

Medical education in Sheffield: the early years

Sheffield's Medical School traces its history back to at least 1828. It is now an integral part of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health – one of the five faculties of the University of Sheffield. We pay tribute to the contributions made by outstanding individuals to the School's development in displays throughout this building and the naming of a number of teaching rooms. The portraits and busts which adorn this Heritage Room bring to life several of the characters from the first century of medical education in Sheffield.

The first hospital in Sheffield was the General Infirmary, which opened in 1795, the result of a public fund-raising meeting. Medical training at the time was unstructured, largely being by apprenticeship. Hall Overend, a surgeon apothecary, began teaching medical students in Sheffield, perhaps as early as 1811; he was a "superb teacher with initiative and drive". The move to formally recognise medical education began under the auspices of the Society of Apothecaries – which awarded its licence to practise, the LSA – and the Apothecaries Act of 1815 was the beginning of regulation of the medical profession. Although Overend successfully presented students for the LSA from 1815, he was never officially registered as a lecturer with the Society, and so cannot be described as running an official medical school. Even so, he can be regarded as the father of medical education in Sheffield.

Hall Overend established an anatomy museum at his home in Church Street, where he conducted demonstrations of dissection, the one essential feature of a medical school at the time. His son, Wilson Overend, successfully applied to become a lecturer with the Society of Apothecaries in 1828, and ran the Sheffield School of Anatomy and Medicine on Eyre Street. However, the physicians and surgeons of the General Infirmary had qualified their support for him by stating that a medical school connected with a public institution such as their own would have greater eligibility for recognition by the Society of Apothecaries than one owned and run by private individuals.

Arnold Knight, a physician at the Infirmary, called a public meeting to found such a school in 1828, being supported by Hall Overend. Funded by public subscription, the Sheffield Medical Institution opened in 1829 on Surrey Street. It contained a museum/library, a dissecting room and a lecture room. Knight laid the foundation stone and gave the opening lecture. This is the true precursor of today's Medical School.

Wilson Overend's School of Anatomy and Medicine continued until it was destroyed by fire in 1835, following a riot in the street. The crowd misinterpreted the noise of a domestic argument on the premises as a dispute over grave robbing – a real fear at the time, following the Burke and Hare murders of 1828 in Edinburgh.

The teachers for the Medical Institution were initially drawn from the consultants at the Infirmary; as other hospitals were founded in Sheffield, their consultants also became involved – all on an unpaid basis. First was the Royal Hospital, founded as a Public Dispensary in 1832 (also by Arnold Knight); it developed into a large general hospital and continued in existence until 1978 when it was replaced, along with the Infirmary, by the Royal Hallamshire Hospital.

DID YOU KNOW?
The Medical School is the oldest establishment of higher or professional education in Sheffield.



See also:

- B floor entrance: Timeline**
- Sir Arthur Hall Health Sciences Library**
- Seminar Room 1: Knight Room**
- Seminar Room 2: Mellanby Room**
- Seminar Room 3: Jackson Room**
- Seminar Room 4: Bartolomé Room**
- Seminar Room 5: Addison Room**
- Seminar Room 6: Florey Room**
- Seminar Room 7: Women Pioneers Room**
- Seminar Room 8: Discovery Room**
- Seminar Room 9: Alumni Room**
- C floor meeting room: Post-1940 Room**
- B floor entrance: The history of Sheffield Teaching Hospitals**

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The Sheffield Medical Institution on Surrey Street, opened in 1829.



The Medical School's premises on Leopold Street, opened in 1888.



The Anatomy dissecting room in the north wing of the quadrangle at Western Bank, the Medical School's home from 1905-73.



Joined by the Children's Hospital in 1876 and the Jessop Hospital for Women in 1878, the 'Infirmary' and the 'Royal', as they became known, provided all the medical teaching in Sheffield in collaboration with the Medical School throughout the 19th century. Several specialist hospitals opened later (for example Lodge Moor and Winter Street for infectious diseases), and two – Northern General and Nether Edge – developed from Poor Law institutions. The Medical School struggled to survive, in constant crisis caused by the regular resignation of the 'honorary' lecturers, the difficulty of recruiting new ones and competition with the local hospitals for funds from the public. On at least two occasions, in 1865 and 1882, it came near to closure.

During the second half of the 19th century, the medical curriculum was greatly improved and systematised at a national level. The General Medical Council was created in 1858: "a watershed marking the beginning of the end for apprenticeship medical training and the rise of scientific college education". In Sheffield, following the abolition of apprenticeships in 1874, a Clinical Committee was formed which oversaw the collection of hospital training fees, dividing them annually among the clinical teachers.

A major development for the Medical School was its relocation from Surrey Street to a new building, opposite Firth College, on Leopold Street, which opened in 1888. All of the preliminary sciences were taught by Firth College and in this way the two institutions became inextricably intertwined. This closeness was formalised by the amalgamation of the Medical School, Firth College and the Sheffield Technical School in 1897, to form University College, Sheffield. Public demand led to the creation of the University of Sheffield in 1905, with the Medical School housed in the main building on Western Bank (now Firth Court). After almost 70 years at Western Bank, the School – now recognised for its high-quality teaching and research – moved to this building.

The Medical School moved to its current home on Beech Hill Road in 1973.



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Further information about the history of the Medical School

Helen Mathers, *Steel City Scholars: the Centenary History of the University of Sheffield*, James & James, 2005

William Smith Porter, *The Medical School in Sheffield, 1828-1928*, Sheffield, 1928

Harold T Swan, 'Sheffield Medical School: origins and influences', *Journal of Medical Biography*, Vol 2, 1994, pp22-32

Milton C Wainwright, Harold T Swan, 'C.G. Paine and the earliest surviving clinical records of penicillin therapy', *Medical History*, 30:1 (1986:Jan), pp42-56

The Special Collections and Archives Department of the University Library holds the following collections:
 Bartolomé Papers
 Arthur Hall Manuscripts, and Notes on the Sheffield School of Medicine (1944)
 Lydia Henry Documents
 Sheffield Medical Portrait Collection
www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/special



ARS LONGA VITA BREVIS.