

THE OLDEST MEDICAL SOCIETIES IN GREAT BRITAIN

by

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IN 1949 Thornton published the most complete list that is available of the years of formation of the medical societies in Great Britain. The list also included other medical institutions in Britain and the more important societies and institutions of other countries. Thornton acknowledged that his list was incomplete in 1949, and since then further information has become available concerning some of the early medical societies. No accurate chronological list exists of the years in which the earliest of the existing medical societies in Britain were founded in spite of the interest which the subject arouses among medical men. Claims are made for individual societies that they are 'among the oldest in the country' or erroneous claims that a particular society is the 'oldest'. For these reasons an attempt has been made to provide a chronological list of the early existing medical societies, limiting it to those which were founded prior to 1850.

Doctors have an instinctive concern for records and their preservation and this would seem to explain why the original minute books of so many early medical societies have survived to the present day. This enables an accurate date to be given to the year of formation of most of the early medical societies. Sometimes this is difficult when the early records have been lost or when the society started from a group of medical men holding informal meetings among themselves, and it is uncertain when the formal society which evolved was actually founded. In this situation it is usually found that a society reviews the available evidence and decides upon a given year for the date of its formation. Greater difficulty in compiling an accurate chronological list is encountered from the fact that many provincial medical societies evolved from medical book clubs (Bishop, 1957) and that some medical societies date their foundation from the year of formation of the book club from which they evolved and others from the date of formation of the medical society proper. It has been felt in this study that the date of formation of a medical society can only be that claimed by the society concerned. But in view of the absence of a uniform method of dating the formation of medical societies, information will be given as to how the date has been decided when it is not the formal date of an existing medical society.

Information on the dates of foundation of the early medical societies has been obtained from a number of sources. In addition to Thornton's study (1949, 1966), Bishop (1950) published an essay on medical societies, and the subject was one on which Rolleston was an acknowledged authority and wrote a number of papers (e.g. Rolleston, 1930). In 1939 Power published a volume on the histories of thirty-six medical societies by various authors and of which sixteen were early societies included in this study. The dates of foundation of a number of early medical societies are given in the reference volume on Scientific and Learned Societies of Great Britain (1964) and the histories of a number of societies have been published as monographs or in medical journals. In the absence of a published account of a medical society,

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or when the date of its foundation has not been certain, reference has been made to original minute books or manuscripts in the possession of the society. These have been examined by the societies' current office-bearers who have kindly made the relevant information available and whose names are included in the paragraph of acknowledgments.

The definition of a medical society is generally understood in contemporary usage. But the name has been used to describe many different types of medical organization and it is necessary to define which types of medical society are included in this study. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a society as 'an association of persons united by a common aim or interest or principle, often for the improvement of knowledge'. The earliest of the existing associations for medical persons to meet together for the improvement of knowledge are the Royal Colleges, and Thornton (1949, 1966) feels these should not be overlooked when dealing with medical societies. The Colleges provide many of the amenities of a medical society and when numbers were small in their early days they also provided the atmosphere of an intimate medical society. But it is felt that medical licensing bodies are not normally regarded as medical societies, and for this reason the Royal Colleges and the Society of Apothecaries, founded in 1617, are excluded from this study. The first of the existing societies in which medical matters have regularly been discussed and of which there have always been medical members is the Royal Society founded in 1660. A high proportion of its early fellows were medical men but it was founded as a society for the study and interpretation of all the natural sciences and it is therefore not appropriately classified as a medical society. For the same reason the British Association for the Advancement of Science founded in 1831 is excluded. But the association between the early philosophical societies and medicine was a close one, philosophy being used to describe natural philosophy or science. In Edinburgh a medical society formed in 1731, the Society for Improvement of Medical Knowledge, became in 1739 the Philosophical Society and in 1783 the Royal Society of Edinburgh of the present day (Comrie, 1932). In many of the main provincial cities of England, e.g. Manchester and Newcastle, a Philosophical or Philosophical and Literary Society was concerned with the study of medical matters and was the forerunner of the local medical society. Some of these societies still exist but again are excluded from this study in view of their not being solely concerned with medical matters.

It has been decided to exclude those societies which do not meet for the 'advancement of knowledge'. This excludes the many medical dining clubs and social medical societies. Rolleston (1930) gives a colourful account of many of the early ones but the majority have not survived. The Royal College of Physicians of London possesses one of the early ones which have survived in the College Club among its Fellows; this was founded in 1745 and in 1804 merged with an earlier dining club of unknown date (Clark, 1966). Though there is usually no difficulty in distinguishing between a medical society with its annual dinner and perhaps other social events and a pure medical social or dining club, the distinction can at times be a fine one. This is exemplified by the Fleece Inn Medical Society which met at the Fleece Inn at Rodborough, Gloucestershire, from 1788 to about 1793 and to which Jenner contributed his early observations on smallpox and Parry of Bath spoke on angina

pectoris. The society was also known as the local Medico-Convivial Society in distinction from another local society the Convivio-Medical Society whose members complained that they found Jenner's scientific papers tedious. For this reason Jenner founded the Fleece Inn Medical Society (Strohl, 1963). Edinburgh was a great centre for medical social and dining clubs in the eighteenth century. Two of them are still in active existence, the Aesculapian Society founded in 1773, and the Edinburgh Harveian Society founded in 1782 (Wemyss, 1933; Comrie, 1932).

Other types of medical societies which do not exist for the advancement of knowledge, and which are therefore not included, are the medical benevolent societies. The first two provincial medical benevolent societies appear to be the Essex and Hertfordshire Benevolent Society and the Norfolk and Norwich Medical Benevolent Society, both founded in 1786 (Crosse, 1821). The latter is still in existence; the former has been dissolved and its funds were transferred to the Royal Medical Benevolent Society in 1951. The Royal Medical Benevolent Fund itself was established in 1836 as the Benevolent Society of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association and acquired its present title in 1913. The third oldest benevolent society, and the oldest one in London, is the Society for Relief of Widows and Orphans of Medical Men founded in 1788 (Merriman, 1888). Local provincial medical benevolent societies often preceded local medical societies with educational functions and held dinners and other social events in their annual calendar. They were known as 'medical societies' and have sometimes been confused with medical societies proper. This appears to have been the case in the date, 1802, which Thornton (1949) gives for the formation of the Lincoln Medical Society. 1802 was the year of formation of the Lincoln Benevolent Medical Society and the Lincoln Medical Society proper was not founded until some sixty years later. The situation is further confused by some early benevolent societies, but not the one at Lincoln, holding scientific and clinical meetings. In an account of the Surrey Benevolent Medical Society, founded in 1812, Walters (1944) recorded that the society held regular scientific meetings until 1862 since when it has been concerned solely with benevolent matters. The various medical missionary societies are also excluded from this study, e.g. the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society founded in 1841.

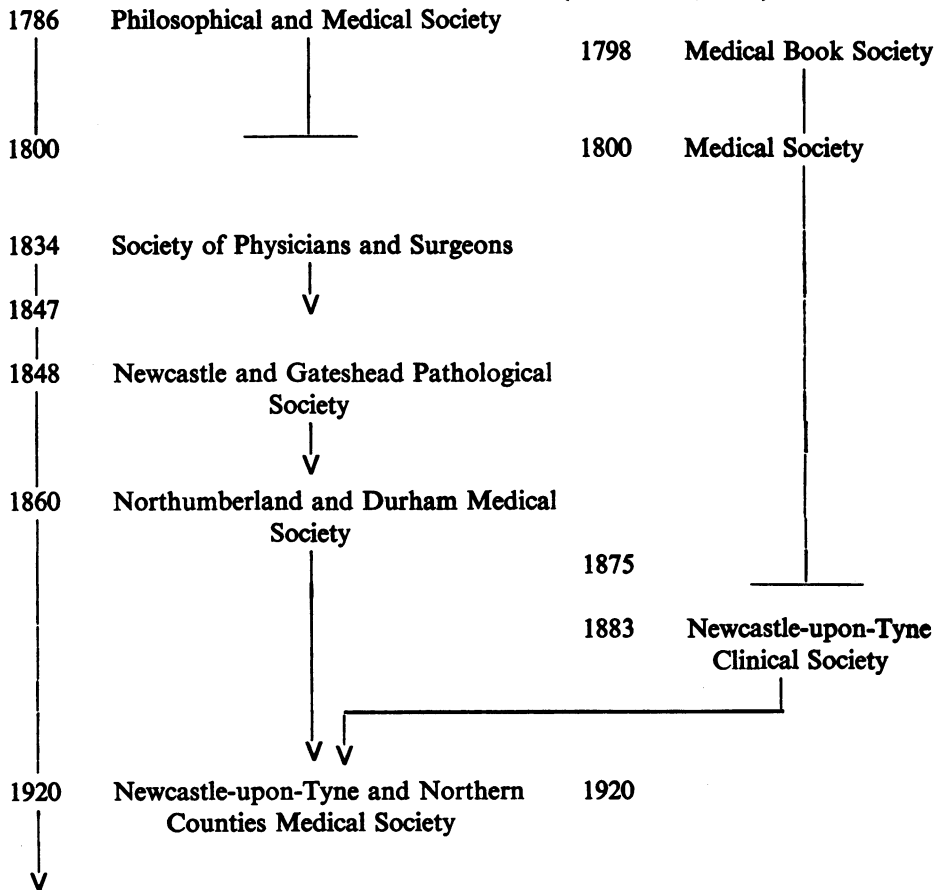
Most accounts of medical societies do not regard medical book clubs and medical libraries as qualifying for inclusion in their number. For this reason the Medical Reading Society founded at Bristol in 1807 and the Lancaster Medical Book Club founded in 1823, which are examples of early medical libraries still in existence, are not included. Medical student societies are sometimes rejected from lists of medical societies. But so many of the early medical societies are student ones and the earliest medical society in Britain, the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh, is one of them, that it is felt that they should not be excluded from this study. They are marked with a cross in the following tables to distinguish them from graduate societies.

A final criterion which has been imposed is that the medical society must still be in existence. This excludes a large number of societies which were formed but which have not survived, and excludes the names of many towns and cities in Britain which had early medical societies. A notable exclusion is Bristol which has a remarkable record of early medical societies, ten medical societies and book clubs being formed

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in the city between 1788–1850 (Smith, 1914). The history of the Bristol medical societies also illustrates a trap for the unwary historian in that the present Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Society founded in 1874 is a separate organization from an earlier society of the same name which existed from 1812 to ?1825. Lack of appreciation that there may have been more than one medical society with the same name has led to false claims in the literature. The policy of including only existing medical societies does not reflect the large number of early ones which existed in Edinburgh, London, and cities other than Bristol. Hume's (1958) account of the Newcastle medical societies illustrates the point well. As the existing Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Northern Counties Medical Society was founded in 1920 no Newcastle society appears in the following tables, but Newcastle has an unbroken sequence of medical societies from 1786 to the present day apart from a short lapse between 1800–1834 and even during this period there was a small society in existence parallel to the main succession. The following chart (Table 1) adapted from Hume's paper could be repeated for other cities who are not represented by a society in the present study, e.g. Sheffield (Snell, 1890.)

TABLE 1. THE MEDICAL SOCIETIES OF NEWCASTLE (FROM HUME, 1958)



EXISTING BRITISH MEDICAL SOCIETIES FOUNDED BEFORE 1850

The existing medical societies of Britain founded prior to 1850 will be considered in five groups comprising those in Scotland, London, the provinces of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and national medical societies.

SCOTLAND

Table 2. MEDICAL SOCIETIES IN SCOTLAND FOUNDED BEFORE 1850

(× denotes a student society; + denotes a student society which became a graduate society)

× 1737	Royal Medical Society, Edinburgh
+ 1789	Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society
× 1802	Glasgow University Medico-Chirurgical Society
1814	Royal Medico-Chirurgical Society of Glasgow
1821	Edinburgh Medico-Chirurgical Society
1839	Edinburgh Obstetrical Society

In a recent account of the evolution of medical education at the Scottish Universities, Tait (1966) has outlined the stages whereby Edinburgh in the eighteenth century acquired from Leyden the mantle of the leading medical school of the world; at this school medical student societies were encouraged and a great number were formed (Comrie, 1932). The oldest one to survive is the Royal Medical Society. Granted a royal charter by George III in 1779, the Royal Medical Society is not only the oldest students' medical society but the oldest existing medical society in Britain (Gray, 1952). In 1789 the medical students of Aberdeen formed the Aberdeen Medical Society in imitation of the Edinburgh society. It was soon joined by medical graduates as honorary members. In 1811 the name of the society was changed to that which it bears today, the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society. In 1812 the constitution was amended and the society was divided into two groups, for graduates and students, each with its respective officers. The meetings of the medical students' group lasted until about 1870 and the society has since been one for graduates only (Riddell, 1922; Power, 1939). The third oldest Scottish medical society is also a medical students' society, the Glasgow University Medico-Chirurgical Society formed in 1802 (Coutts, 1909). Excluded from this list on the grounds that they are dining clubs are the Aesculapian Club of Edinburgh, 1773, and the Edinburgh Harveian Society, 1782. In 1814 the first medical graduates' society in Glasgow was formed as the Glasgow Medical Society; this combined in 1866 with the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Glasgow formed in 1844, and the combined society took the name of the younger partner. In 1907 it amalgamated with the Glasgow Pathological and Clinical Society and in 1919 the society received the royal charter (Power, 1939). The Edinburgh Medico-Chirurgical Society founded in 1821 is the second society of that name (Handyside, 1874). The first society was formed in 1767 and was one of the remarkable number of graduate, as well as medical student societies, which Edinburgh produced during the eighteenth century. The first Edinburgh Medico-Chirurgical Society amalgamated in 1782 with the Physico-Chirurgical Society, founded in 1771, to form the Physical Society, later the Royal Physical Society, a society which has not sur-

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vived (Comrie, 1932). The Edinburgh Obstetrical Society formed in 1839 appears to be the oldest existing obstetric society in Britain (Underhill, 1890).

LONDON

Table 3. MEDICAL SOCIETIES IN LONDON FOUNDED BEFORE 1850

(× denotes a student society)

1773	Medical Society of London
× 1774	Middlesex Hospital Medical Society
× 1795	Abernethian Society, St. Bartholomew's Hospital
(1805	Royal Society of Medicine, 1907, as the Medico-Chirurgical Society of London)
1819	Hunterian Society of London
× 1830	Pupils' Physical Society, Guy's Hospital
1831	Harveian Society of London
× 1832	Hunterian Society of St. George's Hospital Medical School
× 1833	Listerian Society, King's College Hospital
× 1836	Medical and Physical Society, St. Thomas's Hospital

Accounts of the early London medical societies, a great number of which have not survived, are given by Bailey (1895), Pitt (1896) and Dukes (1960); many owed their creation to Edinburgh graduates who had migrated to London. In 1773 John Coakley Lettsom founded the Medical Society of London (Owen, 1897; Thompson, 1918; Power, 1939). In 1774 the first of the student medical societies at a London school, the Middlesex Hospital Medical Society was formed (Morris, 1924; Power, 1939) and it is of interest to see from Table 3 that six of the ten existing London medical societies founded prior to 1850 are student societies. The second students' society is the Abernethian Society of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. It was founded as the Medical and Philosophical Society with John Abernethy as one of its prominent members. In 1832, one year after Abernethy's death, the society was renamed the Abernethian Society (Power, 1939). The Pupils' Physical Society of Guy's Hospital originated in 1830 (Hale-White, 1919; Campbell, 1925) as a branch of the older Physical Society of Guy's Hospital (Power, 1939). It appears that the initiative for forming the Physical Society of Guy's Hospital which existed from 1771 to 1852 arose in Guy's and that is why it was so named, though its original members included members of the staff of both Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals whose students at the time of the Physical Society's formation attended the practice of both hospitals; the society also included among its members local practitioners and other London consultants. After the break between Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals in 1825 their medical schools became quite separate. But for a few years the students of each hospital were allowed to attend the operations conducted at the other, and when the Pupils' Physical Society of Guy's Hospital was formed in 1830 students from both hospitals appear to have attended its meetings. In 1836 the break between the students of the two schools became complete and St. Thomas's established its separate students' society, the Medical and Physical Society (Parsons, 1934; Gough, 1949; Cameron, 1954). The medical students of St. George's Hospital founded in 1832 the St. George's Hospital Medical and Surgical Society; it has experienced a few short breaks in its existence

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after one of which it was renamed, in 1851, the St. George's Hunterian Society and now it is known as the Hunterian Society of St. George's Hospital Medical School (Turner, 1894, 1895). In 1833 the King's College Hospital Medical and Scientific Society was formed; its name was changed to the Medical Society of King's College, London, in 1845 and in 1908 it became the King's College Hospital Medical Society. In the year of Lord Lister's death, 1912, the society was renamed the Listerian Society of King's College Hospital to commemorate his distinguished association with King's College Hospital and its medical school (Power, 1939). The Hunterian Society was formed in 1819, as the London Medical and Physical Society. It was founded for doctors practising in the east of London and to perpetuate the name of John Hunter (Power, 1939). Conversely the Harveian Society of London, 1831, was formed for doctors in west London and to commemorate the name of William Harvey, and was initially named the Western London Medical Society (Power, 1939).

The second oldest of the graduate societies in London is the Royal Society of Medicine. Though not so named until 1907, and for this reason shown in brackets in Table 3, it evolved from the Medico-Chirurgical Society of London founded in 1805. The Medico-Chirurgical Society of London, founded by a group of doctors dissatisfied with the Medical Society of London, acquired its royal charter in 1834 and in 1907 combined with seventeen other specialist medical societies in London to form the Royal Society of Medicine. Of the seventeen specialist societies that were incorporated, two were founded prior to 1850, the Pathological Society of London in 1846 and the Epidemiological Society of London in 1850 (Moore and Paget, 1905; Davidson, 1955).

PROVINCES OF ENGLAND

Table 4. PROVINCIAL MEDICAL SOCIETIES IN ENGLAND FOUNDED BEFORE 1850.

(× denotes a student society)
The dates of foundation are those claimed by the societies.

1774	Colchester Medical Society
1794	Plymouth Medical Society
1800	Leicester Medical Society
1814	Huddersfield Medical Society
1826	St. Helen's Medical Society
1828	Nottingham Medico-Chirurgical Society
1832	York Medical Society
1834	Manchester Medical Society
× 1834	University of Birmingham Medical Society
1837	Liverpool Medical Institution
1841	Reading Pathological Society
1842	Torquay and District Medical Society
1847	Brighton and Sussex Medico-Chirurgical Society
1849	North Staffordshire Medical Society
1849	West Hertfordshire and Watford Medical Society

Rolleston (1928, 1930) claimed that Warrington set the example by establishing the first provincial medical society in England in 1770. The claim has been repeated

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in the literature but is a false one. That which was founded at Warrington in 1770 was a pre-medical course at Warrington Academy (Guest-Gornall, 1967).

There appears to be little doubt that the earliest of the provincial medical societies is that founded at Colchester in 1774 by Robert N. Newell. Newell, the son of a Harwich surgeon, practised in Colchester and was a friend of Lettsom who was elected a member of the Colchester Medical Society a few years after its formation. The Plymouth Medical Society, founded at the suggestion of Samuel Fuge in 1794, would appear to be the second oldest of the existing provincial medical societies (Square, 1957). Thereafter the chronological sequence becomes confused for the next four societies, as given in Table 4, at Leicester, Huddersfield, St. Helen's and Nottingham all give their date of origin as that of the medical book club from which their societies evolved. If this practice were generally adopted a different order would appear in the table. The Liverpool Medical Institution, 1837, would then appear first in that it can trace its ancestry to the formation of a medical library in Liverpool in 1770 (Power, 1939). Reading Pathological Society, 1841, might be shown as being formed in 1824 which was the year of formation of the Reading book society with which it amalgamated in 1898 (Hurry, 1909). Some medical societies would become eligible for inclusion which do not appear in the table e.g. the Norwich Medico-Chirurgical Society which was founded* in 1867 and is therefore not included but which arose from an amalgamation of the Norwich and Norfolk United Medical Book Club formed in 1824 and the Norwich Pathological Society founded in 1848 (Batty Shaw, 1967). Table 4 shows the order of formation of the provincial medical societies on the basis of the individual society's claims; in Table 4 a list is given of the order based on the year of formation of the medical societies proper and excluding medical book clubs or libraries.

The Leicester Medical Society dates its foundation from 1800, the year in which the Leicester Medical Book Society was formed. In 1825 this changed its name to the New Leicester Medical Book Society but the year in which this became the Leicester Medical Society is uncertain. Mr. E. R. Frizelle of Leicester has kindly made a careful search of the records but the particular minute book which might give the year cannot be traced. It is possible that the date may have been during or before 1846 when the words 'Medical Society' were stamped on the backs of all bound books. The Huddersfield Medical Society was formed in 1880 and therefore might appear excluded from this study. But the society claims its official date as 1814 when the Huddersfield Medical Library was formed. The position is complicated, as in the early days of some other medical societies, by the existence of a group of Huddersfield surgeons who met between 1825 and 1834, and whose relationship to the main society is not clear. Rolleston (1928) cited the neighbouring Halifax and District Medical Society, founded in 1822, as being among the six earliest provincial medical societies but it is no longer in existence.

The St. Helen's Medical Society dates its formation from that of the St. Helen's and Prescot Medical Book Club formed in 1826. It remained a medical book club until 1870 when the name was changed to that of the St. Helen's Medical Club and clinical meetings were introduced; in 1902 the name was changed again to that of the present St. Helen's Medical Society. The centenary address of the Nottingham

Medico-Chirurgical Society was given by Rolleston in 1928 and in this he gives an account of the early provincial medical societies and the evolution of the Nottingham society from its origin as the Nottingham Medico-Chirurgical Book Society from which it changed to its present name in 1843. There also existed an older Nottingham Medical Book Society founded in 1817 (Rolleston, 1928). The York Medical Society was founded as such in 1832. It acquired the valuable library which it possesses today from its own collection and from those books which were bequeathed to it by the York County Hospital and the York Dispensary (Power, 1939; Hession, 1961).

The Manchester Medical Society was formed in 1834 and Brockbank (1934) wrote its history during its centenary year and the shortened version which appears in Power's (1939) volume of collected histories of medical societies. In 1950 the society combined with a number of local allied societies to form the new Manchester Medical Society. This has sections for different branches of medical practice and with over 1,500 members appears to be second in size, as a British medical society, only to the Royal Society of Medicine.

The University of Birmingham Medical Society appears to be the only provincial medical students' society founded prior to 1850. It was established as the Birmingham Medical Students' Debating Society in 1834 and antedates the formation of Birmingham University by sixty-six years (Davis, 1965).

In 1770 three members of the staff of the Liverpool Infirmary formed a reading club for the purchase of the latest medical books. They were joined by other members of the infirmary staff and the library that was formed opened its shelves to other doctors in Liverpool and its neighbourhood as the Liverpool Medical Library in 1779. This library had several homes until 1837 when the Liverpool Medical Institution was built; in 1839 the Liverpool Medical Library amalgamated with the Liverpool Medical Society and the Liverpool Pathological Society to form the society of medical men of Liverpool now known as the Liverpool Medical Institution (Bligh, 1937; Power, 1939; Liverpool Medical Institution, 1963).

In 1841 the Reading Pathological Society was founded and was the first pathological society to be formed in Great Britain. A local medical book club, known as the Reading Medico-Chirurgical Society, had been formed in 1824 and the two societies combined in 1898, retaining the name of the younger parent society; though still called the Reading Pathological Society the society is not solely concerned with pathological matters and has the functions of the customary provincial medical society (Hurry, 1909). The Torquay and District Medical Society is the last of the provincial medical societies in Table 4 to date its origin from a medical book society. The Torquay Medical Book Society was formed in 1842 although the date is sometimes, and in its own minutes of 1891, erroneously given as 1840; in 1862 the society changed its name to the Torquay Medical Society and is now known as the Torquay and District Medical Society. The Brighton and Sussex Medico-Chirurgical Society was formed in 1847 (McCurich, 1946) and the last two societies shown in Table 3 were both formed in 1849, the North Staffordshire Medical Society (1949) and the West Hertfordshire and Watford Medical Society. The latter society dates its formation from that of the West Hertfordshire Medical Society, which amalgamated in 1912 with the Watford Medical Society founded in 1896.

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In addition to the Halifax and District Medical Society which has been referred to above, the Rochdale Medical Society, founded in 1840, is commonly included in lists of the early provincial medical societies but like the society at Halifax it is no longer in existence. Several societies whose official dates of formation fall in the second half of the nineteenth century had their origins prior to 1850 and might claim inclusion in Table 4. Such a society is the Midland Medical Society which acquired its name in 1854 though from the minutes that have survived it probably came into existence in 1848 and may have had an earlier forerunner (Thomson, 1924; Gough, 1957). However the list has been restricted to those societies formally founded prior to 1850.

The greatest number of erroneous or false claims for 'being the oldest medical society' occur in the claims of the provincial medical societies. Some of the reasons for this confusion can be seen in the foregoing summaries of their formation. The main discrepancies arise from some provincial societies dating their formation from the book club or society from which they evolved and from others, with a similar history, not doing so. As it is considered that medical book clubs or medical libraries do not merit consideration as full medical societies, an alternative chronological list to Table 4 has been compiled (Table 5) in which the dates are uniformly those of the establishment of the medical society. This table does not imply that medical societies have not the right to date their formation from their pre-existing book society; it is merely basing the order on a uniform method.

Table 5. PROVINCIAL MEDICAL SOCIETIES IN ENGLAND FOUNDED BEFORE 1850

Based on the date of formation of the medical society and not a pre-existing medical book society.
(× denotes a student society)

1774	Colchester Medical Society
1794	Plymouth Medical Society
1832	York Medical Society
1834	Manchester Medical Society
× 1834	University of Birmingham Medical Society
1837	Liverpool Medical Institution
1841	Reading Pathological Society
1843	Nottingham Medico-Chirurgical Society
+ 1846?	Leicester Medical Society
1847	Brighton and Sussex Medico-Chirurgical Society
1849	North Staffordshire Medical Society
1849	West Hertfordshire (and Watford) Medical Society

+ The year in which the New Leicester Medical Book Society, formed in 1825, became the Leicester Medical Society is unknown (see text) and may be earlier than 1846.

WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

No medical society can be traced in Wales that was founded prior to 1850. The first appears to be the Cardiff Medical Society formed in 1870 (Power, 1939). In Northern Ireland the oldest society is the Ulster Medical Society formed in 1862; its origins date back before 1850 in that it was formed by amalgamation of the Belfast Medical Society formed in 1806 and the Belfast Clinical and Pathological Society founded in 1853 (Power, 1939).

NATIONAL

Table 6. NATIONAL MEDICAL SOCIETIES FOUNDED BEFORE 1850

1832	British Medical Association
1841	Royal Medico-Psychological Association

In 1832 the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association was founded at Worcester and in 1856 changed its name to the British Medical Association. Though it was a provincial medical society in origin it is considered appropriate in view of its present structure and functions to classify the British Medical Association as a national society (Little, 1932; Power, 1939; Vaughan, 1959). The only other national medical society whose origins can be traced to before 1850 is the Royal Medico-Psychological Association. This held its first meeting in 1841 at the Gloucestershire General Lunatic Asylum (now Horton Road Hospital, Gloucester). Its original name was the Association of Medical Officers of Hospitals (and Asylums) for the Insane. The name was changed in 1865 to the Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain and Ireland and the further change to its present name occurred in 1926 (Walk, 1961). The British Homeopathic Society was formed in 1844, and in 1943 was superseded by the Faculty of Homeopathy.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the foregoing study has been to provide a chronological list of the years of formation of the existing British medical societies founded before 1850. But such a study could not be undertaken without learning of the history of these societies and the purposes for which they were founded. The rise of the medical societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reflected the emergence of a new type of scientific medicine from a previous ancient medical order. The societies were founded to disseminate and discuss the new knowledge. This was achieved by the formation of medical libraries, the holding of clinical meetings and by lectures. The medical societies not only purchased medical books and journals for their members but were themselves the producers of some of the earliest medical journals. Many societies found that the attendance rate at meetings was promoted by holding them according to a regular time-table and combining them with the provision of social amenities. The societies rented, or built for themselves, premises in which a library could be housed and in which there were rooms for social and scientific purposes. They had among their objectives the promotion and enforcement of an ethical code among their members and were concerned with what would now be termed medico-political affairs. But with the expansion of the British Medical Association by its local branches and divisions, most local medical societies have handed over to it the custody of these two matters. Many early societies had written into their constitution the promotion and encouragement of friendship among members. In this way they did much to heal the rifts and competing jealousies which were a feature of British medicine in the early nineteenth century and helped to establish medicine as a unified profession. The contribution of the early medical societies, and those which have followed them, to British medicine has been considerable. This study of the years of formation of the earliest of them may perhaps serve as a reminder of the debt that is owed to them.

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ADDENDUM:

Since the manuscript was submitted further information has been obtained about the Lancaster Medical Book Club, page 234. Its original minute book records its foundation as a book club in 1823 and a copy of its rules printed in 1841 shows it was then solely a medical book club. At an unknown date, for the relevant minute books have not survived, clinical and scientific meetings were added to its programme. General meetings are still held; many of its old books disappeared during the Second World War. It is thought to be the only medical library or society in Great Britain which still uses the title of 'book club'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the help I have received from the following librarians and their staffs, L. M. Payne of the Royal College of Physicians, P. Wade of the Royal Society of Medicine and E. Gaskell of the Wellcome Historical Medical Library. I am especially indebted to J. L. Thornton, Librarian to St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College, for his advice and help. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance that the following doctors, medical students and librarians have given: *Scotland*—Dr. J. Innes, Dr. C. D. Kennedy, Dr. H. P. Tait, Miss M. D. Blair (Edinburgh); Dr. G. C. Timbury, Mr. D. Blair, Miss L. Dickson (Glasgow); Dr. J. G. Henderson (Aberdeen). *London*—Mr. E. J. Tucker (Medical Society of London), Miss J. Hickling (Middlesex Hospital), Mr. W. Hill (Guy's Hospital), Miss F. M. Picken (St. George's Hospital), Mrs. L. Sargeant (King's College Hospital), Mr. F. A. Tubbs, Miss D. Slatyer, Mr. G. C. Marks (St. Thomas's Hospital), Dr. A. Walk (Royal Medico-Psychological Association), Dr. J. A. Struthers (The Society for Relief of Widows and Orphans of Medical Men), Mrs. G. Roosmale-Cocq (Royal Medical Benevolent Fund). *Provinces of England*—Dr. W. Radcliffe, Dr. D. Clendon, Dr. G. J. G. Menzies, Mr. K. N. MacKenzie (Colchester), Dr. P. A. Adam (Plymouth), Mr. E. R. Frizelle (Leicester), Dr. J. B. Eagles (Huddersfield), Dr. A. M. F. Brook (Liverpool: St. Helen's Medical Society), Mr. J. P. Neil (Nottingham), Dr. M. C. Barnett (York), Dr. S. Oleeskey (Manchester), Dr. W. B. Gough, Miss M. P. Russell (Birmingham), Mr. W. A. Lee (Liverpool), Dr. K. Bryn Thomas (Reading), Dr. W. S. Holden (Torquay), Mrs. M. S. Cohn (Hove), Dr. D. V. Duckworth (Watford), Mr. R. Merryweather (Cheltenham: Fleece Inn Medical Society), Dr. H. H. Gunson (Lancaster), Dr. A. T. M. Roberts, Mr. A. E. S. Roberts (Bristol), Dr. R. Guest-Gornall (Warrington), Mr. D. G. Burgess (Lincoln), Dr. R. M. Maher, Mr. G. R. Eastwood (Rochdale), Dr. F. J. Brice (Dorking: Surrey Benevolent Medical Society). *Wales and Northern Ireland*—Dr. M. Richards (Cardiff), Mr. D. M. Bell (Belfast).

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