PAST AND PRESIDENT

Surgeons’ News talks to Iain Macintyre about his new role as president of the British Society for the History of Medicine and its first president, Douglas Guthrie

**SN:** Tell us about the British Society for the History of Medicine (BSHM).

**IM:** BSHM is an umbrella organisation for a number of medical history societies throughout the UK. It was founded with four member societies and this has now grown to 18. The society holds its congress every other year in centres around the UK, with the prestigious Poynter Lecture taking place on alternate years in London.

**SN:** What part did Douglas Guthrie play in its foundation?

**IM:** Douglas Guthrie was an Edinburgh ENT surgeon turned medical historian who played a leading role in founding the society. After retiring from surgery, he became a full-time medical historian and gained an international reputation. He was the driving force in establishing the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine, which held its first meeting in the RCSEd in 1948, when he was elected its first president. He was also elected the first president of the BSHM, which was founded in 1965 when the Scottish Society joined with three other societies: the Section of the History of Medicine of the Royal Society of Medicine, the Osler Club of London and the Faculty of History and Philosophy of Medicine and Pharmacy of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London.

**SN:** To what extent does the society attract members from outside the medical world?

**IM:** Although most members of the Scottish and British Society are from the medical world, there are members who are, or who have been, pharmacists, dentists, nurses and librarians. Professional medical historians tend to join their own societies.

**SN:** What do you enjoy about being a part of the society?

**IM:** The congresses. Keeping up to date and hearing new ideas presented at conferences was an enjoyable part of surgical practice, but on retiring they don’t hold the same relevance. In history of medicine conferences, you can continue to participate, and you can present papers if you are researching a topic, as most BSHM members seem to be. It’s refreshing to hear papers presented by speakers ranging from students to the occasional octogenarian.

**SN:** How did your own interest in medical history develop?

**IM:** It was stimulated by an inspiring history teacher at school. Then, working in Edinburgh, surrounded by so much medical history, it became a hobby, which has developed in retirement.

**SN:** When is the next Poynter Lecture?

**IM:** On 12 October next year at the Wellcome Building Conference Centre and the lecturer will be Sam Alberti, director of museums and archives at the RCSEng. Sam knows our own museum collection well and is currently advising on the move of the Edinburgh University Anatomical Museum across to Hill Square – a very exciting development, which should happen in 2018.

**SN:** What makes Edinburgh and the College a suitable host city/venue for the 2017 congress?

**IM:** Edinburgh is always attractive for visitors. The College is an ideal conference venue, with modern facilities yet steeped in history. Of course, the magnificent refurbished museum will be a powerful draw for all those interested in the history of medicine. The Douglas Guthrie connection was an important factor for me – and the Guthrie Lecture will be a highlight of the congress.
Douglas Guthrie
And his Legacy

Iain Macintyre remembers Douglas Guthrie, the surgeon, teacher and author who left legacies as a benefactor and a founder of two medical history societies.

Guthrie’s gift has developed a science of robust criticism of sources. So, you could argue, have doctors, but historians must interpret these “facts” in the light of the context in which they were recorded.

While medical history today is dominated by historians, increasingly doctors are taking up training in academic history departments or learning about historiography and its methodology. So the school of doctors as medical historians remains alive and well.

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The British Society for the History of Medicine will hold its next congress in the gangrenous on 13-15 September 2017. www.bshm.org.uk

The Douglas Guthrie fund is administered by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine. For further details about the fund and how to apply, see the society’s website: sshm.ac.uk

Above left: the BSHM president’s badge, showing the insignia of the four founder clubs: The Scottish Society for the History of Medicine, the Oster Club of London, the Section of the History of Medicine of the Royal Society of Medicine, and the Faculty of History and Philosophy of Medicine and Pharmacy of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London.

Above right: The reverse side of the BSHM president’s badge, recording that it was donated to the Society by Douglas Guthrie.

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The British Society for the History of Medicine will hold its next congress in the gangrenous on 13-15 September 2017. www.bshm.org.uk

The Douglas Guthrie fund is administered by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine. For further details about the fund and how to apply, see the society’s website: sshm.ac.uk

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The British Society for the History of Medicine will hold its next congress in the gangrenous on 13-15 September 2017. www.bshm.org.uk

The Douglas Guthrie fund is administered by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine. For further details about the fund and how to apply, see the society’s website: sshm.ac.uk

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The British Society for the History of Medicine will hold its next congress in the gangrenous on 13-15 September 2017. www.bshm.org.uk

The Douglas Guthrie fund is administered by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine. For further details about the fund and how to apply, see the society’s website: sshm.ac.uk

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The British Society for the History of Medicine will hold its next congress in the gangrenous on 13-15 September 2017. www.bshm.org.uk

The Douglas Guthrie fund is administered by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine. For further details about the fund and how to apply, see the society’s website: sshm.ac.uk

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The British Society for the History of Medicine will hold its next congress in the gangrenous on 13-15 September 2017. www.bshm.org.uk

The Douglas Guthrie fund is administered by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine. For further details about the fund and how to apply, see the society’s website: sshm.ac.uk

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The British Society for the History of Medicine will hold its next congress in the gangrenous on 13-15 September 2017. www.bshm.org.uk

The Douglas Guthrie fund is administered by the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine. For further details about the fund and how to apply, see the society’s website: sshm.ac.uk

Free of charge to university staff, students and graduates, and were always well attended. His reputation was such that he was invited to give lecture tours in the USA, South America, Australasia and Europe.

Style, Authority and Integrity

Guthrie’s love of medical history for his and later generations.