The history of dermatology in the Sheffield region.

RONALD CHURCH

*The Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield 10*


When one looks at Sheffield, today England's fifth city, it is difficult to imagine it as it was at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a small town of about 2200 people huddled round the castle near the confluence of the rivers Don and Sheaf. Before that time the only event of dermatological interest was the establishment of a hospital for poor lepers by William de Lovetot, Lord of Hallamshire, in 1181. Leprosy was then very prevalent and similar institutions were established in many English towns. St Leonard's hospital was built on the land granted by de Lovetot near the bridge over the Don; dissolved in the reign of Henry VIII, nothing now remains but the name of Spital Hill.

Before the eighteenth century there was no doctor in the town, and when one of the manorial servants fell ill in 1639 a doctor had to be brought from Doncaster, bringing his own apothecary with him. The population increased greatly during the eighteenth century and the first medical man to practise there regularly, early in the 1700s, was John Fisher, son of a local minister. By 1750 the population of the whole parish was 20,000 and by 1801 this had grown to 46,000. There were several medical men of note practising in the town at that time, but international fame came to William Buchan (1729-1805), who wrote his Domestic Medicine (1769) while living over an apothecaries' shop in Hartshead. He left Sheffield in 1766 for Edinburgh before the book was first published. It ran to nineteen editions in the author's lifetime and was translated into all European languages, including Russian. He wrote of the connection between lack of cleanliness and skin diseases and for this reason urged cold bathing for everyone, especially for children. He recorded that 'the itch is now by cleanliness banished from every genteel family in Britain. It still, however, prevails among the poorer sort of peasants in Scotland and among the manufacturers in England'. The situation is not much changed today. Buchan died in London and is buried in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.
During the eighteenth century no fewer than forty-six hospitals, infirmaries and dispensaries were founded throughout the country and when in 1787 an appeal was launched to found one in Sheffield the town was reminded that there was scarcely a city or large town in the kingdom that had not already established its Infirmary. The appeal was successful; the Infirmary was built half a mile from the town on a site which 'can hardly be excelled for the purpose'; a description which the Industrial Revolution was soon to alter. The building was opened in 1797 and half a century later it was recorded that '152,000 sufferers had been cured or relieved, a far greater number than have at any date between 1797 and 1847 been living contemporaries within the compass of Hallamshire.'

In 1829 a group of doctors established a medical school in Surrey Street; the building, bearing the inscription 'Ars longa, Vita brevis' over its portals, was demolished only in recent years. The Medical School was the oldest of three institutions which combined by charter into a University College in 1897.

In 1832 a year medically noteworthy for a widespread outbreak of cholera which began in Sunderland and ultimately involved a large area of the country including Sheffield, the Public Dispensary was founded. Mr. Arthur Jackson, a surgeon of the latter half of the century, wrote: 'It is not easy to realise Sheffield as it was then, with its five churches, one Hospital, no Town Council, no club except a reading room in East Parade, most of the lawyers living at their offices, the manufacturers living close to their works, the doctors living in Fargate, Norfolk Street and Church Street.' By 1854 plans were being made to accommodate inpatients at the Public Dispensary. These beds were opened in 1860 and formed what is now the Royal Hospital.

The first medical man to make a special study of skin diseases in the town was William Dale James (1850-1902), probably led to do so because throughout his life he suffered severely from psoriasis and had only short intervals of freedom. James was a Cornishman, born in Penzance but educated at Wesley College Sheffield and the Sheffield Medical School where he obtained his diploma in 1871. After house appointments at Truro and Hull he settled in practice in Sheffield, and became Surgeon to the Children's Hospital. To further his knowledge of skin disease he
visited various clinics, including that of Professor Unna in Hamburg. In 1891 he published 'Notes on a case of lymphangioma cavernosum', in which the histopathology was contributed by Dr Arthur Hall, of whom more later. In writing 'An unusual case of tuberculosis of the skin' (1892), Dr Norman Walker of Edinburgh was co-author. This contact with the dermatological great figures of his time was put to useful purpose, as they sent him photographs and case histories of interesting patients whom they encountered. The collection of six albums of remarkably good photographs is still preserved in the Sheffield University Library. In 1893 it was decided to form a Skin Department at the Royal Infirmary, and James was the obvious choice as he had by then established a reputation for skill in the treatment of skin disease. He took up the appointment at the end of that year, having been granted three beds and facilities for outpatients to attend at 12 o'clock on Tuesdays and Saturdays! By 1900 he had succeeded in obtaining two bathrooms for dermatological patients and a Finsen light for the outpatient department. His later publications on 'Paraffin acne' (1895) and 'Trade eruptions' (1898) illustrate the problem such eruptions must have been in an industrial town at the end of the nineteenth century. As a man James was admired for his literary ability, amusing in conversation and an excellent storyteller. He also drew witty cartoons with which he embellished the menus of Infirmary dinners; one such menu is still treasured in the Infirmary Medical Staff Room.

For many years James suffered from diabetes and phthisis. For the last year of his life he was an invalid and during that time the House Physician had care of the dermatology patients. Arthur Rupert Hallam was appointed House Physician in April 1902; later in that year Dale James died.

About the same time as James practised at the Infirmary the dermatology at the Royal Hospital was done by a general physician who was one of the most remarkable men to adorn any medical school; Dr (later Sir) Arthur Hall (1866-1951). Arthur was the son of John Hall, a Sheffield surgeon. He was appointed to the staff of the Royal Hospital as physician in 1890 and the following year was performing skin histopathology for Dale James. His publications of dermatological interest about that time were on xerostomia (1898) in which he analysed thirty-nine recorded cases of the disease which was later described by Sjogren in 1933. He also recorded a case of
hydroa gestationis (1899). Hall was made Professor of Physiology in 1897, appointed to the Chair of Pathology 2 years later and continued in that appointment until 1906. In 1915 he became Professor of Medicine and retired from that office in 1936. He filled all these appointments with distinction and vacated his earlier chairs only when he found a suitable successor. He continued to practise dermatology as part of his post of physician until 1911, and his interest in skin diseases is still remembered.

At the Infirmary on the death of James one of the physicians, William T. Cocking, took charge of the skin department. He was a native of Sheffield and qualified at University College London, being appointed to the staff of the Royal Infirmary in 1892. He became the first Dean of the Medical School and for many years occupied the Chair of Pharmacology and Therapeutics. During his time most of the skin patients were attended to by the house physician and for several years before his death from pulmonary tuberculosis he was chronically ill and made rare appearances at the Infirmary. He resigned from the staff in 1911 and died a year later.

At this time in 1911 the Royal Hospital appointed E. Fretson Skinner (1880-1944) to take charge of its skin department. His grandfather practised medicine in the town and held the original anatomy license of the medical school which was handed down to son and grandson until a Chair of Anatomy was established in 1897. For a time after his appointment Skinner studied under Sabouraud in Paris. In 1919 he became an assistant general physician. Like most dermatologists at that time he was also venereologist to the hospital and his experience with syphilis increased his interest in neurology which in its turn led him to increasing specialization in psychiatry. In 1931 the Royal Hospital dermatological department was taken over by Rupert Hallam as Skinner gave up dermatology.

Arthur Rupert Hallam (1878-1955) was the eldest son of Dr Arthur Hallam, who was a general practitioner and surgeon to the Royal Infirmary. He studied medicine at Edinburgh University and graduated in 1901 taking the M.D. in 1905. His interest in dermatology was first stimulated when he was appointed House Physician to the Infirmary in 1902 and helped to care for Dale James' patients. After holding posts of House Surgeon and Anaesthetist to the Infirmary, in 1906 he was appointed Medical Officer to the newly created Electrical Department, which over the following decade
rapidly grew into a department of diagnostic and therapeutic radiology. In 1911, on the resignation of Dr Cocking, Hallam was also appointed Medical Officer in charge of the Skin Department. In that appointment he was also responsible for Venereology and in 1914 instituted Evening Venereal Clinics. During the 1914-18 war he served in the R.A.M.C. with the rank of Major. On returning to the Infirmary in 1919 he requested to be allowed to resign the X-ray work while retaining the Dermatology Department, a request which was to be reiterated, until in 1927 Mr. J. Wilkie was sent to London to be trained in radiology and took over the work from Hallam. In the same year plans were agreed for a new skin department. In this Hallam incorporated designs in layout which he had seen in clinics abroad visited during his holidays. The size of the department was to be enlarged in 1949 when it was named after Hallam. It moved to the Hallamshire Hospital in 1969 to an entirely new and purpose built clinic which Hallam would find not entirely unfamiliar, as many of his designs are still incorporated.

By 1930 he had a full time clinical assistant, and when Skinner gave up dermatology, Hallam was the only consultant dermatologist in an area which stretched from the Pennine chain to the coast.

An original member of the British Association of Dermatology, he was President in 1936 when the Association met in Sheffield, and was later elected an Honorary Member. He helped found the North of England Dermatological Society and was its President in 1930, the year after its foundation.

One of his interests was papular urticaria (1927, 1932). He was aware that Hutchinson thought that the bites of insects were the cause, and his investigations into the effects of admitting children to hospital with their mattresses from home brought him near to the modern acceptance of Hutchinson's theory. Another interesting experiment was his establishment of open air centres around Sheffield and in the Infirmary grounds for the daily attendance of sufferers from lupus vulgaris (1943). In one good summer he was encouraged by the improvement even in those in the smoke laden air round the Infirmary. The following wet summer dampened his and the patients' enthusiasm.
His other publications were on erythema multiforme (1933), the prognosis of psoriasis (1934) and miliary lymphocytoma (1939), the last being written with H.R. Vickers, who became his colleague and successor.

Hallam obtained the M.R.C.P. in 1936 and was elected to the Fellowship in 1940. He retired in 1944, settling in the West Country where he pursued his hobbies of painting, gardening and walking. His skill at drawing is illustrated in the self-portrait reproduced here.

LEICESTER

Leicester, in the southernmost part of the Sheffield Region, is the only other area where dermatology was established as specialist practice before the turn of the century.

In 1898, Dr Alec P. Bremner founded the Leicester Institute for Diseases of the Skin in a building in Church Gate in the town centre. The original building has now been replaced by a shop. Bremner was a Glasgow graduate (L.R.C.P., L.R.C.S. 1876) and was awarded the Chesterfield medal in Dermatology at St John's Hospital, London, in 1896. He was a fellow of the London Dermatological Society and became its President in 1918-19. The society became the St John's Society in 1926 when Bremner was made Vice-President. He died in 1926.

He had been succeeded at the Institute in 1925 by Dr F.A.E. Silcock (1892-1955), a Belfast graduate who qualified M.B., B.Chir. in 1915. After house appointments he became R.M.O. at the Belfast Fever Hospital and in 1923 was appointed Medical Superintendent to the Isolation Hospital in Leicester. After obtaining the M.D. in 1925 he concentrated on dermatology, working at the Institute until in 1934 he was appointed also to the honorary staff at Leicester Royal Infirmary. The following year the Institute merged with the Infirmary. Silcock was particularly interested in occupational dermatitis and during the Second World War was a member of the Ministry of Labour's panel for industrial dermatitis. At that time he was a frequent contributor to discussions on this subject at the Royal Society of Medicine. He was also one of the first British dermatologists to investigate the properties and value of
water miscible bases. In 1950 failing vision forced him to retire from the Infirmary and he became completely blind before his death in 1955.

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REFERENCES


