

### CHAPTER XIII

#### "THE BATTLE OF THE SITES," 1864-1869

INFIRMARY STREET OR LAURISTON PLACE?—PROFESSOR JAMES SYME AND THE FINAL DECISION—DEATH OF JAMES SYME—THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE NEW ROYAL INFIRMARY—THE DISPOSAL OF THE OLD INFIRMARY BUILDINGS.

FOR some years the state of the fabric of that part of the Infirmary, known as the Medical Hospital, had been a source of anxiety to those responsible for its preservation and upkeep, and they recognised that considerable repairs would soon be required if the building were to remain in a thoroughly efficient condition. In the long interval of a century and a quarter which had passed since its foundation-stone was laid, new ideas had been conceived regarding hospital construction, and more modern methods of ventilation were in use. Before a final decision was reached as to the expediency of remodelling or of rebuilding the whole structure it was deemed advisable to obtain the opinion of an expert. Accordingly, Mr David Bryce, the architect, was requested to prepare and present a report upon the condition of the medical hospital.

In October 1864, the financial position of the Infirmary and the accommodation it was able to provide for both medical and surgical patients might be described as satisfactory. The sum of £81,903 represented the value of the Capital Stock invested in good securities and in certain properties. The ordinary revenue for the year 1863-64 derived from all sources amounted to £13,190, and the total expenditure on the ordinary account was £15,408, thus giving an excess of expenditure over income of £2218, an excess, however, which was reduced to £1186 by providing from the capital account a sum of £1032 to meet a small outlay on building and repairs. The number of patients entertained in the Infirmary, although varying slightly from year to year,

### ARCHITECT'S REPORT ON OLD INFIRMARY

continued to show a progressive increase and in 1863-64 totalled 4594: of these, 4253 were admitted during the year and 341 remained in hospital from the previous year. The average number of occupied beds was 386, the highest in use at any one time being 438, and the lowest, 306. Of the 4285 patients treated and discharged during the year 1863-64, 1955 were ordinary medical cases, 1837 were surgical, and 493 were fever and smallpox cases. The managers in seeking an expert opinion were not influenced by any pressing need to increase the beds, but wished merely to learn the truth as to the actual condition of the fabric of the medical house.

The architect in his report presented on 19th December 1864 referred to several defects, the result of wear and tear, and especially to the weak condition of the timbers forming the floors of the wards, which would have rendered the latter unsafe for occupation had additional support not been from time to time supplied. The low position of the ceilings was also adversely commented upon as not in keeping with the modern ideas of ventilation; the baths placed in the basement were far removed from the wards and approached through cold draughty passages; and the rooms assigned for the administrative offices were too small and low in the ceiling. He objected also to the close proximity of the hospital to the high buildings in South Bridge and Drummond Street as interfering with the free circulation of air. In concluding his report he said: "I am of the opinion that as little money as possible should be spent on the present house as I am afraid that, if a large sum were expended in attempting to remedy so very defective an arrangement, it would prove unsatisfactory. In fact, my opinion is that nothing short of a new building will answer the purpose." It was obvious, therefore, that some drastic step was necessary.

The managers, the medical and surgical staff and the Committee of the Court of Contributors were in complete agreement with Mr Bryce's opinion. Therefore full power was given to him to examine the most approved modern hospitals and to prepare the plans and estimates for the

construction of a new medical hospital in proximity to the two surgical hospitals, regarding the condition of which no serious complaint had then been made. A Building Fund was opened and a special appeal was issued to the public for contributions. In anticipation of the occurrence of a situation of this kind, the managers for some years past had annually added to capital account all legacies and donations exceeding £100, not ear-marked for special purposes; and a considerable sum free from all restrictions had thus accumulated, part of which they proposed should now be set aside as a nucleus.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these they proposed to apply to a similar purpose a legacy of £6000 bequeathed, in 1865, by Miss Ann Cranstoun Fryer, late of Reading, permission to do so having been obtained from her executors.

Two plans were submitted by the architect, one representing the new medical hospital on the existing site, the other, with the new hospital in the same position, but with the proposal to acquire the ground and houses on the east side of South Bridge directly opposite the frontage of the University. This suggestion was made, not with the object of extending the hospital westwards as far as the street but, by the demolition of the houses, to secure a free circulation of air and at the same time to effect a city improvement, the more open space thus acquired between the hospital and the University giving a better view of the entrance and east façade of the Old College. The proposal was also made that the cost of this improvement should be met by assessing the citizens and, "that the small rate of one penny per pound on the valued rental of Edinburgh for ten or twelve years would accomplish the object."

At this stage of the deliberations—January 1866—the medical and surgical staff were unanimous in their condemnation of the unhealthy condition of the New Surgical Hospital opened in 1853. James Syme, while expressing satisfaction with the state of his own wards in the old High School building, affirmed that the other surgical hospital had been constructed on a faulty principle. This expression of opinion

<sup>1</sup> Minute, Royal Infirmary, 23rd October 1865.

by the staff fell like a bombshell on the managers and put an entirely new complexion on the situation. It was no longer merely a question of rebuilding the medical hospital: if two hospitals were required, would the existing site be the most suitable? A Joint-Committee of the managers and of the Court of Contributors were appointed and early in the inquiry steps were taken to dispose, temporarily at any rate, of the complaints arising in connection with the New Surgical Hospital by carrying out extensive alterations upon it.

The question of the best site for the Royal Infirmary was then explored and many witnesses were examined. Two requirements appeared to be essential: first, that all the departments of the Infirmary should be centralised, so that if the medical hospital were removed from Infirmary Street the surgical hospitals should follow; and, secondly, that the Infirmary should be in close proximity to the University and Surgeons' Hall so as to maintain the centralised character of the medical school. Two possible sites were considered by the Joint-Committee, that of the existing Infirmary and the site of George Watson's Hospital—later designated George Watson's College for Boys—situated on Heriot's Croft, an area lying between Lauriston Place and the Meadows, the latter an open expanse of ground, once the Burgh or South Loch.<sup>1</sup> The consensus of opinion of the medical and surgical staff favoured the existing site, as the improvements made in the New Surgical Hospital nine months previously were giving satisfaction; the surgeons in charge desired its retention, though some of the witnesses examined expressed doubt as to whether the real effect of the alterations could be fully ascertained till a longer period had elapsed. James Syme had no improvements to suggest in the old Surgical Hospital which he regarded as probably the healthiest in Her Majesty's dominions. In the event of the present site being retained the committee recommended that the houses facing the University should be removed.

<sup>1</sup> In a Provisional Order of 1869 permission was granted to convert George Watson's Hospital from a boarding school into a day school with the title of George Watson's College for Boys.



"THE BATTLE OF THE SITES," 1864-69

Various objections were raised to the alternative site in Lauriston Place; in particular, its distance from the University, but especially its proximity to the Meadows which, because of imperfect drainage, might prove detrimental to the health of the inmates of the Infirmary, an objection, however, which was not considered insurmountable. On the other hand, the site had much to recommend it, but, in order to obtain a sufficiently large area for all the buildings required, it would be necessary to purchase in addition a strip of ground on the west side of George Watson's Hospital, on which stood the houses forming Wharton Place and the mansion and gardens of Wharton House. Taking all the circumstances into consideration the Joint-Committee concluded their report as follows: "Being now in possession of a site which is perfectly healthy, and into which more light and air may be let in the manner suggested—with buildings erected on it sufficient for the whole surgical department, of great pecuniary value, and probably as healthy and as suitable for all practical purposes as any other that might be erected—and the site, moreover, in the most favourable position with reference to the University and the Extra-Mural Medical School—the Joint-Committee are unanimously of opinion that, even on the supposition that the situation of George Watson's Hospital is on the whole preferable, there is no such superiority in it as would justify the pecuniary sacrifice implied in the removal of the Infirmary there, and therefore that the present site should be retained and the new Medical Hospital erected thereon."

In view of the decision of the Court of Contributors, in March 1867, to adopt the above report, a fresh appeal for funds to build on the existing site was issued. It was largely through the exertions of two men, Mr Thomas Jamieson Boyd, the convener of the committee, and later Lord Provost of the City, and of Councillor Colston, the City Treasurer who acted as secretary, that the large sum finally raised to erect the new Royal Infirmary was obtained. Within six months of the issue of the appeal the response had yielded £68,000, which, added to the sum of £40,000 apportioned by the

SYME'S APPEAL FOR A NEW SITE

managers from the Capital Stock, brought the total to £108,000. A Bill was introduced into Parliament to enable the Infirmary to acquire the ground and houses facing the University as part of the scheme. Although complete unanimity with the decision to erect the new hospital on the existing site was scarcely to be expected among all the members of the community interested in its future, satisfactory additions were made from time to time to the building fund.

On 19th October 1868, Syme wrote a letter to the Board of Management, the purpose of which entirely altered the whole situation. After recapitulating the course of events he went on to say that the sanguine expectations entertained from remedying the defects in the New Surgical Hospital, while certainly procuring considerable improvement, had not been realised, and pyæmia—the scourge of unhealthy hospitals—was still distressingly frequent. The inter-communication which had been made between that hospital and his wards in the old High School had greatly increased "the tendency to serious derangement" in them. But, even if no fault could be found with the salubrity of all the surgical wards, they would still remain unworthy of the Royal Infirmary, and the erection of a new medical hospital, in association for an indefinite time with two surgical hospitals of an earlier period, would injure the prestige of the Infirmary. Further, with the new Infirmary in process of erection on the existing site, necessitating the demolition of all the buildings, Edinburgh would be without a hospital for at least three years, thus depriving the sick poor of the means of treatment and interfering with medical education. "When the confined, smoky condition of the present site," he added, "is contrasted with the airy, cheerful and salubrious site now within reach, it is difficult to imagine what possible objection there can be to removal." Professor James Spence, whose work was conducted in the New Surgical Hospital, refuted some of Syme's statements and quoted, in support of his contention, a series of successful major operations performed by the surgeons attached to it in 1860-62, before the sanitary and constructional improvements had been carried out. Of

"THE BATTLE OF THE SITES," 1864-69

twenty-five amputations through the thigh for disease only two died, and of five performed through the leg, all recovered ; of twenty-one excisions of the elbow, all recovered, and seven lithotomies were also successful ; and of twelve strangulated herniæ, only two died. These were results which he considered would contrast favourably with those of many model hospitals. Whatever decision might be reached regarding rebuilding of the surgical hospital he hoped no change of site would be made.

In consequence of Syme's strong protest, two questions arose : Was the whole Infirmary to be rebuilt on the existing site, or on the alternative site ? These questions along with the comparative cost were remitted to the architect. As the position occupied by George Watson's Hospital was eventually selected, it is unnecessary to present in detail the different plans for the erection of the Infirmary on the old property. It will suffice to record that, in order to find an area adequate for a complete hospital, Mr Bryce proposed that the Infirmary Corporation should acquire the High School Yards and the ground extending northwards from it as far as the Cowgate ; or, alternatively, should purchase an area on St John's Hill situated east of the Pleasance, making it accessible by spanning that roadway with one or two iron bridges. On the other hand, if a preference should be given to the Lauriston site he considered it would be necessary to purchase not only George Watson's Hospital and grounds, but, in addition, the Wharton property. In concluding his report Mr Bryce submitted that either was well adapted for erecting an Infirmary in the middle of a large town and that, while Watson's site was superior on account of the extent of ground available, the other had an advantage in its proximity to the medical school and to the poorer districts of the city.

The opinion of the Committee of the Court of Contributors was divided on both these big questions when the subject came before the adjourned meeting of the Court on 19th March 1869. Moreover, during the six months prior to that date public opinion had undoubtedly been influenced by Professor Syme's change of views which had been circulated in a letter to the contributors. Syme then moved the two following resolu-

TERMINATION OF THE BATTLE

tions : 1. That the New Infirmary shall afford accommodation for surgical as well as medical patients : 2. That the New Infirmary shall be built on the grounds of George Watson's Hospital. An amendment was presented by Mr Millar of Sheardale and seconded by James Spence to the effect that, having considered the report of the committee, the Court resolve that the present site be retained and the whole question of the rebuilding of the hospital be remitted to the managers with full powers. On a vote being taken, 144 were in favour of James Syme's motion and 50 voted for the amendment.

Thus terminated the Battle of the Sites and, for the second time in the history of the Infirmary, negotiations were commenced between the managers and the governors of George Watson's Hospital. Widespread interest in the struggle had been aroused not only in the public Press but amongst all classes of the community. Syme's *volte face* was in later years chronicled in verse in the following lines written by a well-known Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh :<sup>1</sup>—

So 'twas Hamish Syme spoke it in a letter—  
If you want a site there is not a better ;  
For ta air and licht are they not a treasure,  
An' ta price of all is just at your pleasure.

Here ta patients wull, long pefore they leave us,  
Be as strong as kye on ta great Ben Nevis ;  
For it's here they cure children's diseases  
Only by ta pure air an southlan' breezes.<sup>2</sup>

Goot day to you, sir, and what is it you've spoken ?  
Had we not your word, Hamish, which you've broken ?  
So you spurn ta place for your occupations,  
Where your great forbears did all their operations.

Looking back over a period of sixty-eight years with the experience that these years have given, no one today will

<sup>1</sup> "How ta New Infirmary Arose," by J. S. in *Lays of the Colleges*, 1886.

<sup>2</sup> The Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Sick Children, in 1869, stood in proximity to the south-west corner of the grounds of George Watson's Hospital.



"THE BATTLE OF THE SITES," 1864-69

regret that Syme had the courage of his convictions and succeeded in impressing his views upon the majority of the contributors. Yet he could hardly have foreseen that, within less than half that period of time, even the new site in Lauriston Place would prove too small for the inevitable extensions of the Royal Infirmary. Within a month of the date of the fateful meeting of the contributors, Syme had an apoplectic seizure which necessitated his resignation of the chair of clinical surgery and his position as surgeon to the hospital. For several months he was able to attend to a little professional work, but he died on 26th June 1870, aged seventy years, and was interred in the family vault at St John's Episcopal Church, Princes Street.

Syme spent the evening of his life in his beautiful home of Millbank in the Grange district of the city amongst the flowers which he loved, his matchless orchids, his heaths and azaleas. "Sensitive, strong-willed, shy, bent upon reaching reality and the best in everything" he had struggled in his early years with imperfect means and family disaster. Short in stature but well-formed, with a finely modelled forehead, expressive eyes and strong well-shaped hands, he was invariably neatly dressed, and his checked neckerchief tied as a bow was a characteristic feature of his apparel. The times in which he lived were not always peaceful in the medical profession. There were giants in those days, but very combative and quarrelsome giants, and he not infrequently found himself engaged in controversies which sometimes terminated in estrangement with men who were formerly his friends. "He was keen in the pursuit of his science, single-minded and earnest in the discharge of surgical duty and influential for good in an immeasurable way."<sup>1</sup>

An agreement having been reached regarding the site, an offer was made for the building and grounds of George Watson's Hospital ; but although accepted by the governors the suggestion met with opposition on two occasions from a minority of

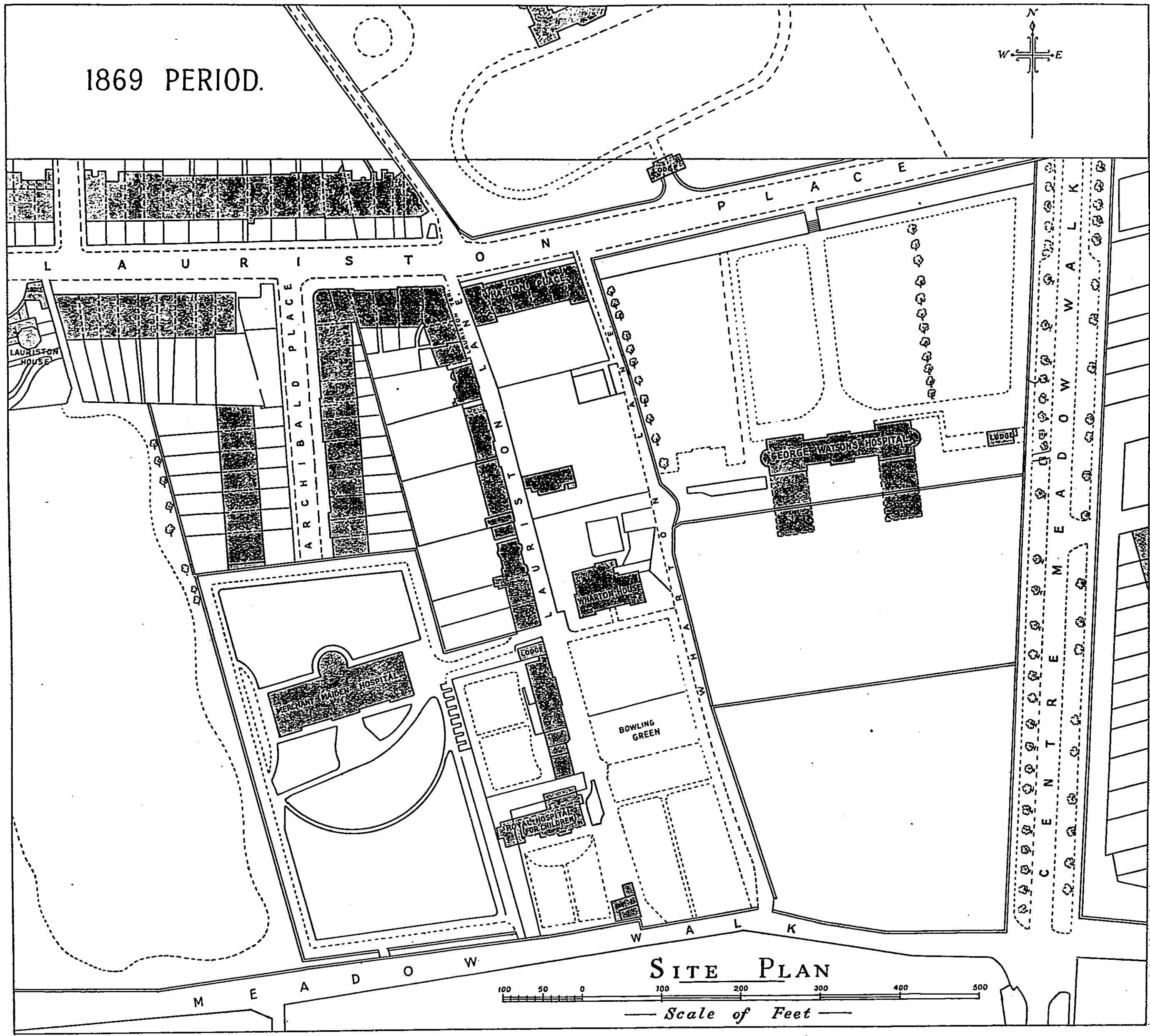
<sup>1</sup> *Horæ Subsecivæ*, by John Brown, M.D. First Series, vol. iii, p. 360, *et seq.* London : A. & C. Black, 1897.

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PLAN OF SITE IN LAURISTON PLACE SELECTED IN 1869 FOR THE ERECTION OF THE NEW ROYAL INFIRMARY

## INFIRMARY ACT RECEIVES ROYAL ASSENT

the members of the Edinburgh Merchant Company when brought before them for confirmation. An Interdict from the Court of Session was sought but this was refused.<sup>1</sup> The contiguous Wharton property on the west side of the grounds of George Watson's Hospital, along with the houses in Wharton Place facing Lauriston Place, was also acquired, the whole area comprising eleven acres.<sup>2</sup>

In view of the decision to build the Infirmary on a new site, the Bill, previously introduced into Parliament to legalise the purchase of the ground and houses facing the University, was withdrawn and a second Parliamentary Bill was prepared and introduced in December 1869. It contained *inter alia* the following important sections:—1. Confirmation of the agreement between the Company of Merchants of the City, the governors of George Watson's Hospital and the Infirmary Corporation for the sale of the property in Lauriston: 2. Power to the Infirmary Corporation to dispose of the lands and buildings now belonging to and occupied by them, in whole or in part, either by sale or in consideration of annual payments: 3. Powers to the Infirmary Corporation to repay those persons who had previously subscribed for the erection of a new hospital on the old site and who dissented in the application of their contributions to the new proposal:<sup>3</sup> 4. Authority to the Infirmary Corporation to appropriate and apply towards the purchase of lands and buildings, monies now in their hands, whether accumulated capital or annual proceeds.<sup>4</sup> The Bill passed through both Houses without opposition and received the Royal Assent on 20th June, as the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary Act, 1870.<sup>5</sup> An interesting point arose at that time as to whether subscribers to the building fund could be regarded as contributors, within the meaning of the statutes, and therefore

<sup>1</sup> *The Company of Merchants of the City of Edinburgh and its Schools, 1694-1920*, by John Harrison: the Merchants' Hall, Edinburgh, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> The governors obtained a new site for George Watson's College by purchasing from the Merchant Maidens' Trust the Merchant Maidens' Hospital which stood on the west side of Lauriston Lane, facing the Meadows.

<sup>3</sup> Only eighteen dissentients finally sought repayment, entailing the return of £224.

<sup>4</sup> See Sections 11, 12, 14 and 15 of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary Act, 1870. Appendix vii.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter xii, p. 216.



"THE BATTLE OF THE SITES," 1864-69

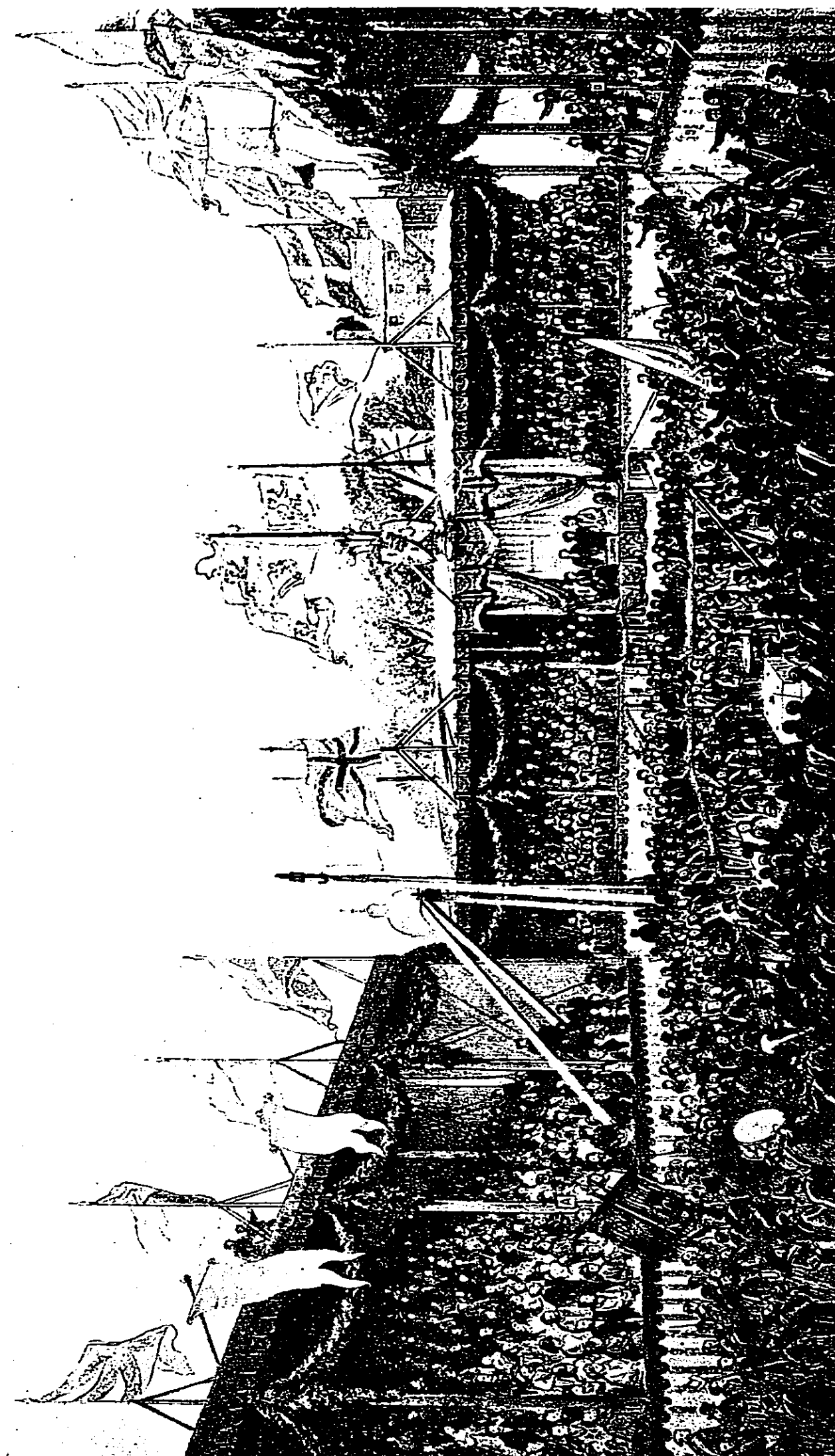
be privileged to vote at the General Court of Contributors. Counsel's opinion on the matter was thus expressed :—" If the money subscribed to the building fund is paid to the amount of £5 the subscribers will be members of the General Court of Contributors and entitled to vote at the meetings of the Corporation. Although the money is supplied to a special object it is none the less a contribution to the Infirmary. So long as the money, however, is held by the committee of the building fund, it is not yet handed over to the Infirmary and so the subscribers cannot vote till that is done, as they are not yet members of the General Court."<sup>1</sup>

On 13th October 1870, the Foundation Stone of the New Royal Infirmary was laid with full Masonic honours by H.R.H. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, Patron of the Freemasons of Scotland, in the presence of H.R.H. the Princess of Wales and a large and distinguished company. The visit of Royalty, combined with the national character of the event which brought the Prince to Edinburgh, aroused widespread interest throughout Scotland and in the capital. There was a general suspension of business in the city, and the main streets decorated and beflagged were lined by troops along the route of the procession. Over 4000 Freemasons representing 170 of the Lodges in Scotland, under the leadership of the Grand Master, the Earl of Dalhousie, assembled in Charlotte Square and marched by way of Princes Street and the Mound to the rendezvous in Lauriston. The scene of the Ceremony was set in the north-east corner of the grounds of the Hospital where the stone was laid by the Prince with correct Masonic ritual—with plumb and level, square and mallet ; and finally, the contents of the cornucopia, the horn of plenty, and of the vases containing the oil and wine were poured upon the stone, in a cavity in which were placed plans of the hospital, current coins of the realm, a copy of Oliver and Boyd's Almanac for the year 1870 and Black's Guide to Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup>

When a commencement was made with the construction of the new Infirmary the disposal of the old buildings of

<sup>1</sup> Minutes, Royal Infirmary, 22nd March and 24th May 1869.

<sup>2</sup> No trace of the Foundation Stone now exists.



H.R.H. ALBERT EDWARD, PRINCE OF WALES  
Laying the Foundation Stone of the New Royal Infirmary, 13th October 1870  
(From an old coloured lithograph)



## DISPOSAL OF INFIRMARY BUILDINGS

necessity became a matter for careful consideration. The University, being then desirous of obtaining more accommodation for the several departments of Medicine, expressed the wish to acquire the property in Infirmary Street, so the Senatus opened negotiations with the Board of Management. Valuations of the whole area, made independently by each of the parties, estimated the value of the property at £20,705. After subtracting the cost of the buildings used as the Lock and Fever Hospitals at the east end of the area next to the Pleasance, which the Infirmary would require for the treatment of fever patients after the new Infirmary was occupied, the west portion was revalued at £15,690 : to this sum there fell to be added £5335 which the managers had previously paid for the houses in South Bridge facing the University. The Senatus expressed their willingness to give £21,025 for this site on the understanding, however, that they would acquire the east portion, valued at £5015, when the Infirmary ceased to have further use for it.

The Committee of the Court of Contributors in their report of January 1871 took exception to this transaction on the ground that a considerably larger sum might be realised if the property were disposed of by public sale : they also expressed doubt as to whether the managers had the power to sell. The majority of the committee considered that it was both the right and the duty of the Court of Contributors to refuse their consent to the sale, but, at the adjourned meeting of the Court on 23rd January, the greater number of those present, without expressing either approval or disapproval of the transaction, remitted the whole matter to the new Board of Management for consideration.

It is unnecessary to record in detail the various phases of the further discussions.<sup>1</sup> Two Notes of Suspension and Interdict against the managers implementing their bargain with the Senatus were lodged in the Court of Session, an interim interdict being obtained in each instance. Both actions were defended by the managers who considered that they were

<sup>1</sup> Details of the proceedings are contained in the Annual Report of the Managers for the years 1869-70 and 1870-71.

bound to fulfil their agreement with the Senatus, and the cases were debated before the Lord Ordinary who declared the interim interdicts perpetual. The judgment of the Court of Session was communicated to the Senatus Academicus who generously absolved the managers from their bargain, and no further steps were taken at that time by the Infirmary Corporation to dispose of the property.

The whirligig of time, however, eventually placed the University in 1904 in possession of all that was then left of the old buildings of the Royal Infirmary. In the long interval between 1871 and the above date events occurred which had an important influence upon their future disposal. The Public Health (Scotland) Act, 1867, having given powers to Local Authorities to make provision for the treatment of infectious cases during periods of epidemics, the Town Council of Edinburgh, as the Local Authority, in 1871 prepared the Canongate Poorhouse for that purpose.<sup>1</sup> Further, as the managers of the Infirmary refused to admit cases of smallpox or cholera, premises in King's Stables Road and in part of the Poorhouse in Forrest Road were fitted up as temporary hospitals to meet any emergency that might arise, a wise procedure in view of the fact that another epidemic of cholera then threatened the city. But, in 1881, on the advice of Sir Henry Littlejohn, the medical officer of health, the Town Council took further steps for dealing with epidemics by purchasing from the managers of the Infirmary for £16,000 the two Surgical Hospitals with accommodation for 218 beds.<sup>2</sup> At the same time they bought the old Medical Hospital for £8500; and finally, in 1885, old Surgeons' Hall which, since the occupation of the New Infirmary, the managers had been using for the treatment of infectious fevers during ordinary seasons, passed into the hands of the Town Council for £4000.<sup>3</sup> Thus, through the disposal of the old property the Infirmary obtained a sum of £28,500.

At last the Local Authority had assumed the responsibility for the treatment of all cases of fever occurring in the city:

<sup>1</sup> Minute, Town Council, 29th March 1871.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 11th March 1881.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 14th July 1885.

this old and much vexed question was then settled and the Infirmary was relieved of a burden which it had borne, not always patiently, for one hundred and fifty-seven years. The old Medical Hospital was demolished in 1884 and, on part of the site, the School Board erected one of its schools, still used as such by the Edinburgh Corporation Education Committee and on what was left of the ground the Corporation baths were built. For nearly twenty years the City Fever Hospital occupied this corner of Old Edinburgh till, in 1903, it was transferred to the fine situation at Colinton Mains on the southern outskirts of the city.

The way was now opened for placing in the hands of the University what remained of the old Infirmary buildings. Having failed to acquire the property in 1871, the University had turned elsewhere for a suitable position on which to accommodate the several departments of Medicine which could no longer be housed in the Old College. An extensive scheme was inaugurated in 1874, and properties in Park Place and Teviot Row were purchased in the vicinity of the site upon which the new Infirmary was under construction. There the New Medical School was erected, thus maintaining proximity between the school and the hospital, not in the manner formerly envisaged by the Joint-Committee of the Managers of the Infirmary and the Court of Contributors, sitting and deliberating in 1866 upon the site of the new hospital, but by the University following in the footsteps of the Royal Infirmary. In 1904 the University Court, being actively interested in acquiring more ground for the extension of two of the departments of science, opened negotiations with the Town Council for the purchase of the buildings vacated by the Fever Hospital, and were fortunate in obtaining them for the sum of £15,000. The old High School whose walls had once echoed to the youthful voices of Sir Charles Bell and Lord Cockburn, of Henry Brougham and Francis Horner, of Sir Walter Scott and Francis Jeffrey was thus rededicated to educational purposes; and, in the autumn of 1905—with its external walls left unaltered—was ready for the use of the Department of Engineering, continuing to serve that



purpose till 1932, when the department was transferred to the King's Buildings on the eastern slope of the Blackford Hill. The High School was then refitted for the Department of Geography. In 1906, the Department of Natural Philosophy was installed in what had once been the New Surgical Hospital, and old Surgeons' Hall became the Headquarters of the University Officers' Training Corps.

The future story of this historic area of the city has still to be told and, whatever the story may be, the fact remains that for more than three and a half centuries this part of old Edinburgh has continued uninterruptedly to minister to the educational needs of successive generations of youthful citizens. It has more than fulfilled the purpose desired by the Town Council of 1561 that the property once owned by the Black Friars and confiscated at the Reformation "should be applyit to mair proffitable and godlie ussis sic as for sustenyng of the trew ministeris of Goddis word, founding and biging of hospitalis for the pure and Collegis for leirnyng and upbringing of the youth and sic other godlie warkis."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 78.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST DECADE IN THE OLD ROYAL INFIRMARY  
1870 to 1879

JOSEPH LISTER AND THE REGIUS CHAIR OF CLINICAL SURGERY—  
MEDICAL EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN THE ROYAL INFIRMARY—PLANS  
FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW ROYAL INFIRMARY—THE  
OPENING CEREMONY.

WHEN James Syme resigned the chair of clinical surgery in the summer of 1869 Joseph Lister was elected his successor and, in a letter to the managers of the Royal Infirmary dated 25th August, he wrote as follows:—"Having been appointed Professor of Clinical Surgery in the University of Edinburgh I beg to express the hope that you will provide me with the means of giving my lectures in connection with the Infirmary. It is hardly necessary to say that, if you honour me with your confidence, the interests of the patients committed to my charge will be the primary object of my attention." At the same meeting of the Board a letter was read from James Spence, professor of systematic surgery, whose term of office as an acting surgeon of the hospital was about to expire. In it he solicited an extension of his period of service as the charge of beds would enable him to make the teaching of the chair more in accordance with the system of instruction then recognised as desirable. An affirmative answer was given to both these applications, but, as the managers were considering a rearrangement of the whole surgical department, the allocation of the beds was not communicated to the two professors till 4th October.

At that date the Old and the New Surgical Hospitals contained 190 beds available amongst five surgeons, the three acting or ordinary surgeons and the two professors of surgery. Of the 77 beds in the Old Surgical Hospital 50 were allotted