ROBERT HALLIDAY GUNNING and the VICTORIA JUBILEE PRIZES
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SUMMARY
More than a century after the death of Robert Halliday Gunning, a large number of lectureships and prizes bearing his name continue to be awarded by scientific bodies and learned institutions in Scotland. Most of these awards were endowed in H.M. Queen Victoria’s Jubilee year (1887-88) and bear the additional qualification ‘Victoria Jubilee’.

An account of the life of Robert Gunning and his various endowments is complemented by an analysis of the factors which determined the nature of his benefactions.

Keywords: Gunning, Victoria Jubilee, Medical Fellowships and Awards.

For more than a century, prizes and fellowships bearing the title ‘Gunning Victoria Jubilee’ have been awarded by the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Remarkably, the founder of these fellowships has not enjoyed any prominence in the literature; candidates for the various awards seeking biographical briefing on the benefactor have to rely on the little information afforded by the obituaries published following Gunning’s death in London on 22 March 1900. In addition to providing a short but authentic account of the life of Robert Halliday Gunning, this paper relates the factors which played a significant role in determining the nature of his benefactions.

FORMATIVE YEARS
Robert Gunning, later known as Robert Halliday Gunning, was born at Wood House in Ruthwell parish, Dumfriesshire on 12 December 1818 as eighth of the ten children of James Gunning and Elizabeth Affleck McWilliam. In 1822 the family removed to Kirkbean on the opposite bank of the Nith estuary, later to New Abbey and ultimately to Dumfries. Robert attended the Parochial School of Ruthwell as a boarding pupil and became dux of that school prior to pursuing further education at Dumfries.

Gunning and two contemporaries at Dumfries Academy, William Fraser and William Scott, subsequently embarked on the study of medicine and all three made significant contributions to the annals of medical history. Scott and Fraser, both born at Dumfries in 1819, being credited with the first operation under ether anaesthesia in the Old World at Dumfries & Galloway Royal Infirmary on 19 December 1846. All three became Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Scott and Gunning in 1839 and Fraser some months later in 1840.
Robert Gunning was reared in one of Scotland's most progressive medical societies of the nineteenth century. In 1835, following an initial period of study in Edinburgh, he returned to Dumfries to serve an apprenticeship at Dumfries & Galloway Royal Infirmary, the third purpose-built hospital to be erected in Scotland (1776). James Fraser, father of the above William Fraser, was at that time one of several surgeons in Dumfries but had the distinction of being "entrusted with the preparation of young men for the qualifying examinations of the Universities and the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, not a few of whom, by their conduct and abilities, acquired high credit in after-life". The period spent at the local hospital made a lasting impression on the young Gunning and prompted him on his return from Brazil to endow a bed at the Infirmary (vide infra).

Figure 1. Robert Halliday Gunning (1818-1900)

On 11 August 1847 he married Eliza Meikle of Springfield House, Govan, daughter of a deceased Dublin solicitor and took up residence at 43 George Square, Edinburgh. Eliza died in 1889, seven years after their return from Brazil, without issue. Gunning, already losing his eyesight, remarried in London on 10 June 1890, the second bride being the thirty years younger Mary Agnes Winwood Hughes, daughter of a baronet and also widow of a baronet. There were no children of the second marriage.

Robert Halliday Gunning died at 12 Addison Crescent, Kensington on 22 March 1900 at the age of 81 years but was brought to Edinburgh for burial next to his first wife at Grange Cemetery. The funeral procession left from the West Port Church, for more than fifty years an object of his beneficence.

Figure 2. Grave at Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh

EDINBURGH

The apprenticeship at Dumfries was followed by study in Edinburgh and Robert Gunning's record of University Attendance has been preserved. These documents are also interesting in that they are the earliest known records on which his second Christian name Halliday appears. The clinical studies extended from 1836 to 1839 and in the latter year he was registered as a Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. Having decided to pursue a career in academic medicine, he went to Aberdeen in 1840 as assistant and later demonstrator in anatomy with Dr Allan Thomson at Marischal College. Both gentlemen returned to Edinburgh a year later, Thomson becoming professor of physiology and Gunning taking charge of the anatomy rooms under Alexander Monro tertius. Gunning's reputation as a teacher gained widespread recognition and his extra-academic classes attracted students from all parts of Great Britain and the Empire, among them Sir William Tennant Gairdner, Sir William Priestley and Sir Henry Duncan Littlejohn (Dr. Watson of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes).

Seven years after being licensed by the Royal College of Surgeons he took the Edinburgh MD. Not unreasonably, the question
might be asked why, already established as a teacher of anatomy and physiology at the University, Gunning should present himself at such a late date as a candidate for this qualifying degree. There are indications that he had intentions at the time of pursuing an academic career and the Doctorate of the University in which he was teaching would have been a valuable asset. Moreover, in 1846 he was running for the Presidency of the Royal Physical Society and may well have been under pressure from colleagues supporting his candidature. Whatever the reason, the statement on the examination record that this final examination was restricted to oral questioning “by special permission” lends weight to the argument that extraneous factors probably played a role. Having submitted a thesis on The Nature and Treatment of Pulmonary Consumption, he was examined on 24 July 1846 on surgery by Professor James Syme and on midwifery, general pathalogy, practice of medicine, materia medica and medical jurisprudence. At the end of the day he was awarded the degree on payment of £20.16s.00d.

Thanks to his academic qualities and mounting recognition of his teaching ability, Gunning was in fact elected President of the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh for the period 1846-1848 when only 28 years of age.

CHLOROFORM

James Y Simpson’s first public administration of chloroform was reported in the December 1847 issue of the Monthly Journal of Medical Science and his subsequent dominance of this particular chapter of anaesthetic history overshadows the contributions made by other colleagues in Edinburgh. One of the several doctors who witnessed the successful administration of the drug was Robert Halliday Gunning who at that time was studying the effects of chloroform on rabbits in the physiology laboratory at the University.

At a meeting of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh on 17 May 1848, Gunning delivered a paper On the Physiological Action of Chloroform which included a description of his animal experiments and an account of his personal observations.10 The lecture concluded with the remarkable assertion that his studies indicated that the anaesthetic properties of chloroform were attributable to a modified form of asphyxia. Understandably, this initiated an immediate verbal conflict with James Y Simpson which continued throughout the remainder of the gathering. However frail Gunning’s arguments for reaching the conclusions he did, his defiance of the autocratic yet convincing Simpson in debate demonstrated a certain strength of character.

Gunning’s work has to be regarded as the first attempt to define by laboratory experiment the pharmacological action of chloroform. Despite his statement during the above meeting that he (JYS) had “successfully chloroformed several of the lower animals”, mentioning specifically earthworms and fish, Simpson had to admit that he had not yet conducted any systematic experimental work on the agent. Gunning lost no opportunity in labouring the point that Simpson, however extensively he had used the drug, had nevertheless “paid little attention to the modus operandi of chloroform”.

There is no known report of experimental studies by Simpson in which allusion is made to early laboratory work on chloroform by R H Gunning; indeed, no mention of Gunning has been found in any of Simpson’s writings. All credit is due to the professor of midwifery who first dared to employ chloroform and who spared no effort in promoting its anaesthetic virtues, but it cannot be denied that he did not indulge in extravagant acknowledgment of the contributions of others. In this respect, Robert Halliday Gunning joined company with David Wallace, who first recommended chloroform as an anaesthetic agent, and others who failed to receive due recognition from the pen of James Young Simpson.

CHALMERS AND CHRISTISON

Once established in Edinburgh, Robert Gunning became identified with a group of prominent citizens in the town. His association with two of these, the Scottish divine Thomas Chalmers, DD (1780-1847) and the eminent toxicologist Sir Robert Christison, MD (1797-1882) cannot be divorced from the nature of his benefactions during the years in Brazil and following his return to Great Britain.

Gunning’s Edinburgh was rocked to the foundations by the resignation from the Church of Scotland in 1843 of no fewer than a third of the ministers and church members. The leading figure in the Disruption on 18 May of that year was Dr Thomas Chalmers, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland who became first Moderator of the newly formed Free Church. Early in his sojourn in Edinburgh, Gunning became an admirer of Chalmers’ vision of practical evangelism, a concept
which involved the building of schools, social work among the destitute and missions at home and overseas. That the seed of Chalmers’ preaching should fall on fertile soil is hardly surprising, the ground having been prepared by Gunning’s study of the works of the 18th century Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790). These and the writings of the sociological critic Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), born at Ecclefechan only a few miles from Gunning’s own birthplace, had left their imprint so indelibly that Gunning in his latter years commissioned the sculpture of a bust of both men.

Gunning found in the churchman not only an impressive orator but a stimulating conversationalist. After being licensed as a preacher in 1799, Chalmers had studied mathematics and chemistry at St. Andrews and later became assistant professor of mathematics at that university. Even after his ordination to Kilmany in Fife, he continued to conduct classes in mathematics and chemistry.

Robert Gunning became a member of Thomas Chalmers’ church in the West Port, an impoverished area of Edinburgh, and was an elder in that same church at the time of the latter’s death in 1847. He continued to donate considerable sums of money to West Port Church throughout his 33 years in Brazil and identified himself with the ongoing work of the deceased Chalmers by purchasing a tenement building adjacent to the church for conversion into a model lodging house. In recognition of his munificence, Robert Gunning was invited to participate in the laying of the foundation stone of the new West Port Church on his return to Great Britain in 1882.

The current conflict of religion contra science was a cause very close to Gunning’s heart and in propagating his views he gained the support of Sir Robert Christison. Thomas Chalmers had impressed on Gunning how the Church ought to concern itself not only with purely religious work but should become involved in the practical issues of the day such as education and the alleviation of poverty. He had also instilled into Gunning the belief that there were opportunities for ministers who, in addition to their theological education, had made a study in one or more of the natural sciences. Gunning agreed with Chalmers that there ought to be room in the divinity course for inclusion of such sciences and found Christison willing to assist him by disseminating these views among his influential friends at the University.

The way was thus paved for Gunning’s 1889 endowment to finance lectureships in the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Edinburgh, the terms of which required that the funds be used “to promote the study of Natural Science among candidates for the ministry, and to bring out among ministers the fruits of study in Science, Philosophy, Language, Antiquity and Sociology.”

**BRAZIL**

Robert Gunning’s academic career in the Scottish capital, however successful, came to an abrupt end in 1849 when the recently wed couple decided to emigrate to Brazil. Without divulging any details, he stated that he was obliged to seek a warmer climate for health reasons. Many years later he related, “The great improvement of my health in Brazil, and the prospect of easy and lucrative medical practice, induced me to remain there for thirty-three years.”

Throughout his stay in Brazil, Gunning maintained regular contact with Edinburgh and with Robert Christison in particular. Early correspondence relates how Gunning procured ipecacuanha plants for shipment to Christison in Edinburgh. The two evolved a plan to cultivate ipecacuanha plants in India at a time when the drug was being employed on a large scale in the treatment of dysentery.

Remarkably little is known of Gunning’s activities in Brazil between 1849 and 1882. He described his practice in Rio de Janeiro as “lucrative” but the exact nature of his work has not yet been determined. It is nonetheless clear that he became an influential member of Brazilian society. In a letter to Prof. J. Duns he referred to “friendly correspondence with members of the royal families of Brazil and Portugal”. After several years in Rio de Janeiro he was “offered and accepted a responsible position in the management of a gold mine” and between 1872 and 1878 resided at Palmeiras in a gold-mining area of the north-eastern highlands.

The Swiss palaeontologist Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz (1807-1873) is known to have been a guest at the Gunning home in Brazil. On one occasion, during studies of the gulf stream, he interrupted the voyage south to spend a few days with Robert and Eliza Gunning and while there collected fresh water fishes from a nearby river. Agassiz was one of the most vociferous scientific opponents of Darwinism at that time and gained the financial support of similarly thinking philanthropists and intellectuals.
throughout the globe. It is not suggested that funding of his expeditions was the (only) reason for Agassiz’ visit but there can be no doubt that his host lent a sympathetic ear. In a letter to Sir Robert Christison describing his eminent guest’s visit, Gunning wrote, “... telling Agassiz my disgust with the modern caricature of the doctrine of the production (spontaneous generation) and reproduction (evolution and development) of living beings, he thought well of my idea to help research for the solution of these problems”.

Robert Halliday Gunning (about 1899)

Gunning also became involved in the construction of railways\textsuperscript{15}, including the Rio de Janeiro street railways, an unusual sideline of medical practice. However successful in professional and business life, he never abandoned his ‘Chalmers’ principles and put these into practice in the land of his adoption. His activities in Brazil, in particular his efforts to promote the education of the poorer classes, were recognized and rewarded by the Emperor Dom Pedro II\textsuperscript{15}. Just prior to the Emperor’s own expulsion from Brazil, Gunning was created a Grand Dignitary of the Empire of Brazil in the exclusive Order of the Rose\textsuperscript{17}, the highest honour available to anyone outside the diplomatic service. In a holograph addressed to H.M. Queen Victoria, Emperor Dom Pedro requested that Gunning’s rank should also be recognized in Great Britain. The request was granted and, accordingly, Dr. Gunning received a letter from Lord Salisbury intimating the fact\textsuperscript{18}. Henceforth he should rightly be addressed as His Excellency.

However large his frequent donations to the West Port Church in Edinburgh and the cost of financing his various schemes for the benefit of the poor in Brazil, he nevertheless amassed a not inconsiderable fortune and, on his return to Great Britain, possessed the resources which enabled him to make the numerous gifts and endowments bearing his name.

**THE VICTORIA JUBILEE ENDOWMENTS**

Numerous prizes were founded at Edinburgh University, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. The awards all bore the name Gunning Victoria Jubilee in commemoration of the 50 years of H.M. Queen Victoria’s reign. The title was also indicative of Gunning’s gratitude to the Queen who had granted him, as Grand Dignitary of the Empire of Brazil, permission to use the title ‘His Excellency’ on his return to Great Britain in 1882.

The bequest to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1887 was to be awarded triennially by the Council of the Society to “men of science resident in or connected with Scotland .... in recognition of original work in Physics, Chemistry, or pure or applied Mathematics”. The remarkable nature of this bequest from a medical man reflects the influence on Gunning of his two close acquaintances, Thomas Chalmers and Robert Christison.

The first Gunning Victoria Jubilee Prize of the Royal Society of Edinburgh was awarded in 1887 to Sir William Thomson, PRSE, FRS (Lord Kelvin) for his publications on ‘Hydrokinetics, especially on Waves and Vortices’. The benefactor was on corresponding terms with the first recipient\textsuperscript{19} and doubtless derived considerable pleasure from this particular award.

The Gunning Victoria Jubilee Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland was founded by an endowment of £1,000 “to enable experts to visit other museums, collections, or materials of archaeological science at home or abroad, for the purpose of special investigation and research”. It was inaugurated in H M Queen Victoria’s Jubilee year 1887-88 by the appointment of Dr Joseph Anderson and Mr George F Black “to visit and report on local museums in Scotland”. In the years preceding Gunning’s
death money from these funds was used to enable archaeological surveys to be carried out on early sculptured stones in Scotland. A catalogue of these and of other Scottish antiquities was published in the Proceedings of the Society.\textsuperscript{20,24}

No fewer than eleven post-graduate prizes of £50 were founded in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh and a considerable number of Gunning Victoria Jubilee Bursaries and Prizes are available to this day, many bearing the names of former eminent professors and teachers. These include:

- the Alison Prize for Community Medicine; (William Pulteney Alison 1790-1859, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence, later Professor of Practice of Medicine; first physician to the Queen in Scotland);
- the Bell Prize for Physiology (John Bell 1763-1820 and his brother Charles Bell 1774-1842);
- the Joseph Black Prize for Chemistry (Joseph Black 1728-1799, Professor of Chemistry);
- the Christison Prize for Pharmacology (Robert Christison 1797-1882, Professor of Pharmacology and life-long friend of Robert Gunning);
- the Edward Forbes Prize for Zoology (Edward Forbes 1815-1854; Regius Professor of Natural History);
- the Gregory Prize for the Practice of Physic (James Gregory 1733-1821, Professor of Medicine);
- the Hutton Balfour Prize for Botany (John Hutton Balfour 1848-1930, Professor of Medicine and Botany);
- the Lister Prize for Surgery (Joseph Lister 1827-1912, Professor of Surgery at Glasgow, subsequently Professor of Clinical Surgery at Edinburgh and at King's College, London);
- the Maclagan Prize for Forensic Medicine (Douglas Maclagan 1812-1900, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence);
- the Monro Prize for Anatomy (Alexander Monro primus 1697-1767; Alexander Monro secundus 1733-1817; Alexander Monro tertius 1773-1859);
- the Thomson Prize for Pathology (John Thomson 1765-1846, first Professor of Pathology at Edinburgh);
- the Simpson Prize for Obstetrics (James Y Simpson 1811-1870); and additional Gunning prizes in Medicine and Dentistry and vacation bursaries.

The largest single gift of this kind took the form of the donation of £11,000 to endow a Cullen Victoria Jubilee Prize in commemoration of Queen Victoria and in memory of Dr William Cullen (1710-1790), co-founder of the Medical School at Glasgow (1744) and one of the most eminent professors of the practice of physic in the history of the University of Edinburgh.\textsuperscript{25}

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh received a gift of £1,000 to endow a prize to be awarded every four years to a Fellow or Licentiate of the College "for the greatest benefit done to practical surgery during the quadrennial period prior to the award". This particular Prize was named the Robert Liston Victoria Jubilee Prize indicating Gunning's personal admiration for the late Professor of Surgery at University College in London. It is uncertain whether the two men knew each other personally although Robert Gunning commenced his pre-clinical studies in Edinburgh in 1834, the year prior to Liston's departure for London.

At a time when major discrepancies existed between the opportunities for male and female students, in particular with regard to admission to medical schools, Gunning showed an enlightened attitude by including among his many other benefactions the sum of £1,000 for the Association for University Education of Women.

In 1889 the Faculty of Divinity benefited from a gift of £5,000 for the endowment of a series of Gunning Victoria Jubilee Lectures. As noted above, the conditions of the endowment stipulated that the funds be used to promote the study of Natural Sciences among candidates for the ministry.

** Dumfries Infirmary **

Allusion has already been made to Robert Gunning's apprenticeship at Dumfries Infirmary. As a token of appreciation of the "valuable clinical instruction received" he bequeathed a bed at that hospital shortly before his death. One of the hospital governors from 1895 until 1901 was John Gunning of Victoria Road, Dumfries, a cousin of Dr Robert Gunning, but there is no suggestion that he in any way played an influential role regarding the bequest. An account of the correspondence with the benefactor is recorded in...
the Minute Book of the Board of Governors of Dumfries & Galloway Royal Infirmary.

"The Chairman read two letters from His Excellency R.H. Gunning, MD, LLD, FRSE ...... expressing his desire to endow a bed at the cost of £1,250 on such conditions as may be hereafter arranged, preference being given to patients from the Parishes of Ruthwell and Newabbey ...... The following is the inscription suggested by the Donor:

'In recognition of the valuable clinical instruction received in 1835-36 and in benefit of the poor of Ruthwell and Newabbey. Endowed by Robert Halliday Gunning, MD, LLD, FRSE etc., Grand Dignitary of the Empire of Brazil, by permission of Her Majesty the Queen.'

The Treasurer was instructed to procure a bed ...... to be placed in No.1 Ward and also to instruct the appropriate inscription to be placed on the wall opposite it".

The benefactor’s warm interest in his native parish was expressed in a variety of ways, including the addition of a library to the McFarlan Hall in Clarencefield, the provision of paraffin street lighting in the same village and erection of a sports pavilion near Brow Well. He also took a particular interest in the Ruthwell Cross, one of the world’s most discussed mediaeval monuments. That this should attract his benevolence is hardly surprising: the original restoration of the severely damaged cross, vandalized by post-Reformation fanatics, had been conducted by the supervisor of Gunning’s old school at Clarencefield and founder of the world’s first savings bank at Ruthwell, the Rev Henry Duncan DD. Visitors to the Savings Banks Museum in the latter village have the opportunity of inspecting there examples of Gunning school and Sunday School prizes which form part of a permanent exhibition.

ST GILES CATHEDRAL

There must be few Scottish children who are unable to relate how Jenny Geddes, during the riot in St Giles’ on 23 July 1637, threw her stool at the Dean in opposition to the imposition of a new liturgy. To commemorate the incident, a brass plaque was placed on the floor of the Moray Aisle of St Giles’ bearing the inscription devised in 1886 by Lord Glencorse, Lord Justice General of Scotland:

CONSTANT ORAL TRADITION AFFIRMS THAT NEAR THIS SPOT A BRAVE SCOTCH WOMAN JANET GEDDES ON THE 23 JULY 1637 STRUCK THE FIRST BLOW IN THE GREAT STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE WHICH AFTER A CONFLICT OF HALF A CENTURY ENDED IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Plaque in St. Giles’ (from a rubbing by Merilyn Smith)

Not generally known is the fact that this plaque was financed by Robert Halliday Gunning who also initiated the erection in the cathedral of the memorial to Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyll who was executed outside St Giles’ in 1661. This memorial in St Eloi’s aisle was unveiled in the spring of 1895.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mrs A Anderson, curator, The Savings Banks Museum, Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire first aroused my interest in RHG and I am grateful to her and to Mr D T Ayres of Applecross, Western Australia, great-grandson of RHG’s youngest brother John McWilliam Gunnison, for their enthusiastic support and for providing me with much of the information incorporated in the text.

The earlier photograph of RHG by A L Henderson of London is reproduced from an original in possession of Mr D T Ayres.

The illustration of the plaque on the floor of the Moray Aisle at St Giles’ Cathedral features in Dr Murdoch Lothian’s The Cutty Stool, published by Hughson Gallery, Glasgow. It is reproduced in this paper by courtesy of Merilyn Smith.

I am indebted to the librarians at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh whose assistance facilitated the conduct of this research from abroad.

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