

# The History of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, 1920-1935

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*Melbourne*

## PART I

IN the autumn of 1920, the members of the surgical staffs of the Melbourne,<sup>2</sup> the Alfred and St Vincent's Hospitals met on two occasions for the purpose of discussing the proposal to form a surgical society. It was resolved at these meetings that a society be formed and called the Surgical Association of Melbourne. The objects of the Association would be:

1. The advancement of the science and art of surgery.
2. To afford opportunity for free ventilation and discussion of divergent views of surgical subjects.
3. To promote friendly relationship and a community of opinion among the surgeons of the general hospitals in Melbourne.

It was proposed to limit the members to 50, each of whom must be either on the surgical staff of one of the three hospitals, a consultant surgeon, or a surgeon of high repute in active practice in Victoria. It was proposed to hold five meetings each year. Papers contributed by members of the Association were to be the property of the members concerned. Reports of discussions would not be published. It was felt that this would result in greater freedom of discussion. The Association was duly formed.<sup>3</sup> The first president was F. D. Bird, and the vice-presidents Hamilton Russell and G. A. Syme.

The announcement in the medical press of the formation of this Association provoked correspondence through identical channels. One

<sup>1</sup>The author holds the position of Honorary Archivist to the College. Having been closely associated with the founders, and having held every office in the College, he is uniquely qualified to write this History.

<sup>2</sup>It did not become the Royal Melbourne Hospital until 1935.

<sup>3</sup>A list of original members can be found in the College archives.

man, who was later to be elected a foundation fellow of the College, was "dismayed" and "appalled" that an endeavour was being made to make surgery a close corporation by limiting the number of members of the Association, and also by withholding publication of the reports of discussions. He suggested, as it was in Brisbane a few months later, that surgical subsections in the British Medical Association should be created, and that the meetings of these should be open to all members. The Surgical Association of Melbourne for a time went quietly on its way and held its meetings, but no reports were published.

At a meeting of the surgical section of the Eleventh Australasian Medical Congress in Brisbane, later in 1920, attention was drawn to the question of the establishment of an association of Australasian surgeons. This was the outcome of a letter from L. E. Barnett, Professor of Surgery, University of Otago, to the honorary secretary of the surgical section of the Congress. The writer had suggested that action might be taken somewhat on the lines of the American College in order to obtain a higher degree of efficiency in surgical work, and to provide for the bestowal of some hallmark.

Barnett was not present at this meeting, but in an attempt to give effect to his submission, a motion was put forward by Hamilton Russell:

That the members of the surgical section of the Eleventh Australasian Medical Congress heartily approve of the suggestion of Professor Barnett of the University of Otago,<sup>4</sup> that the time has arrived for considering the desirability of forming an Australasian Surgical Association with the objects of raising the standard of surgery in Australia; and that they pledge themselves in an endeavour to formulate an appropriate scheme that shall have for its objects the establishment of such an Association upon a sound basis.

<sup>4</sup>In the Transactions of this Congress, this is referred to as the University of Chicago!

In speaking to his motion, Hamilton Russell referred to the formation in Melbourne of the Surgical Association of Victoria,<sup>5</sup> about which there had been much misconception. In Melbourne there had been discovered evidence of a marked insularity in the three clinical schools, and a tendency for graduates to develop on fixed lines and within narrow limits. To overcome this, it was sought to establish a closer communication and relationship between the members of the surgical staffs of these hospitals, and the Surgical Association thus came into existence. It was inspired by the same motives of improving the standard of surgical work and of providing a hallmark, as had induced Professor Barnett's suggestions. He wished positively to say that this would not be a move against the British Medical Association.

It is interesting to reflect, at this distance of time, on the attitude of some of those who took part in the discussion, having regard to the grand roles which many of them were to play some years later, and the reasons for Russell's failure to promote Barnett's ideas.

The first opposition, for indeed it was, came from Gordon Craig, who proposed an amendment to Hamilton Russell's motion:

That with a view to the advancement of the art of teaching of surgery in Australasia, the members of this Section favour the formation of a section of surgery in each branch of the British Medical Association in Australia and New Zealand.

Gordon Craig said he was prompted to propose this amendment because he feared that otherwise there might be some interference from loss of the wholehearted support of the British Medical Association. Surgical work in Australasia had reached a stage when it should take its place beside that of international surgery. The public should have some means of differentiating the pure surgeons from the general practitioner.

The previous sentence is stressed if only to reconcile, if possible, in the light of future events, the acceptance of Gordon Craig's amendment. But in explanation it should be stated that this meeting was attended only by members of the surgical section, and not by all members of the Eleventh Congress of the British Medical Association.

<sup>5</sup>The name had been changed consequent upon the admission of some Victorian country surgeons.

It is interesting to record some excerpts from the transactions of this meeting. G. A. Syme said that there were two points essentially distinct in Hamilton Russell's motion. The one was the formation of the Association in the interests of better surgery, while the second was the provision of a hallmark. He thought it was the attempt to combine these two points which created the difficulty. If everyone was admitted, surgeons might be less inclined to discuss their failures and accidents (here Syme had in mind the rules of the Surgical Association of Victoria). In the presence of a limited gathering of experts (Syme at least accepted the "expert", the specialist or trained surgeon) they were prepared to admit these failures or accidents. The Surgical Association of Victoria, after the establishment of foundation members, passed a regulation which insisted that new members must be members of the Victorian Branch of the British Medical Association. Syme said that he saw no reason why the surgical subsections of the British Medical Association could not be made permanent and continuous. He doubted whether the time had arrived for carrying out the suggestions of Louis Barnett, and they should be very careful lest they should weaken the British Medical Association. The very fact that there was so much division of opinion among those present should be regarded as an indication for caution.

H. S. Newland, President of the Section of Surgery, said among other things, that he feared the formation of a new association "would be a dagger in the heart of the British Medical Association", and he could see no reason why they should go outside the Association to further the objects mentioned by L. E. Barnett. Newland apparently inferred that Hamilton Russell's motion, which contained the word "hallmark" referred to an additional degree, for he said, in effect, that the higher surgical degrees provided by the universities, with the exception of Sydney, were quite sufficient to hallmark the efficient, and they would be lowering the value of these degrees if they introduced another.

There were only two men who supported Hamilton Russell's motion, H. B. Devine and Frank Andrew. The former regretted that the discussion had been diverted from the original idea, and he deprecated the attempt to make the question one of "The BMA or not the BMA". The danger to the British Medical

Association, played on by the feelings and thoughts of such eminent men as Syme, Gordon Craig and Newland, he believed to be a bogey. He thought that the weakness in the formation of a surgical sub-section of the British Medical Association was that it would be open to all members. At least Syme had agreed with him on this point.

The feeling paramount at this meeting must have been the fear of possible injury to the British Medical Association, because Hamilton Russell in his reply to his motion said he could not believe there was any danger to this body, and he said no more. Gordon Craig's amendment was put and carried by a large majority. A surgical sub-section of the British Medical Association was formed in New South Wales but, as far as one can gather, in no other State.

#### THE VISIT OF W. J. MAYO AND FRANKLIN MARTIN IN 1924

In February, 1924, W. J. Mayo and Franklin Martin,<sup>6</sup> with a few other prominent Fellows of the American College of Surgeons, visited Australia. They came solely with the object of seeing the country and making personal contact with members of the profession. Several conferences and meetings were held under the auspices of the State Branches of the British Medical Association in New South Wales and Victoria, at which the aims and objects of the American College of Surgeons were explained, especially its activity in regard to improving the standard of hospitals.

It appeared that, in the first place, the object of the American College was to get a style which would appeal to a new country, and what had been wanted was something which could be of use to the people. Although, as Mayo stated, it had been a pleasure and help to get the advice of the Royal Colleges from men like Moynihan, Goodlee and Stiles, something more practical, even drastic, was needed in America than that which could be provided by following the traditional lines of the Royal Colleges. One of the main objects of the American College was to improve the hospitals and force them to accept certain standards. In addition, it classified those medical practitioners who had attained practical surgical experience with no special training, except that which their own experience had provided. In admitting some

<sup>6</sup>The first Director General of the American College of Surgeons.

such men as Fellows, the College stamped them with the hallmark by which the people might deduce that they were men in whom they could put their trust.

Great stress was placed on the ethics of the candidates for the Fellowship of the American College. Also, the American College did not recognize any course of academic study as being significant, but enforced a course of practical surgical training. In short, the main requirements were a specified number of records of personally performed operations, and a rigid certification of ethical conduct and character. On the basis of these criteria a credentials committee judged whether a man could be regarded as one who was suitable to operate on the people, and therefore suitable to become a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

The American visitors were careful to make no suggestions of affiliation between their College and an Australasian College of Surgeons, should one ever be formed, but they made a very friendly gesture. They proposed that individual Australasian surgeons might be admitted to Fellowship of the American College on a "charter-membership" basis. The American College agreed, and several surgeons in Australia and New Zealand were so admitted. These were Gordon Craig and C. P. B. Clubbe from New South Wales, R. C. Brown, H. B. Devine, Harold Dew, Robert Fowler, A. N. McArthur, R. H. Morrison, D. Murray Morton, Alan Newton and H. Douglas Stephens from Victoria (some little time later T. F. Ryan was also admitted), W. N. Robertson from Queensland, and A. M. Morgan, H. S. Newland and T. G. Wilson from South Australia.

All through their visit, Mayo and Franklin Martin spoke of the influence of the American College on hospital betterment. As far as one can judge from a perusal of papers, reports of meetings, and press cuttings of that time, they never tried to "sell" to their hosts the idea of a College of Surgeons of Australasia. But just before their departure, there was a small social gathering consisting of the American visitors and a few of the top Australian surgeons. Among those present were, of course, Devine and Franklin Martin. The latter had been told of the rejection of Louis Barnett's proposal at the British Medical Association Meeting in Brisbane in 1920, that an Australasian Association of Surgeons be formed.

He also had been informed that notwithstanding the provision of higher surgical degrees and the existence of the Surgical Section of the New South Wales Branch of the British Medical Association, and the Surgical Association of Victoria, not much success had been attained in promoting better surgeons and better hospitals, or in the removal of ethical abuses.

These last days of the American visitors' stay were to the writer's mind historic, for during that time the idea of an Australasian College was first conceived. Franklin Martin made an extremely interesting, even startling, proposal. Since the attempt at the formation of an Australasian Association of Surgeons had failed by submission through a non-surgical body, namely the British Medical Association, he suggested that the small company of Australasian surgeons who were "charter members" of the American College might be used as a nucleus or starting point for the foundation of an Australasian College of Surgeons!

This, of course, implied that the proposed College of Surgeons in this country would be affiliated with the United States of America rather than with the Mother Country, as it was then known. This notion was, of course, unthinkable, and was rejected out of hand by those in authority at that time. Nevertheless, this suggestion must have hit Devine like a flash and stirred his imagination—a College of Surgeons of Australasia! Devine never ceased thinking about this idea and he set himself the task which he felt was his to undertake.

One of the results of the visit of Mayo and Franklin Martin was that invitations were extended to some of the Australasian "charter members" of the American College, and others, to visit America and read papers at the annual meeting of the American College which was to be held in New York in 1925. The Charter Fellows were greatly impressed with what Franklin Martin and Mayo had told them concerning the influence of the American College on hospitals, so they went to see for themselves. The members of this Australasian "delegation" were Sir Lindo Ferguson, Carrick Robertson, Hamilton Russell, Ralph Worrall, all of whom were elected to Fellowship of the American College *honoris causa* at the meeting in New York, James Elliott (New Zealand), Professor John Hunter and Norman Royle (Sydney) and H. B. Devine (Melbourne).

After the meeting in New York, Devine went to Rochester and stayed with W. J. Mayo. It is well worth while recording from Devine's letters an incident which occurred at that time.

I well remember steeling myself to say something of my thoughts on this College to Dr William Mayo, with whom I was staying. We were living in a luxurious houseboat, sailing (sic) down the Mississippi in glorious weather when, in the midst of a serious conversation about the necessity, for national reasons, for a College in the modern surgery of a continent, I blurted out: "But we could never have a College in a British community wholly on the principles of your American College of Surgeons". His answer came quickly—"I know that", Mayo said, "and I always told Franklin Martin that. My boy, go home and found your own College and make it fit into your own Australasian conditions and circumstances". This delightful afternoon coming down the lovely Mississippi I shall never forget, as well as Mayo's honest answer.

Devine's writings continue:

It was this forthright remark by Mayo that fired me to make a supreme effort to strive for the foundation of an Australasian College of Surgeons the moment I reached home. Accordingly, the day after I returned from my American journey, and after careful consideration and thoughtful apprehension, although I knew him well, I forced myself to approach Sir George Syme in regard to this project in which I was so interested; notwithstanding the fact that in 1920 Sir George had obstinately and bitterly opposed the foundation of any Surgical College<sup>7</sup> in Australasia on the grounds that the B.M.A. sufficed for all branches of the profession. He was most patient and most interested and deeply inspired. My visit was a great surprise to him. My reasons for approaching Sir George were that he had retired; that he was regarded as the doyen of the profession; that he was trusted by the B.M.A. and the profession as a whole; and, above all, that if he believed in this great surgical cause, the greatest confidence could be reposed in this honest Quaker soul to carry it through.

A few nights later, Syme, Hamilton Russell and Devine met to consider how best to set about the formation of this proposed body of surgeons. Since previous attempts made through a non-surgical body had failed, Devine pressed the point that as a primary consideration, the attempts should be, from the beginning, wholly

<sup>7</sup>It was the formation of an Australasian "Association" of Surgeons which Syme opposed at that time. The word "College" is not recorded anywhere in the reports of this meeting. It is not pedantic to make this observation, for later on the word "College" was even objected to by some of the foundation members.

surgical; that it should be Australasian; and furthermore, he regarded it as fundamental that the body should bring within its ambit all surgical specialties. This was a very wise submission by Devine concerning the specialists. Accordingly, the following letter was drafted and signed by Syme, Hamilton Russell and Devine and sent to the in-patient surgeons of every teaching hospital in Australia and New Zealand and, in addition, to several prominent senior surgeons who worked in well-known non-teaching hospitals.

#### THE "LETTER"

Mayfield Avenue,  
Malvern.  
19th November, 1925.

Dear Mr X,

Senior Surgeons and Surgical Specialists in all the States of Australia have noticed with much concern, a growing disregard by younger practitioners, of recognized ethics in Surgical Practice, combined with a spirit of commercialism tending to degrade the high traditions of the surgical profession.

Difficult and dangerous surgical operations are undertaken by practitioners who have not been properly trained in surgical principles and practice . . . They also operate in small and inadequately equipped hospitals which have recently sprung into existence in large numbers. The public has no means of judging the competency of these so-called surgeons and surgical specialists, and of the efficiency of these hospitals. It is felt that steps should be taken to counteract these conditions.

It is proposed that a body<sup>s</sup> should be formed which would have authority to indicate that its members were properly qualified to practise surgery and its various specialties, and to hold positions as such on hospital staffs.

It is suggested that Senior Surgeons and Surgical Specialists, who could not be regarded as having any personal ends in view, should initiate such a body.<sup>s</sup> Its objects would be to endeavour to raise the status of surgery and check its practice by those who are not adequately trained, and also to improve hospital standards. Would you be willing to become a Foundation Member of such a body<sup>s</sup> and act on a provisional Committee to draw up its constitution?

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) G. A. SYME  
HAMILTON RUSSELL  
H. B. DEVINE.

Some time later, Syme wrote to the Surgical Section of the British Medical Association in Sydney, the Surgical Association of Victoria, and to leading surgeons in the other Australian

States and in the Dominion of New Zealand who had replied to this letter, asking each for suggestions as to the next step. These replies were sent to Syme.

The Surgical Section of the New South Wales Branch of the British Medical Association was realistic from the very beginning in its deliberations, in contrast to the most extraordinary document which was produced by the Surgical Association of Victoria. It is preferable to deal with the contributions of these two bodies separately, rather than to attempt to describe the sequence of events, because some of the documents in existence are undated and unsigned. The problem was set, how to go about forming this "body" of surgeons?

In April, 1926, a special meeting of the Surgical Section of the New South Wales Branch of the British Medical Association was held to discuss the proposal to form an Australasian College of Surgeons. This is the first occasion, as far as the writer can determine from an examination of all the documents at his disposal, when the term "Australasian College of Surgeons" really came out in the open.

Professor F. P. Sandes, in writing about this meeting a week or so later, stated:

There was no discussion whatever; even several general practitioners who were present at the meeting, expressed approval of the project. The general trend of opinion was, that it would not be wise to have a College on the lines of the British Colleges, but it should savour more of the American College of Surgeons, in that practical experience should be essential for membership.

At the end of this month of April, 1926, a meeting was held, to which all surgeons in New South Wales who had replied to the "letter", agreeing to become foundation members of this body or association, were invited. Sir Alexander MacCormick was in the chair. Devine travelled from Melbourne to attend the meeting and outlined roughly the history of events. He then read an address which Syme had given to the Surgical Association of Victoria two nights previously. There is no record of this address, but apparently it caused this Association to modify its original suggestions. He also read a list of surgeons who had agreed to become foundation members of the proposed College.

Some very interesting points emerged from the discussion of this meeting in Sydney. The first were the submissions of Dr Todd, who

<sup>s</sup>Once again Syme was reluctant to use the word "College".

had been invited to attend because of his legal knowledge, for apparently one and all were confounded by the main problem, "How do you found a College of Surgeons?". Dr Todd believed that the method of voluntary incorporation, with each man putting his name to a declaration, would be a good way to originate the proposed College. He believed that an application for a Charter to the Privy Council might encounter a great deal of opposition from "the present College of Surgeons", and instead of a Charter, for a time, after the College had been formed, he suggested that it take the form of a company registered in one State only. It could then be a corporate body and have a perpetual existence, and later on, when it had justified its formation, a Charter might possibly be obtained. Otherwise formation of a company would make it extremely difficult to take in New Zealand because of the six different Company Acts in the different States of Australia, and also because of an entirely different Company Act in New Zealand. He thought that membership of the British Medical Association could not be made contingent. There would be a conflict that might be incompatible, and likely to lead to trouble, and he questioned the legality of this suggestion.

Apparently this meeting was "in committee", as may be guessed from the next contribution made by George Abbott, who proposed that "we go on discussing this subject for Mr Devine's benefit in order to give Melbourne the benefit of the views of the assembled Sydney surgeons". Nevertheless, he then moved "that a committee be formed to go into the matter fully". The members of the committee elected were Sir Alexander MacCormick, C. P. B. Clubbe, E. T. Thring, Ralph Worrall, Gordon Craig, R. B. Wade, George Abbott and Professor Sandes, with Archie Aspinall as Secretary. This proved to be a committee which did a great deal to get things moving.

At this meeting there were other speakers. Ralph Worrall moved, and his motion was carried:

That this meeting give its general endorsement and commendation to the work which has already been done by the Melbourne Organizing Committee,<sup>9</sup> and that it be empowered to carry on as far as Sydney is concerned with the organization of the rest of Australasia.

<sup>9</sup> Sir George Syme, Hamilton Russell, H. B. Devine and A. L. Kenny.

Gordon Craig said that he thought the proposed Association should be able to give a definite label to its members for the benefit of the public. He was very much in favour of the word "College". People understood its meaning. He was very much against the word "Guild", which had been suggested. Gordon Craig went on to describe a meeting which he had with Dr Armit concerning the publication of a surgical journal which would be the official organ of this surgical Association.

This important meeting was concluded by a discussion of "unofficial suggestions from Sydney". All the Sydney men were most anxious that Sir George Syme should be the first president, and also it was freely expressed, that in an Association like this it would be better not to change the office bearers every year, but rather every two or three years. It was felt that this would make for stability, especially in the initial stages of the organization. Some thought that later on a central control might be established at Canberra, and furthermore, that the uniformity of the senior surgical degrees might be accomplished through the proposed University of Canberra, which could be a degree-giving university, and that degrees would be given *ad eundum gradum*.

This meeting of surgeons who had received the circular letter, held in Sydney, was, as already recorded, the outcome of a letter signed by Syme to the Surgical Section of the New South Wales Branch of the British Medical Association. The response to a similar letter sent to the Surgical Association of Victoria resulted in the production by that Association of a most extraordinary document. Now it should be pointed out that this Surgical Association of Victoria was composed entirely of general surgeons. By no means all of its members had received the "Letter", nor had they been invited to take part in the formation of the proposed College, whereas many specialists in Melbourne had been invited to do so. This document referred to above was headed "Proposal to form an Australasian Association of Surgeons out of, or in conjunction with the Melbourne Surgical Association!". As Syme, Hamilton Russell and Devine were, of course, all members, it is difficult to imagine them allowing such a preposterous suggestion to be made known. The writer has not a hint of those who were responsible for drawing up the document. Besides being undated, it is unsigned.

The proposals contained in this document were discarded out of hand, and Melbourne came somewhat into line with Sydney, by calling a meeting of those surgeons who had received the "Letter". It is interesting to note that of the 26 who attended this meeting on May 24, 1926, no less than 17 were specialists. Syme addressed the meeting, and read the list of the proposed foundation members from the other States. Devine reported on the Sydney meeting described above. Syme then enlarged on the many problems facing those charged with the foundation of a College of Surgeons, and invited free discussion.

It is pertinent to record the words spoken and sentiments expressed by A. L. Kenny:

Very many difficulties and much opposition will necessarily have to be encountered, but in a sense, the difficulties and opposition will be a measure of the wisdom of the movement. To achieve success, the men selected to inaugurate the work must be eminently judicious, fair-minded and tactful, full of regard for the rights and susceptibilities of others, anxious to thoroughly consider and weigh every step, so that there will be no action to retrace or modify or withdraw, even the first move. Without offence I wish to say that, inasmuch as they presume to sit in judgement on the acts and intentions of their fellow practitioners, it is imperative that their mental attitude should be absolutely unselfish and totally fair. There are possibilities of great good ensuing but injustices must be avoided by all means. It might be as well to profit by the experience of the American College of Surgeons which had achieved most gratifying results. It is well to note how that College set about gaining the goodwill of the public for its undertaking. By every means at my hand, I am prepared to support the movement, and I feel that I can promise the same for my fellow specialists who are all keen for the maintenance of honour, dignity, and skill in their relations with their patients. At the risk of wearying you, I beg to reiterate my conviction of the need for the utmost care and wisdom in the selection of the men who are to be appointed to carry on the development of this movement. They must be judiciously minded, fair, just and considerate.

There was prescience in his words "opposition" and "difficulties".

The most important decision made at this meeting was that a committee should be appointed to report on the problems which Syme had outlined. The members of this committee duly appointed were Sir George Syme, Professor R. J. A. Berry, Hamilton Russell, H. B. Devine, B. T. Zwar, Victor Hurley, Fay Maclure, W. G. D. Upjohn, A. N. McArthur,

A. L. Kenny, Reginald Morrison and S. A. Ewing. It is interesting to note that four members of this committee were specialists, and that Alan Newton, who was present at the meeting, and who was senior to both Hurley and Upjohn at the Melbourne Hospital, and who was in the future to make far greater contributions to the College than either of these two men, was not proposed as a member. Yet he did propose that this elected committee should have the power to co-opt.

Then events moved apace. Sydney was in the lead and Melbourne appeared to follow slowly. It may be that those in Melbourne were hesitant, even diffident, because the original letter had been signed by three Melbourne men, and perhaps, too, they were trying to forget the submissions of the Surgical Association of Victoria. Whatever may be the truth, there is no doubt from the documents available that the contributions made by the Sydney men at this time were signal. On June 1, 1926, a meeting was held of the committee appointed to consider the question of the formation of the College. This was an important meeting, and from it some very constructive ideas emerged. The Melbourne surgeons held a meeting designed to achieve the same purpose later, on June 14, 1926.

The suggestions from the Sydney meeting far outweighed in importance the thin suggestions from Melbourne, which dealt mainly with the principles and ethics upon which the College should be founded. Sydney, on the other hand, was going to work to suggest the practical means whereby the College should be formed. But both of these meetings, held a few weeks apart, agreed that the basis of the formation of a College should rest with a meeting of delegates from all States and New Zealand, which was to be held in Sydney in August, 1926. This indeed proved to be the vital meeting. At this stage, with Melbourne still in a fluctuating mood and Sydney quite decisive, from documentary evidence, Professor F. P. Sandes provided the spark. He had been responsible for drafting an "exordium" which was modified by a legal friend. This draft "exordium" is a nice document, but it is quite different from that which was sent to the founders, and which, in addition to being more specific, included one important item: "To do all other things that might help to better achievement of these objects including the right to acquire and hold

property." The letter which he wrote to Devine on August 8, 1926, some few weeks before the meeting of delegates was to be held, is recorded in full. Sandes must have had a great sense of procedure.

Darling Point  
Sydney, N.S.W.  
8th August, 1926.

Dear Dr Devine,

Let me confirm my conversation per telephone with you in Melbourne tonight and make some suggestions to help in overcoming legal difficulties.

Dr Herbert, surgeon, of Wellington, N.Z., and a Senior Hospital man happens to be over here for a week or two. He says that N.Z. will be very keen to join us and he is willing to stay till the meeting 24th-26th August to help us unofficially or convey our views to his colleagues in N.Z. If you can get Carrick Robertson or Lindo Ferguson to write to him (c/- me) and authorize him to act for them it would regularize the proceedings. He has given me a lot of useful information as to the personality of the most suitable N.Z. men.

Might I suggest that you put before your legal adviser the following propositions as regards procedure:

1. Let us call the meeting of delegates the "Preliminary Convention". The function of this according to our views is merely to nominate any 40 people who will agree to act as "Founders". There is no reason why this convention should not expire when it has done this, but the feeling here is that if say 10 Founders are nominated by N.S.W., say, two of them should be of the active type to get the subsequent work done, because if they are all Consulting Hospital Surgeons these will not be able to do the devilling. This "Preliminary Convention" is merely a device to avoid heart-burnings.
2. These "Founders" (it having been ascertained that they are willing to act) sign an agreement (similar to the modification of the "Exordium" attached). We should have this drawn on parchment and engrossed. It is the "Magna Carta" and will be a precious and historical document. It could be sent round for signature to the States and to N.Z. and if Sir Geo. Syme accepts the duty laid upon him by common consent of the "Founders" he can proceed to constitute the College by his own act.
3. The "Founders" (Fdr. C.S.A.) then or later might co-opt an equal number, say 40, called "Foundation Fellows" (F.F.C.S.A.) and these 80 Surgeons might later on sink their special designations to "Fellows of C.S.A." when ordinary Fellows are ready to be admitted and all sign the oath or pledge (to be devised later) in the ordinary way.
4. Sir Geo. Syme takes the steps necessary to have drawn up a Provisional Constitution, selects Vice-Presidents (provisional or

actual) and other functionaries of a temporary character. We all place implicit trust in him and know that he will do this work well.

This provisional constitution should be on broad lines so that it can be agreed on by all the Australian States and N.Z. and may be acceptable for adoption as the permanent constitution at the N.Z. congress or later, when the first council etc., shall be selected and empowered to co-opt the 40 "Foundation Fellows" and to draft rules, by-laws, regulations, etc., and other matter for submission to the College.

I think that all possible care should be exercised to make the procedure as plain, straight-forward as possible in view of our later intention to ask for a Royal Charter. This may take some years to obtain and it can only be got after the College has demonstrated its usefulness. Herbert said that Elliot, the editor of the N.Z. Journal, and Acland of Auckland would be most powerful advocates of any proposition having for its ultimate aim such a Royal College and that in New Zealand, if the "clean up" did not come from within, it would be attempted by legislation, and that the public press there would be for it "to a man".

Yours in the good cause,

(Signed) F. P. SANDES.

P.S. The evening of 25th August and possibly 24th August could be spent on this and the delegates would not be delayed.

DRAFT  
COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF AUSTRALASIA  
"EXORDIUM"

(The beginning—

The weaving of a web or cloth)

1. WHEREAS it is necessary for the better service of the people of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Dominion of New Zealand, and for the continuance of the usefulness and the upholding of the noblest traditions of our beloved profession of Surgery that we should encourage the intensive study of its science and principles and of its art and practice, and that we should labor to extend our knowledge by research in the quest of truth.
2. AND WHEREAS it is advisable that we should provide additional facilities for the higher education and advanced technical training of those who assume the functions of general surgeons and/or specialists in different branches of surgery and that we should elevate the standards of surgical practice in our hospitals and elsewhere, and that we should secure where desirable, uniformity in matters of surgical policy.
3. AND WHEREAS it is expedient in the interest of our Australasian people and their surgeons that a high standard of moral conduct should be inculcated and that there should be exercised expert supervision over those who accept the responsibilities of a surgeon both in their relation to the people and to each other.



4. AND WHEREAS we whose names are hereunder written have set ourselves to devise means in furtherance of the objects aforesaid.
5. NOW, THEREFORE we agree to bond ourselves together in founding the College of Surgeons of Australasia and we name as (provisional?) President our trusted friend and colleague, George Andrew<sup>10</sup> Syme of Melbourne, Victoria, and we give to him authority to act on our behalf as may seem to him necessary in pursuance of the said objects.

SIGNED N.Z. ....  
 VIC. ....  
 N.S.W. ....  
 S.A. ....  
 Q'LAND. ....  
 W.A. ....  
 TAS. ....

FOUNDERS.

6. DECLARATION (or Oath)  
 I, GEORGE ANDREW<sup>10</sup> SYME, accept this trust and authority and in pursuance thereof I declare the College of Surgeons of Australasia to be (provisionally?) duly constituted and appoint as Vice-Presidents (provisionally?)

Louis Barnett of Dunedin, N.Z.  
 and

Alexander MacCormick of Sydney, Australia  
 and I appoint

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

as a provisional Committee to draw up the provisional constitution of the said College for submission to a meeting to be held at Dunedin, N.Z., on the ..... day of February, 1927.

DATED at Melbourne this }  
 day of 1926 }  
 (Signed) G. A. SYME  
 WITNESS.....

Some time later, in 1939, Sandes joined to his feelings of this original exordium the following words:

Years ago it became necessary to set forth in a way that might be generally acceptable the ideals and objects, the bond of fellowship and the title of a proposed association of Australian and New Zealand Surgeons. Hence this "exordium" or beginning.

In a restricted sense the word has reference to an early stage in making cloth. If the mantle of Surgery which we hand on to succeeding generations is to be of Cloth of Gold may the Surgeons of this hospital weave into it many threads of precious metal, free from dross.

<sup>10</sup> Adlington.

If there was apparent inactivity in Melbourne, as has been suggested, there may have been good reason for it in the minds of the three men who signed the "Letter". Syme may have been embarrassed by Sandes's suggestion that he "constitute the College by his own act" and that he should "take the steps necessary" and "appoint Vice-Presidents".

Syme was the most modest of men. He was by nature cautious, and at this stage this trait was preserved. Hamilton Russell's mood may have been one of detachment. His motion had been rejected by the 1920 Congress in Brisbane. Up to the present he had done all that he could. He had lent his great name to the "Letter". At this stage he maintained a calm which was Olympian, and awaited events. Devine, who perhaps had done more than anyone to launch the project, probably felt that for the time being he should adopt an attitude of self-effacement. At this time he was in very active surgical practice, and was 47 years of age.

The meeting of delegates was held in Sydney in August, 1926, and proved to be the meeting above all which led to the foundation of the College within the year. The deliberations of this meeting are recorded in *The Medical Journal of Australia*, Volume 1, 1927, page 134, and for the purpose of this contribution certain items have been abstracted.

The delegates were Professor F. P. Sandes, R. B. Wade (N.S.W.); Sir George Syme, A. L. Kenny (Victoria); H. S. Newland, Bronte Smeaton (South Australia); W. N. Robertson, Lockhart Gibson (Queensland); D. H. Lines (Tasmania); H. Stacy as proxy for Western Australia; Herbert (Wellington), and Gordon Craig as an additional proxy for New Zealand.

This meeting was chaired by Sir George Syme, who explained the practical difficulties of forming such a College of Surgeons. Legal advice in Sydney and Melbourne suggested a purely voluntary association with a pledge, such as an exordium, binding the signatories to obey its laws. Some of the delegates at this meeting still favoured the formation of the Association within the structure of the British Medical Association. These men must have had their fears allayed by A. L. Kenny, who said he had no fear that the British Medical Association in Australia could regard the formation of a College as being in any way hostile to itself. The men present at the table, he said,

provided eloquent testimony that nothing opposed to the interests of the British Medical Association would be contemplated for one moment. By this, Kenny was obliquely drawing attention to the fact that of the delegates, no less than six out of the 12 were members of the federal committee of the British Medical Association.

R. B. Wade said that he did not believe that the assembled delegates had been chosen as the most suitable persons to be original foundation members.<sup>11</sup> The foundation members (i.e. founders) should, he thought, be men retired from practice who were past considering personal advantage, and in the main should be consultants to their respective hospitals. He would not be a foundation member himself. But he pointed out that, if such a system of selection were rigidly carried out, there would be an endless dragging on of the formation of the College, because of the natural loss of energy in such persons. He thought that there were other greater prospects of obtaining finality of working. Older men as original foundation members might be unable to meet, and therefore there would be delay in the foundation.

It was significant that eventually New South Wales appointed two emergency members to the list of their proposed founders. Perhaps Wade's remarks were a kind way of saying that some of the suggested New South Wales men had a physical future which was uncertain, and he proved to be right.

However, the meeting proceeded, and it was moved that the name of the Association be "The College of Surgeons of Australasia". Then it was moved that the total number of founders of the College of Surgeons should be 40. The South Australian delegates (H. S. Newland and Bronte Smeaton) moved an amendment "that the number be 25, including six from New Zealand". It is difficult to guess, even at this distance of time, what prompted their specific proposal. On the basis of population it was certainly very strange. On the basis of surgeons in the States of Australia and New Zealand holding a Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England at that time, it was inappropriate. The delegates apparently

believed that the figures suggested in the amendment were disproportionate, and the amendment was defeated.

The delegates then nominated the 40 founders as set out below.

## NEW SOUTH WALES

A. J. Brady	Sir Alexander MacCormick
William Chisholm	Frank Antill Pockley
C. P. B. Clubbe	F. P. Sandes
R. Gordon Craig	E. T. Thring
Thomas Fiaschi	Ralph Worrall
G. H. Abbott	
Emergency—C. E. Corlette	

## VICTORIA

Sir James Barrett	Reginald Morrison
F. D. Bird	D. Murray Morton
H. B. Devine	R. Hamilton Russell
A. L. Kenny	Sir George Syme
Felix Meyer	B. T. Zwar

## NEW ZEALAND

H. D. Acland	Sir Donald McGavin
L. E. Barnett	Carrick Robertson
Sir Lindo Ferguson	D. S. Wylie

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A. M. Cudmore	H. S. Newland
Anstey Giles	T. G. Wilson
A. M. Morgan	
Emergency—Bronte Smeaton	

## QUEENSLAND

Donald Cameron	E. S. Jackson
G. P. Dixon	W. N. Robertson
Lockhart Gibson	
Emergency—E. D. Ahern	

## TASMANIA

D. H. Lines	John Ramsay
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## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

F. A. Hadley	W. Trethowan
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The delegates met the next day, when they framed a constitution and prepared an exordium. This exordium was printed on parchment, as Sandes had suggested, and shortly afterwards was sent to all the nominated founders for signature, together with a full report of the meetings of delegates from which abstracts have been made. These documents were mailed from Melbourne on September 22, 1926, with a covering letter signed by A. L. Kenny. And so, in the spring of that year, when the 40 proposed founders returned day by day the exordium which they had signed, the College of Surgeons of Australasia gradually came into existence.

There are one or two curious points about the list of founders. First of all, F. D. Bird did not sign the exordium. He certainly would

<sup>11</sup> The word "member" is used here and elsewhere in a general sense. The College never had any "members". When its foundation had been established in 1926, there were the founders only, until the first meeting of Council in February, 1927, at which a number of "Foundation Fellows" were elected.

have received the "Letter", for he was the first president of the Melbourne Surgical Association. He lived until May 29, 1929. He was never a Fellow of the College. However, all the 40 Fellows who had been nominated, with the exception of Bird (whose name was replaced by that of Basil Kilvington) signed the exordium.

In April, 1927, Thomas Henry Fiaschi died, and in May, 1927, C. E. Corlette signed the exordium as a founder. Andrew John Brady died in 1927, but the services of the other emergency, George Abbott, were not called upon. So the College had 41 and not 40 founders.

There was some trouble shortly after the foundation of the College. In Queensland, some members of the British Medical Association objected to the method of selection of the founders, believing that they should have been chosen by the members of the British Medical Association in that State. Sandford Jackson played the leading role in quelling this slight disturbance, and the point at issue was soon forgotten.

In Victoria the reaction of some members of the British Medical Association was little short of violent. The Central Subdivision called a meeting at which a motion was to be put: "That the formation of the College of Surgeons of Australasia is inimical to the best interests of the profession and the public."

Sir George Syme agreed to address the meeting.<sup>12</sup> He stood on the stage and gave a short address. Very soon the meeting became a very undignified spectacle. Some of those present, who no doubt had held Syme in the greatest respect as their former president, insulted him, even abused him. He had to defend as well as he could two accusations levelled at the College of which he was President.

The first was that the formation of the College was unnecessary. The University gave the degree M.B., B.S., and as a Bachelor of Surgery, a man with that degree was entitled to operate. It is incredible that such a view was ever held, but this was a long time ago. The second criticism hurled at Syme was that in the Exordium drawn up by the founders was included a clause, as one of the objects of the College: "That the public should be educated to recognize that the practice of surgery demands adequate and special training."

<sup>12</sup>The writer was present at this meeting.

This, of course, was a complementary criticism of the first argument, but to it there was a valid reply. The late John S. Green, a most respected obstetrician and gynaecologist, perhaps summed the matter up best. He said that he could not for one moment side with those who objected to the formation of the College of Surgeons; in fact, he hoped that one day he would be a Fellow himself. "But," he said, "I am quite prepared to admit to anyone that Sir George Syme is a better surgeon than I am, but I think it is unethical for him to say so in public."

Antagonisms and parochial interests flare up from time to time, but they are extinguished when examined by men of fair thought and mutual trust, and in the end, cooperation and unity prevail.

## PART II

In Dunedin, during the British Medical Association Congress in February, 1927, the first ballot for the Council was conducted. When the Exordium was sent out to the founders, each one was asked if he would be willing to act as a councillor, if he should be elected. The names of all those who had signified their willingness to do so were set out. It appears that this nomination paper was, in effect, a ballot paper, but very different from that in current use. These nomination papers were taken to Dunedin by A. L. Kenny under seal and were opened by two scrutineers, one of whom was (Sir) Richard Stawell, who was to become the first president of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 1938.

The 10 councillors elected, the number agreed upon by the meeting of delegates in Sydney in August, 1926, were Syme, Barnett, Worrall, Newland, Gordon Craig, Robertson, Hamilton Russell, Sandes, Kenny and Devine, to which number was added the name of Sir Alexander MacCormick as vice-president, which office he held until he resigned in 1933 without ever having attended a Council meeting! Syme was elected President, Louis Barnett Vice-President, and A. L. Kenny Honorary Secretary and Treasurer.

At this meeting (Figure 1) the by-laws which had been drawn up at the provisional meeting of delegates were discussed, modified and adopted. This formed the Constitution of the College which, at that time, was not

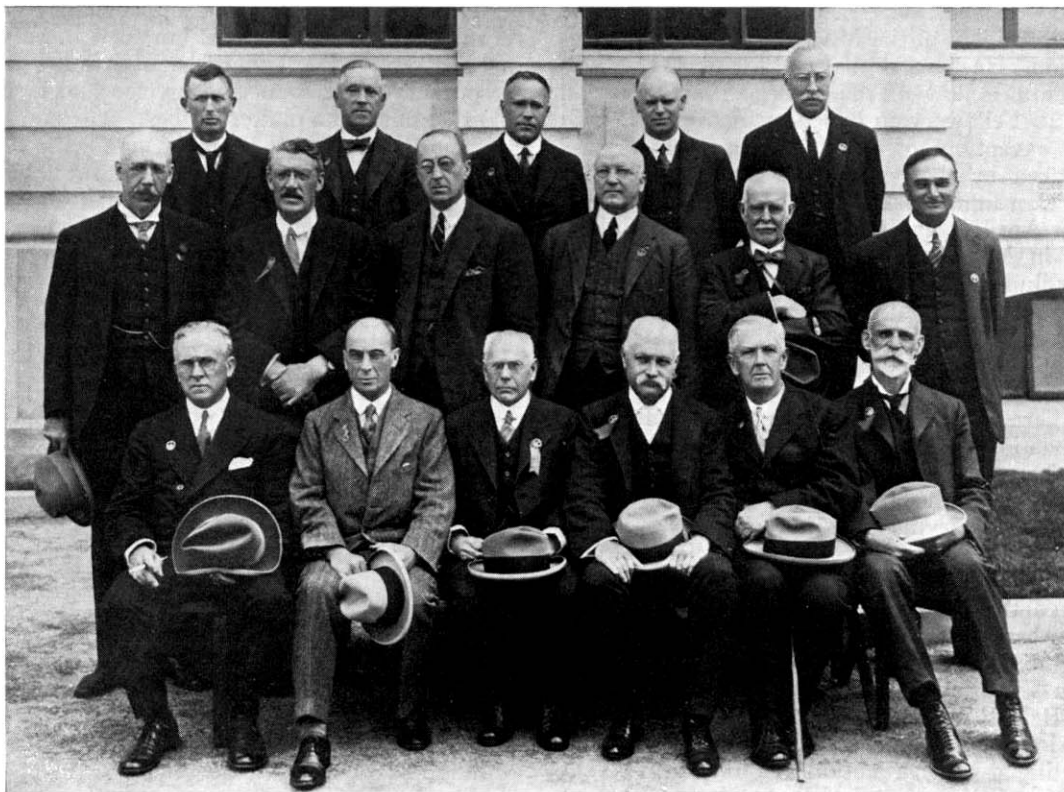


FIGURE 1: The Founders who attended the B.M.A. Congress in Dunedin in February, 1927. *Back Row:* Basil Kilvington, Henry Newland, Sir Donald McGavin, Sir Carrick Robertson, A. M. Morgan. *Second Row:* Sir James Barrett, W. N. Robertson, D. S. Wylie, Sir John Ramsay, F. A. Pockley, Hugh Devine. *Front Row:* R. Gordon Craig, Louis Barnett, Sir George Syme, Sir Lindo Ferguson, R. Hamilton Russell, A. L. Kenny.

incorporated, and therefore had no Articles of Association. One by-law which in the future was to become of great importance was:

After five years from 5th February 1927 the candidate (for Fellowship) must possess a senior surgical qualification,<sup>18</sup> but at the discretion of Council in the case of candidates of exceptional surgical ability and experience, this requirement may be dispensed with.

<sup>18</sup> In defining this senior surgical qualification, Council had followed the precept of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, i.e. a primary examination in anatomy and physiology and a final examination in surgery. The Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh did not exact the same from its candidates as there was no primary examination. So, shortly, sharp-written words were exchanged between the respective secretaries of the Australasian and the Edinburgh Colleges. A few years later Edinburgh included a primary examination in its Fellowship regulations.

The College of Surgeons of Australasia, having been established, with its council and office-bearers elected, for a time had as Fellows the founders only! It was obvious that something had to be done as soon as possible. So at this first meeting of Council it was decided that all the general surgeons and specialists who had been invited by the "Letter", and who had consented to become provisional "members" in the preliminary meetings for the foundation of the College, "shall be and hereby are elected foundation members (*sic*) of the College". In March, 1927, the same sheet of parchment, the Exordium, was sent to those surgeons, and also to others who had been recommended for inclusion by committees appointed in each State and the Dominion. Thus the College was strengthened by the election of 165 foundation fellows.

## FIRST ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COLLEGE

The first annual meeting of the College of Surgeons of Australasia was held in Canberra on March 31, 1928 (Figures 2 and 3). His Excellency Lord Stonehaven, Governor-General of Australia, was present. His Excellency Sir John Goodwin, Governor of Queensland, had



FIGURE 2: Canberra, 1928. H. H. Schlink, Reginald Davies, Hugh Devine, J. L. McKelvey.

conferred on him the first honorary fellowship of the College. Sir John was a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, and a past Director-General of Medical Services of the British Army. Council had also elected Mr Victor Bonney, a member of Council of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, to honorary fellowship. Papers on the history of the Royal Colleges and of the American College were read. The annual report of Council was presented to the Fellows. Various by-laws were introduced.

Shortly after the formation of the College, Professor (Sir) Colin Mackenzie had written to Sir George Syme, stating that he thought it probable that the Federal Government would grant the College a site in Canberra on which the headquarters could be erected. This suggestion was reinforced by Sir Neville Howse, V.C., a Fellow of the College and, at that time, Minister for Home and Territories and for Health, of the Commonwealth. As a consequence of these proposals, late in 1927 Sir George Syme and H. B. Devine visited Canberra and had an interview with the Chief Commissioner, Sir John Butters, in order that they might receive information and discuss details of the reservation of a site in Canberra

for the College. During their visit Sir John indicated on a map an area of five acres which, he felt sure, was to be reserved for medical scientific bodies.

Within this area he was prepared to recommend to the Federal Government that a site should be reserved for the College. Sir George Syme and H. B. Devine were then driven to inspect the ground which was adjacent to the National Museum of Zoology, which the Federal Government was building for Professor Mackenzie, immediately adjoining the University site, and in close proximity to the Hospital. "This area was at Acton on the crest of the ridge on the North-Western side of the city close to Parliament House and near the suburb of Ainsley." Ways and means were discussed.<sup>14</sup>

To return to the first annual meeting in Canberra, on April 2 the Fellows present assembled on the site which, by that time, had apparently been granted by the Commission of the Federal Capital Territory for the future College building. F. A. Maguire of Sydney moved:

That this meeting of the Fellows of the College of Surgeons of Australasia which includes New Zealand, held on the site of the College accepted by the Council from the Commission of the Federal Capital Territory, desires to express its confidence in Council's undertaking to build on this site.



FIGURE 3: Canberra, 1928. Alan Newton, Henry Newland, Ralph Worrall, Dr Alan Robertson.

<sup>14</sup> This description is confusing unless it is recalled that Burley Griffin sited the permanent Parliament House on the south shore of the lake. This description of the site, of course, is inapplicable to the present Parliament House or the intended permanent Parliament House.

The motion was seconded by Ralph Worrall of Sydney. There was no amendment and, on being put to the meeting, the motion was declared by the President to have been carried unanimously. The declaration was received with cheering! Then Sir Neville Howse suggested that Fellows show their willingness to follow the President of the College in his action by each taking a debenture of £100 to form the building fund of the College. Twenty-five Fellows offered to take a bond of £100.

Apparently things had got out of hand, because when the Fellows met the following morning at what was presumably a business meeting, the President announced that earlier in the same morning there had been a meeting of Council, and that the following resolutions had been passed.

1. The Council has considered the resolutions carried at the site of the College on Monday, April 2nd, 1928, on the motion of Drs Maguire and Worrall and has decided that it cannot undertake building operations in the immediate future.
2. The Council cannot see its way to pay interest on debentures if taken up at the present time and, therefore, it has decided to postpone the whole question of debentures.
3. Monies given or promised are allotted to the Endowment Fund to be used to further the general aims and objects of the College. Any donor may earmark his donation for a special purpose within these aims and objects.

There and then the Fellows present were asked to subscribe to the endowment fund, for which the honorary secretary and treasurer, with commendable improvisation, supplied the necessary inducement. Shortly after this first annual meeting, Sir James Barrett, a founder of the College, wrote a letter to each member of the Council and one to the honorary secretary, requesting that it be considered formally by Council. This was a somewhat unorthodox procedure. In addition, he asked that his letter be read at the next annual general meeting, at which he intended to give notice of motion regarding the erection of the College building in Canberra. It is worth while recording the following copy of his letter, inasmuch as it practically anticipated the choice of the College headquarters.

18th April, 1928.

1. At Dunedin in 1927, the Founders and a few Fellows met and, in the course of business, the site question was discussed and Canberra

was mentioned. I think it was I who suggested that the President be given authority to ascertain whether a site was available and, if so, on what terms. I certainly would never have agreed to a determination of the site without full discussion by a much larger body and, had I for a moment thought that such action was contemplated, would have at once objected. There is some misunderstanding on this matter.

2. At Canberra I asked the President and the Honorary Secretary more than once for permission to address the College for a few minutes before the visit to the site so that Fellows might have time to think over the issue. This could not be permitted because of the timetable, yet Sir Neville Howse was given an opportunity to make a lengthy speech appealing for funds. I quite recognize the high official position of a Minister of the Crown, but after all, College business was being transacted.
3. When on the site the President informed the gathering, and I learnt for the first time, that Council was committed to the site. It became obvious that a reversal meant a vote of want of confidence in the Council. My respect for the Council and in particular the President and Honorary Secretary prevented any discussion on my part. I find that this attitude was general and, that but for this feeling of respect, there might have been a sharp discussion which would have damaged the appreciation of a conference characterized by enthusiasm and good feeling.
4. In common with almost everyone else I certainly thought Sir Neville Howse was speaking in both cases with the sanction of Council and consequently held my peace.
5. I am convinced that the majority of Fellows do not want a building which might well become a white elephant, and certainly do not want it at Canberra.
6. It is obvious that, for the success of such an undertaking, the Fellows must have an opportunity to discuss and decide so important an issue. If so decided the majority will acquiesce in a decision reached in a constitutional manner, whichever way the matter is settled.
7. There are several methods by which the confusion caused by the rapid changes of opinion at Canberra can be rectified. At the next Annual Conference
  - (a) A Fellow can give and propose that the hasty resolution passed at the site be rescinded. The objection to this course is that it may seem to reflect on the Council . . . a course which no one desired to follow.
  - (b) A Referendum might be taken forthwith and such questions as the following submitted:
    1. Are you in favour of erecting any building at all?
    2. If you are, to what uses would you put it?
    3. If you do wish to build, in what city do you wish the building placed?

4. What sum of money should be spent on construction?  
or the Council might throw the whole question open at the next Annual Meeting.

In any event, action by the Council and not by an individual is, in my judgement, the dignified and correct course to follow. With so representative a body of men, a sensible decision will be reached, apart from political influence and emotional advocacy, and the question will be settled to the satisfaction of all Fellows because they will feel that they have had an opportunity of expressing their views.

When the next annual meeting of the College was held in Sydney, the President, Sir George Syme, stated that as Sir James Barrett was not there to move his motion, the matter was closed, but that he had sent a letter (see above) which was read to the assembled Fellows.

The President stated that Council had decided that it was advisable that the College should have an office of its own. Up to the present, the Executive had been using A. L. Kenny's rooms as an office, at great inconvenience to him. The College was wealthy enough and could afford to have an office. This led to the renting in 1930 of a single room at 6 Collins Street, Melbourne, the entrance to which was gained through a small green door, a step above the footpath itself. The room was about 10 feet by 12. There was a small window which overlooked a narrow alleyway. There was an iron-grid fireplace in which coal was burnt during the winter months. There was a typewriter table at which Miss Oldham worked, and thereafter she served the College faithfully and well for 25 years. There were two filing cabinets, a large but rather unimpressive office table and five chairs.

In these restricted quarters and rather gloomy surroundings, the executive committee met every Wednesday at 12.45 p.m. Hamilton Russell would take the chair. Alan Newton would then take a seat in company with A. L. Kenny and Hugh Devine. The writer was in attendance in a junior capacity as Honorary Secretary of the College. The meeting would begin, and Miss Oldham would take down the proceedings in shorthand. At 2.00 p.m. the meeting would adjourn. The executive committee occupied this room, in which all the administrative work of the College was carried out, until 1935.

At the fourth annual general meeting in Sydney, in March, 1931, the Fellows were

informed that Council, for many reasons, had declined the offer of the Commonwealth Government to provide a site for the College headquarters in Canberra. After some discussion it was moved and seconded, by H. R. G. Poate and Archie Aspinall respectively, that the headquarters of the College should be in Melbourne, the geographical centre of the south-eastern Australian seaboard. This motion was carried. The executive committee was then instructed to look for a site in Melbourne.

As a consequence, negotiations began with the Royal Society of Victoria, whose small but dignified building is on a triangular site bounded by Latrobe, Exhibition and Victoria Streets. The representatives of the Royal Society approved of the proposal that some of the land should be granted to the College by the Society free of charge for the purpose of erecting a College building, but they stipulated that the additions to their building should contain a lecture hall which should be made available to the Royal Society for its meetings. The part of land in question was on the Exhibition Street frontage, that is, with a western aspect, and presumably the new building would be an extension of the western aspect of the existing building. Fortunately these negotiations were not concluded.

On the Melbourne plan in the late 1840s, there was shown an area of two acres and 26 perches "reserved for a Market". Subsequently Governor La Trobe promised the Education Department a Crown Grant for that island area bounded by Nicholson, Victoria, Spring and Flint<sup>15</sup> Streets "a consideration of which is the payment of a quit rent of one peppercorn yearly for ever on demand".

At this period in Melbourne there were no great public schools and no university, and the site of the House of Parliament was a stumped paddock. There were, however, establishments for primary education in the form of denominational schools and national schools, the latter being known as Lord Stanley's system. For one reason or another, a breakaway was made from this educational scheme, the first being when one Robert Lawson, on October 6, 1851, formed the nucleus of Scotch

<sup>15</sup> The name of Flint Street was later changed to Evelyn Street, and when the College building was opened in 1935 there was still a street sign bearing this name near the old horse trough. The street was merely the short thoroughfare connecting Lonsdale and Albert Streets.

College in a building in Spring Street, long since demolished, although the site is delineated by a marble tablet set in the footpath directly opposite the western end of the College building.

The second venture was the erection of a model high school on this island site in 1852. It continued to function there until 1932, when the building was found to be inadequate for its purposes, and plans were made to transfer these

the College, within a period of 10 years from April, 1932, was to expend the sum of £15,000 on the erection of new buildings, additions and improvements.

Shortly after this lease was signed, the Hogan Ministry resigned and was succeeded by the Ministry under the leadership of Sir Stanley Argyle, who modified the terms of the lease in such a manner that the whole area was leased to the College on the same terms for

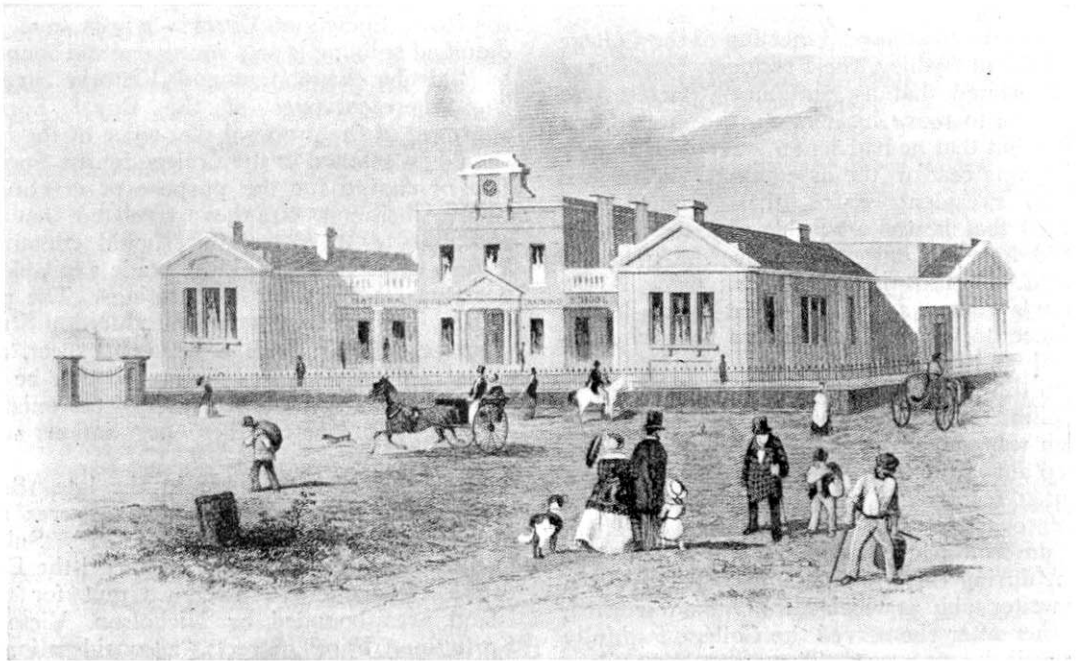


FIGURE 4: Model High School, Melbourne, 1852-1932

activities elsewhere. On learning of this, the executive committee instituted negotiations with the Ministry of the State of Victoria which resulted in the lease to the College for a nominal rental of the southern half of this site, which included the old building, for 50 years, with the option of renewal for another 50. The Ministry made it a condition of this lease that the College should also take over the northern half of the site for a period of 10 years. Under the terms of the lease, the College would be required to place the grounds and fences in good state and condition, and convert into gardens such portion of the ground as was not occupied by buildings and approaches. Further,

50 years, with the option of renewal for another 50 years, and that the Government would construct, and the Melbourne City Council maintain, the gardens free of expense to the College.

The old building was examined with a view to its restoration. A very unfavourable report was received from the architect, and it was decided that the building should be demolished<sup>16</sup> and a new one erected. Mr Leighton Irwin was instructed to draw plans, and Council at once instituted a building fund. At this stage

<sup>16</sup> A relic of the old high school is still standing, the "Tuck Shop", built in the same year. It is the small shop on the corner of the lane opposite the exit of the College Drive, in Spring Street.



the total assets of the College were about £6,000. The building fund had produced approximately £5,000.

In plans which Mr Irwin drew it was estimated that the cost of the building would be £13,000. There was not this much money available, so it was decided, with regret, that the extensive colonnade which was part of the design would have to be omitted. On hearing of this, Dr A. E. (Sir) Rowden White contributed £1,000 in order that the item might be preserved in the plan. He did so, not so much as a member of the profession, but because he felt, as a citizen of Melbourne, that every possible advantage should be taken by the College of the magnificent site. In addition, Mr F. J. Cato, father of a Fellow of the College, gave £500. The old model school was demolished, and work began on the College building soon afterwards.

## PART III

## THE SYME ORATION, THE MACE AND MOYNIHAN

Sir George Syme died in 1929. It would be idle for anyone to pay further tribute to this eminent surgeon and great man, so many years after his death. But it would be correct to say that but for him, the College of Surgeons of Australasia would not have been founded as early as 1926. Shortly after his death, Lady Syme and her family gave the College a sum of money, the interest on which was to be used to perpetuate his memory. Council decided that there should be a George Adlington Syme Oration delivered at each annual meeting of the College. The Syme Oration, first delivered in 1932, has since then been the official opening ceremony of the annual meeting (now the general scientific meeting).

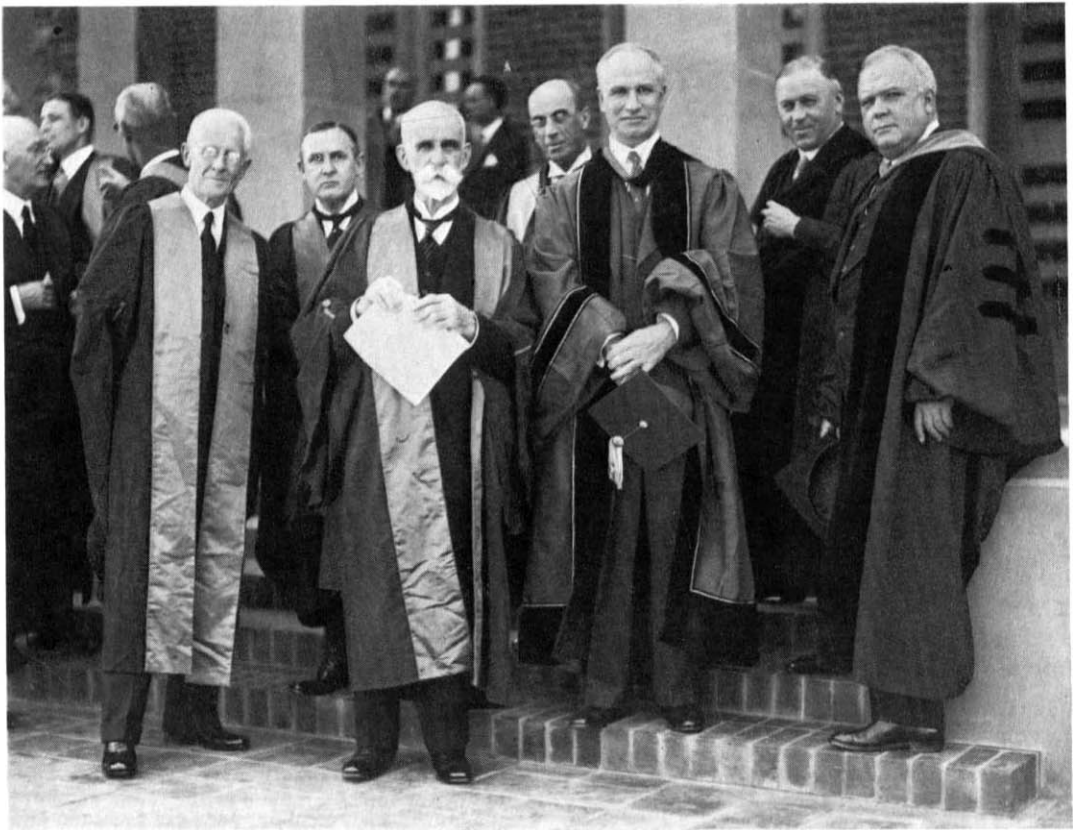


FIGURE 5: Opening Ceremony, 1935. *Left to right:* Edward Archibald, G. R. A. Syme, E. D. Ahern (back of head), F. P. Sandes, C. F. M. Saint, A. L. Kenny, Sir Louis Barnett, Donald Balfour, John Fraser, Dean Lewis.



FIGURE 6: The crowd at the opening.

In 1930 H. B. Devine went to England and spent a great deal of his time on College affairs, cementing the close relationship between the Royal College of Surgeons of England and the young Australasian College, which Sir George Syme had established in London in 1928, especially with regard to the question of the primary examination being held in Australia. Moynihan was still President. He gave a dinner for Devine at the Garrick Club at which many members of the English Council were present. At this dinner Moynihan announced that he

and members of his Council wished to give the Australasian College a Great Mace, and that he himself would go to Australia to present it. This was great news. Who better than this illustrious man, blessed with the silver tongue, to deliver the first Syme Oration?

Thus in August, 1930, the following somewhat enigmatic cable was received from Devine.

Moynihan presenting mace giving Syme Oration March 1932. Acknowledge Moynihan. Have registered revised Arms with motto. All contingent incorporation. Try G-G for Royal for mace.

It seemed that this young College was soon to be engaged in exciting events. The Mace and Moynihan! Moynihan was written to and asked if, when he came to Australia to deliver the Syme Oration and present the Mace, he would accept Honorary Fellowship of the College. He wrote a charming letter of acceptance. Then in early 1931, from many quarters, and then from Moynihan himself, it became doubtful whether he could come out because of Lady Moynihan's health. So he nominated C. H. Fagge, a former vice-president of the College, to present the Mace and deliver the first Syme Oration.

About this time, His Majesty King George V was graciously pleased to approve of the application for the prefix "Royal" to the Australasian College. Then it suddenly dawned on Newton or Devine, or both, that the inscription on the Mace would have to be altered. Newton telephoned Fagge in London to appraise him of the prefix "Royal" and asked him to see Omar Ramsden, who was fashioning the Mace. But it was too late. The craftsman had already engraved on the Mace "College of Surgeons of Australasia". All that could be done was to prefix the inscription on the head with the word "Royal". Fagge's comment on this, in offering commiserations, was that he "liked the title as it stood, because Royal Australasian College of Surgeons is, in my opinion, far less pretty".

The men who have had the greatest number of opportunities to inspect the Mace at close quarters are members of Council, but it is doubtful if more than a few of these, past or present, have seen that the inscription on the head of the Mace is "Royal College of Surgeons of Australasia".

So, in 1932, C. H. Fagge delivered the First Syme Oration in the Wilson Hall, Melbourne, presented the Great Mace, and was admitted to the College as an Honorary Fellow.

Work began on the College building in 1934, and for some time before preparations had been made for the official opening. It was anticipated that the building would be completed early in 1935. In that year, two important events were to take place in Melbourne; the centenary celebrations early in the year, and the annual general meeting of the British Medical Association in September. The Council of the British

Medical Association in London suggested that the opening of the College building might provide a double attraction if it could be held either immediately before or after the BMA meeting. Council of the College considered and rejected this proposal for the following reasons.

1. The Lord Mayor of Melbourne and his Councillors were very anxious that the Opening of the College building should take place during the Official period of the Centenary Celebrations in the first part of the year, and the Lord Mayor was prepared to accept certain visitors who were attending the Opening as Official guests.
2. Council was loth to risk that the Opening of its building might suffer in importance, if held at the same time as the meeting of the B.M.A.
3. Council had invited the President of the English College, Sir Holburt Waring, to open the building. He could not come to Australia in September.

So the opening was set for May, 1935, and the ceremony was duly performed as scheduled.

Many invitations had been sent to eminent surgeons throughout the world, inviting them to the opening ceremony. Among these were D. P. D. Wilkie, de Courcy Wheeler, Wilfred Trotter, Starr Judd, W. W. Chipman, Bastianelli, A. K. Henry, Hugh Lett and others. Comparatively few were able to accept. Nevertheless, the College was fortunate that those who were able to do so, though few in number, were very distinguished men. They included Sir Holburt Waring, P.R.C.S., Sir D'Arcy Power (London), James Fraser and Henry Wade (Edinburgh), Edward Archibald (Montreal), Donald C. Balfour (Mayo Clinic), Dean Lewis (Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore), and C. N. F. Saint (Johannesburg) (Figures 5 and 6).

The building was opened officially by Sir Holburt Waring, and in the evening the fourth Syme Oration was delivered by Professor Frederick Wood-Jones, F.R.S. It was a most colourful ceremony. The visitors in their variety of brilliantly coloured academic robes provided a great spectacle. The handsome, dark-haired orator with his beautiful speaking voice spoke, unaided by a note of any kind, for exactly one hour. The title of his oration was "The Master Surgeon". It was many, many years before any other Syme Oration approached his in quality.