and the Association that began with the founding of the British volume twenty-five years ago. Mr Catterall is also well known in overseas countries, and his broad outlook augurs well for good relationships with the orthopaedic associations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa which the Journal is proud to serve.

The other members of the reconstructed British editorial team are Mr David L. Evans and Mr John Crawford Adams, both of London. Mr Evans, of the Westminster Hospital, has served for some time as Secretary and Treasurer to the Board. He is largely responsible for the Journal's finances, which in these times of devaluations, revaluations and floating currencies pose incredibly difficult problems. Mr Adams, of St Mary's Hospital, who as Deputy Editor has also had a long association with the Journal, will continue with his main concern, the actual editing, layout and production of the finished article. The members of this team of Londoners, working now from new offices at 8 Hallam Street, only a short walk from Oxford Circus, will do all in their power to maintain the high standards set by their predecessors.

THE BICENTENARY OF ABRAHAM COLLES, 1773-1843

The 200 years that have elapsed since the birth of Colles are but a drop in the ocean of time existing before it. It still remains almost unbelievable that the diagnosis of the commonest fracture affecting the human skeleton remained uncertain till the publication in 1814 of Colles's article in the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal. As fresh material about his life is unobtainable, it is perhaps best to let his article speak for itself: it is reproduced in the following pages. Seldom has such an important original observation been made with such brevity. The paper speaks for Colles's ability and succinct style.

It is strange that no occasional necropsy after accidental death had enabled the diagnosis of this fracture to be established. As Pasteur said: "In the fields of observation chance favours only the minds which are prepared". Colles deserves full credit for his powers of observation. No certain diagnosis of fracture was possible in the days before radiography except by the detection of crepitus.

Abraham Colles was born near Kilkenny on July 23, 1773, his father being a quarry master. He graduated in 1796 after much frugal living and hard work, showing that poverty could not undermine his determination. After graduation he walked the 400 miles from Edinburgh to London. On his return to Ireland in 1797 he waited for two years before being elected resident surgeon at Steevens' Hospital, an important post which led to his being elected a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. He was twice President of the College, which was founded in 1784, and we can imagine his feelings as an Edinburgh graduate to read in an editorial in the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal in 1837 that the Irish College was "perhaps the most enlightened surgical corporation in Europe, and it requires from its members a greater range of accurate knowledge than any other body, excepting the Medical Faculty of the University of Edinburgh". He retired in 1836 after thirty-two years as professor of surgery, and declined a baronetcy in 1839. He continued practice in Dublin until his death on December 16, 1843. He holds a position in Irish surgery comparable with that of Astley Cooper in England.

Colles's wide interests are evidenced by his collected work. He was an innovator (with William Hunter) in the change of teaching anatomy from a systemic method to a topographical one, and he wrote in 1811 a Treatise on Surgical Anatomy which was twice reprinted in America.
He took an interest in the treatment of club foot, publishing a paper in 1818. Colles saw that a syphilitic baby could not infect its mother and was persuaded, in ignorance of the fact that the mother already had the disease in an attenuated form, that the mother was resistant. This was published in 1837 in his book *Practical Observations on the Venereal Disease and on the Use of Mercury*, and was known as Colles’s Law until it was discredited seventy years later by Wassermann.


While not an outstandingly dexterous surgeon at a time when speed counted, Colles was a more than competent operator and was the first surgeon to tie the right subclavian artery. His reputation, however, rests chiefly on his powers of observation, his kind consideration for his patients and his powers of communication with students and colleagues. His portrait scarcely does justice to his energy, strength of character and intellect. J. G. Bonnin.

REFERENCES

