

## Reading Pathological History

The Reading Pathological Society was not the first medical society in Reading. That honour belonged to the Reading Medico-chirurgical Society, which was founded in 1824. for the purpose of 'forming a medical library and diffusing medical literature'. Without official premises, their meetings would have been held at the members' homes.

The founding of the Royal Berkshire Hospital in 1839 totally altered the local medical scene. The honorary medical officers of the Hospital formed a Society in 1841 for the discussion of clinical matters in conjunction with the Practitioners of the Town and the Neighbourhood. The Hospital Board granted use of the hospital museum as a meeting room and provided a Library room for the Society's books.

Although the examination of morbid anatomy specimens was an important part of the activities of the new, hospital-based society, the title 'Pathological' was used more in the older Greek sense of pathos - misfortune or suffering - they planned to discuss the misfortunes, or medical problems, of mankind. The central principle that membership should be open to both hospital consultants and general practitioners has continued to the present day.

The Society was very successful. Benjamin Ward Richardson reported in 1864 in the *Medical Times and Gazette*:

***The Reading Pathological Society has for many years past taken a very distinguished position in medical science. Altogether there is perhaps no town in England in which medical men are more heartily of one mind or firmly bound together by the ties of mutual respect, confidence and I may say, warm and sincere friendship.***

In 1882 the original Library and Museum were replaced by the Hospital Chapel and a new library suite was built above the Outpatients Department.

This magnificent new Library and the adjacent room housing the Society's Museum of pathological specimens were again provided specifically for the use of the Reading Pathological Society, and constituted the 'Postgraduate Education Centre' of the day.

In 1889 the Medico-chirurgical Society amalgamated with its junior brother. In 1892 the tradition was begun of an annual oration. Over the years the Orators have include such famous names as Sir Frederick Treves, Sir Arbuthnot Lane, Hugh Cairns and Francis Avery-Jones.

The society was forward-looking clinically, being quick to discuss advances such as anaesthesia, antisepsis and X-rays. But in other ways it was a conservative, indeed a reactionary body. It took the altered social conditions of the First World War to persuade the membership to admit women. Dr Carling of the Sanatorium at Peppard and Dr Armitage who had a hospital appointment were the first lady members, in 1918.

The Museum was disbanded in 1946 and the room adjoining the Library became the Hospital Consultants' Room. The Library continued as the main hospital teaching centre until the purpose built PostGraduate Centre opened in 1976. The Old Library houses our historical books and is still the meeting place of the Society.

On the social side, the first Annual Dinner was held at the George Hotel in 1853. The Jubilee of the Society was celebrated with a banquet in the Town Hall in 1891. When

lady members were eventually admitted to the Society they were “not expected” to attend the dinners. Now we have distinguished Lady Presidents.