revealed that the main building was unsafe. This led to the establishment of the RSCED in Playfair's new Hall on Nicolson Street in 1832, at which point the Old Surgeons' Hall was sold to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Numerous proposals for the building were put forward, including its conversion into a classroom for Dr Aitkin at the University Medical School. This suggestion took the form of a petition from Dr Robert Knox to the Dean of Guild of the City of Edinburgh submitted on 12 September 1833.<sup>69</sup> Knox wrote 'That the Petitioner is about to make certain internal alterations upon the said Tenement [Old Surgeons' Hall], to take down and rebuild part of the walls thereof, and also to open an entrance by means of a stair entering from the back thereof, conform to the plans of the said alterations herewith produced.'

Despite the detailed nature of Dr Knox's proposals, it is not clear whether they were accepted

or not. The Old Surgeons' Hall did become the 'Lock Hospital' and was later converted into a Fever Hospital. During this period the building was considerably altered, the first floor windows greatly enlarged, and a second floor added. The Old Surgeons' Hall is visible on the Ordnance Survey map of 1852 only as part of a large hospital complex including William Adam's Royal Infirmary and David Bryce's more recent Surgical Hospital of 1848–53, the latter having merged into Laing's High School building by this time.<sup>70</sup> When the Royal Infirmary was moved to a new site on Lauriston Place in 1879, the area lost its central importance to medical life in Edinburgh. Many of the buildings were eventually acquired by the University, including the Old Surgeons' Hall. In 1957, Basil Spence and Partners were commissioned to make suitable alterations to the Hall so that it could be put to use as the Department of Natural Philosophy.

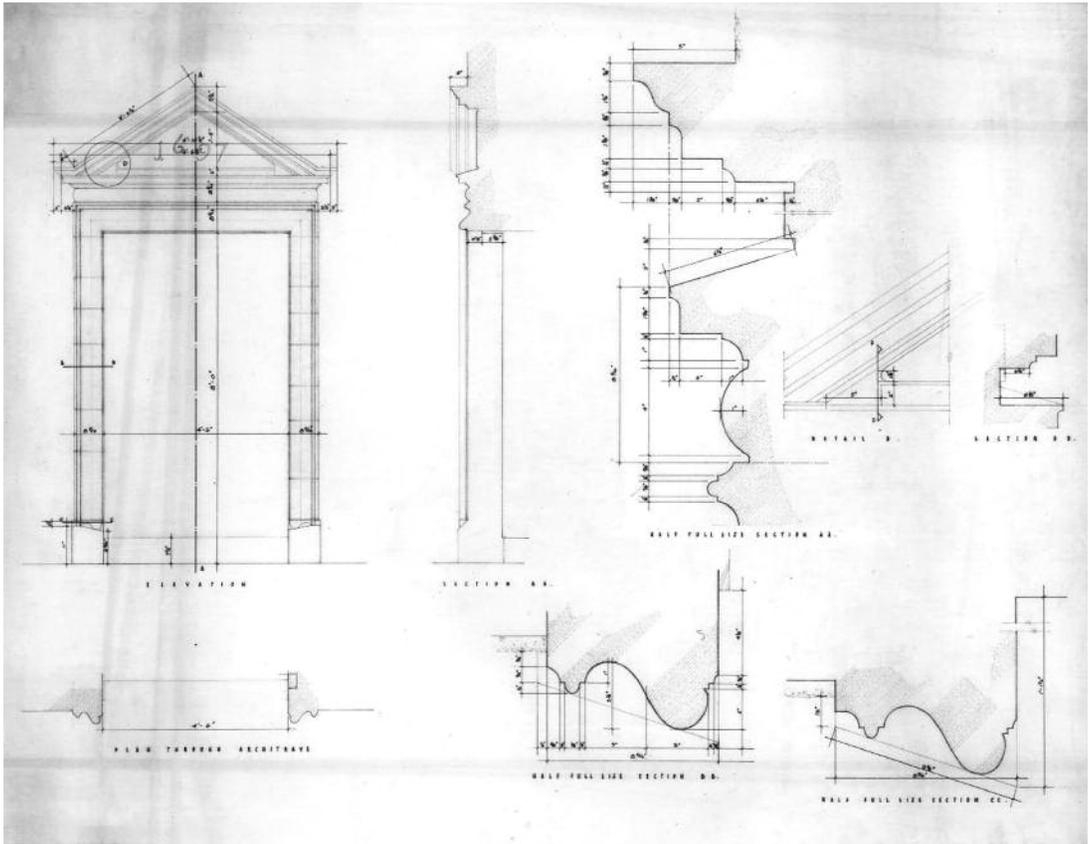


Fig. 5. Basil Spence and Partners, *Plans for the restoration of the stonework at the entrance to Old Surgeons' Hall* (1958).  
 Crown copyright: RCAHMS (Spence, Glover and Ferguson Collection).

The drawings relating to this project are now in the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland as part of the Spence, Glover and Ferguson Collection.

The restoration of 1957–58 appears to have been a remarkably sensitive one. Most proposals for the exterior were concerned with restoring the building's appearance by removing unattractive gas vents, chimneys, roof vents, window bars and outhouses. The remaining round-headed window on the ground floor at the rear of the building was restored, broken cills and lintels were replaced, ground floor windows were renewed, and old windows opened up where they had been blocked.<sup>71</sup>

There was also extensive restoration of stonework including the reproduction of the original pediment which had been transferred to the new Surgeons' Hall. This process involved the execution of laboriously detailed drawings of the stone mouldings around the main doorway (Fig. 5). The only major changes to Old Surgeons' Hall were the fitting out of the interior and the addition of an aerial corridor from the building to the Old Surgical Hospital, also owned by the University.

The restoration by Spence and Partners has determined the appearance of Old Surgeons' Hall as it is today. The building is still owned by the University of Edinburgh, but is now the Institute for

the Study of Science, Technology and Innovation. In its external appearance it is still possible to see the essential features of Smith's design of 1696. On the ground floor, all nine bays remain, and the quoins dividing the central five from those at the edges are still visible. The mouldings and pediment around the main doorway as restored by Spence and Partners have weathered well, as have the new areas of stonework around the windows which had to be replaced. Both octagonal towers still exist, perhaps the features most essential to the character of Smith's design. Furthermore, one of the houses built from 1764 onwards in Surgeons' Square has survived and is now Chisholm House, The University of Edinburgh Institute of Governance.

The surroundings of the Old Surgeons' Hall have of course changed greatly. Most obviously, the height of the buildings has increased and as a result Surgeons' Square is darker than it was. Furthermore, the extensive hospital building programme of the 19th century has given the buildings around the square a rather more uniform and institutional appearance than they had in 1829. However, the composition of the buildings and their skyline remains remarkably unchanged, and the ground floor of Old Surgeons' Hall itself is unmistakably recognisable. Despite years of constant alteration and sometimes neglect, this unusual building has retained an essentially unaltered character for more than three hundred years.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks are due to Mr Joe Rock for insight and information imparted during a conversation on 8th December 2003.

#### NOTES

- 1 A. Miles, *The Edinburgh School of Surgery Before Lister* (London 1918), p. 7.
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