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*Henry L. Fulton*

## Smollett's Apprenticeship in Glasgow, 1736–1739



The late Professor Knapp's account of Smollett's medical apprenticeship in Glasgow has never been challenged or revised, although it is certainly sketchy.<sup>1</sup> It was composed, like much of the biography, with almost no search or knowledge of the public records of Scotland; it reflects the traditional view that Smollett was an English writer who happened to be born a North Briton, so that any facts about his younger days in Scotland cannot be known except through secondary accounts. Details about Smollett's life in Scotland are indeed quite scarce compared, say, to what Professor Pottle has found for Boswell. However, from some examination of public documents in Glasgow and certain other sources, it is possible to correct some of Professor Knapp's assumptions about Smollett's training in that city, in particular his legal obligations to his masters, the location of their business, the nature of his medical education, and add some additional material to the larger picture of Smollett's early medical education.

According to the anonymous article in *The Emment* for April 5, 1823, reprinted in Knapp, Smollett was apprenticed first to William Stirling and John Gordon, but soon changed to one John Crawford. Much of Knapp's account of the apprenticeship and Smollett's disposition at this period in his life is based on the assumption that Smollett finished with this less known



person who is thought to have been the model for Crab in *Roderick Random*.<sup>2</sup> We can be reasonably certain, however, that Smollett did not quit his bond with Stirling and Gordon and go with Crawford because no such arrangement is noted in the manuscript Minutes of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow,<sup>3</sup> nor should we even expect it: Crawford was not licensed to practice until July 6, 1741, several years after Smollett had left.

Not much is known of William Stirling and John Gordon, although they were eminent and well respected in Glasgow in their day. Stirling came from a prominent family in western Scotland and was licensed to practice medicine in 1712.<sup>4</sup> By 1718 he was a partner of John Gordon,<sup>5</sup> and with Gordon and Robert Wallace took an early and active interest in the health and welfare of the city's poor. As early as 1740 he was investing in the city's growing overseas trade,<sup>6</sup> and by 1750 he had retired from the practice to devote more time to his linen business. He died in 1765.

Gordon is better known. Scholars and general readers alike will recall Matthew Bramble's tribute to him in *Humphry Clincker*--"a patriot of a truly Roman spirit, who is the father of the linen manufacture in this place, and was the great promoter of the city workhouse, infirmary, and other works of public utility. Had he lived in ancient Rome, he would have been honoured with a statue at the public expense."<sup>7</sup>

It is not known where Gordon was born, but it was not likely Glasgow.<sup>8</sup> He was licensed to practice before 1719; in 1734 he married Mary Bell, daughter of Patrick Bell of Cowcaddens.<sup>9</sup> The standard history of the University of Glasgow cites him as the first to offer lectures in anatomy at the University, some time before a Chair in Anatomy was established--and then given to someone less competent. This was before 1720.<sup>10</sup>

Frequent references to Gordon in the Glasgow Burgh *Extracts* cite his collaboration with Stirling in caring for the medical needs of the city's indigent,<sup>11</sup> and tradition has it that he introduced the use of the blunt hook to William Smellie (1697-1763), the pioneer instructor in midwifery in the British Isles. In 1752 John Gordon, David Loudoun and Company petitioned the Town Council for a "piece of the Old Green next to the bottle work, for building house, office houses, and other conveniences for their clothier work, which they intend to erect and set up,"<sup>12</sup> although Gordon remained formally in medical practice as partner to Smollett's cousin John Moore (1729-1802), father of Sir John Moore of Coruna, and Smollett's first biographer. Having turned Physician in 1755, Gordon retired from surgery and continued only a consultant in this partnership, which by this time had added Thomas Hamilton (1728-1782),

brother of Robert Hamilton (1714-1756) Professor of Anatomy at the university.<sup>13</sup> But in the *Glasgow Journal* for June 13, 1765 are printed some statistics for variolation against small-pox. Gordon and Moore inoculated 264 between them, Gordon the greater share. Although the death of one of the other participating surgeons dates these statistics no later than 1763, the list indicates not only that Gordon continued in some form of partnership but that he was still involved, as before, with problems of public health. He died July 10, 1772, three months before Smollett.<sup>14</sup>

The novelist was apprenticed to Stirling and Gordon May 3, 1736. The official entry in the Minutes of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons booked him for five years.<sup>15</sup> Professor Knapp and others have seemed uncertain why Smollett remained only three years with his masters, and several reasons have been put forth, including the suggestion first alluded to in this article that Smollett did not get on well with these older men. This is difficult to prove. However, while five years was the stated booking for a medical apprentice in Glasgow, the practice was more like three, especially if one left to pursue his medical studies elsewhere. John Moore, previously mentioned, is a helpful comparison. Moore left his apprenticeship with Stirling and Gordon after three years to become a surgeon's mate with the army in Flanders (1747),<sup>16</sup> after which he studied successively under William Hunter in London (where he says he first met Smollett), Jean Astruc (1684-1766) in Paris, and the aforementioned William Smellie back in London.<sup>17</sup> Likewise Smollett enlisted aboard the Chichester undoubtedly with a medical career in mind. As the opportunities for medical study in foreign locations began to improve at this time, it became standard for students in Scottish medicine to travel on to London and across to the continent. Few apprentices were held to five years under the same master.

This is evident in the business of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow at this time. In August of 1743 the Faculty appointed a committee "to Consider and Report How Far the Facultys Laws now in being anent Booking of apprentices and Journeyman ought to be altered or amended." They reported early in October that "every person Should be deemed a Journeyman and Should accordingly be Booked as Such who Upon whatever occasion Should be received or Intertained unto any Surgeons Shop in Glasgow And with this Special Description of a Journeyman That Sd Committee also reported as their opinion That the former Acts of faculty made anent Booking apprentices and Journeyman Should in terms thereof be strictly observed and all Delinquents thereagainst punished." Subsequent transactions of the Faculty interpret this to mean three years,<sup>18</sup>

making now the rule that had become the usual practice. Therefore, Smollett's "early" departure in 1739 was very likely encouraged by his masters, not merely begrudged.

As apprentice the young Smollett was subject to conditions and restraints both similar to apprentices in other trades and peculiar to his own. This may be illustrated by a bond of apprenticeship drawn up between the partnership of Stirling, Gordon, and Robert Wallace and some relations of the Mures of Caldwell in 1722, which can give us some notion of the contracted obligations between master and apprentice in Glasgow prior to the formation of the medical curriculum. The young man in this instrument binds and obliges himself "faithfully honestly & obediently [to] serve & obey his saids Masters In the forsaid airts & Calling [of Chyrugery and pharmacie]" for a period of three years.

And...he shall not absent himself furth [in the open air] of their service holy day or week day (sickness excepted) without his saids masters Leave asked & given, and shall not hear of his saids Masters Skaith [defamation] Att any tyme by day or night but shall discover the same to them to his power, And that he shall not reveall his masters secrets in their airts, nor the secret diseases of their patients to any persone yrfor [therefore], Nor shall have any patients of his own Under Cüre upon any pretext whatsomever And shall not play at games or goe to ale houses & taverns to tiple or drink with any companions, Nor disobey his saids masters orders, pretending he is elder or younger prent [sic] or upon any other pretense yrfor under the pain of ffourty shillings scots....

The masters in turn bind and oblige themselves to "Task learn [sic] & Instruct the Said Alexander Mure In their said airt & calling of Chirugery & pharmacie And they shall not hyde...any poynt or engyne yrfor from him known to themselves, But doe their utmost endeavour to make him perfect thereuntill." The surgeons also pledge to "intertain the sd apprentice in meat drink bedding lodging and washing his linnings in house & family with one of themselves honestly as becoming & of his rank & degree." There was also some money to be paid by the surgeons for the young man's schooling.<sup>19</sup>

This contract cost forty pounds sterling. Such an amount-- or a slightly higher one--was undoubtedly paid to Gordon and Stirling by Smollett's cousin James Smollett of Bonhill fourteen

years later.

Without additional evidence, one might infer from Knapp's account that Smollett was trained exclusively at Stirling's shop in the "Dispensary Close" off the High Street (the western side), "near the University."<sup>20</sup> It is very difficult to determine exactly where this close was located, much less how near the University it was; by 1820 this close had disappeared through the urban "redevelopment" brought on by the industrialization of the city.<sup>21</sup> Eyre-Todd believes that Gordon's shop stood at the north corner of the Saltmarket and Princess Street; there is some evidence to substantiate this.<sup>22</sup> But it is possible to locate Gordon's shop more near Stirling's. In a deed registered in the Sheriff Court Books of Lanark for June 22, 1764 and cited in sasines registered after his death, Gordon resigned his city property to his eldest son James, merchant in Argyle Street.<sup>23</sup> The total burgh property consisted of a fore shop and back house on the west side of the High Street; the first story of a tenement on the corner of Stockwell Street and the Trongate; a house on the south side of Bell's Wynd; and a fore shop on the north side of Trongate. This amount of property suggests that Gordon at least died comfortably, if not rich. The first item of this series should interest us most. The sasine describes it fully as

That large laigh for shop & back house named formerly the Dispensary then possessed by Mrs. Wardrop [the current inhabitant] being the ground story of that Tenement of Land<sup>24</sup> lying within the Burgh of Glasgow on the West side of that Street leading from the Mercat cross to the high church [High Street leading north to the Cathedral] Bounded betwixt the high street on the East & the Lands belonging to George Danziel on the south the Lands of...[deliberately undesignated] on the West and the Lands belonging to James Robeson [Robertson] on the north.

The building is therefore bounded by the High Street on the east, Danziel's building on the south, nothing designated on the west, and Robertson's property on the north. The accompanying map places this property along the High Street some distance north from the Mercat Cross but below Bell's Wynd.<sup>25</sup> If Duncan is equally accurate, we can safely infer either that Gordon and Stirling had separate shops not far away, or that this was Stirling's old shop that Gordon moved into late in his career. Apprentices to both men likely worked out of either shop.

There survive several possible views of this building of Gordon's in drawings and photographs of nos. 21-27 and 40 of the High Street, west side.<sup>26</sup> Gordon's shop was located on the ground floor of a basically wooden structure built in the late seventeenth century, four or five stories high (counting the ground level); it was one of eight buildings between the Cross and Bell's Wynd, separated in the eighteenth century by a close or alleyway running between each of them into the back yard. The upper stories were reached by a staircase from either this close or the yard behind. Gordon's "large laigh fore shop" opened directly onto the High Street while the "back house" opened to the close or yard. Apparently at the time of his death he owned only the ground floor of this building.

While much of Gordon's medical business and instruction took place in the coffee-house, tavern, or on house-calls, this building--and the partner's shop--were the centers of Smollett's apprenticeship, rather than the university across the street. Smollett contracted his obligations to Gordon and Stirling about a decade before the Scottish medical renaissance reached the otherwise progressive university of Glasgow. All charters of Scottish universities stipulated the establishment of a curriculum in medicine except Glasgow's,<sup>27</sup> although the appropriate chairs in Medicine, Anatomy, and Botany were established before Smollett arrived. Yet until Cullen returned to the western metropolis in 1744 with the professed intent of founding a medical school with regularly offered courses, there is limited evidence of any academic instruction that Smollett might have profited from. A "Statute and Act regulating the University of Glasgow" for 1727 directed the professor of anatomy and botany to teach these subjects yearly from May to July if five students requested them, but Thomas Brisbane, who held this chair is a sinecure, apparently never did.<sup>28</sup> It is uncertain whether John Johnstoun ("Crab"?) did who held the chair in medicine since 1714, yet he was thought to be learned and competent. This is simply an instance where the opportunity to provide a medical curriculum was staffed with men who lacked enterprise and drive and were not prodded in their younger years by higher authorities to exert themselves. Rather, medical instruction was irregularly supplied by outsiders like the surgeon John Gordon.

John Moore stated in 1797 that his cousin "attended the anatomical and medical lectures," but Moore probably did not remember precisely what these consisted of in Smollett's day. From little we know, they could only have been lectures in anatomy John Paisley had been offering sporadically since 1730. According to Coutts, Paisley is the only figure the University

records note as lecturing on any medical topic during Smollett's apprenticeship.<sup>29</sup> 1742 definitely marks the beginning of formal medical instruction--at least extramurally--at the University with the aforementioned Robert Hamilton and John Crawford announcing lectures in anatomy and surgery, followed soon in similar courses by George Montgomerie (Physician to the Touns Infirmary) and Cullen;<sup>30</sup> but Smollett's apprenticeship is previous to these opportunities and must have consisted almost entirely of assistance to his masters and frequent visitations.

One place Smollett certainly visited in his apprenticeship was the Touns Hospital, founded in 1733 to house and work the city's indigent. This building was located on the Old Green along the Clyde. From the beginning the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons "made a genuine Resolution...Agreeing to attend the sick People in the Hospital by Turns, each Physician for a Year, and each Surgeon for a Half-Year, during the first six years after the opening of the House; giving their Advice, Attendance, and Medicines, Grattis, all the Time." By 1739 the directors had seen the need to separate the sick from the merely poor, and erected an Infirmary that year. In this addition were treated "many Rhumatick Fevers, Pleuritick Disorders, inveterate Scurvies, scropolous Distempers, Jaundice, Dropsies, etc."<sup>31</sup> We know that Gordon and Stirling were notably involved with the medical supervision of this residence before the Infirmary and its operating room were added, so we can be reasonably certain that the young novelist was frequently exposed to the ailments listed above. Indeed this medical education in the late 1730's can best be labeled an extended internship.

It is a pity that we do not know more for certain about Smollett's medical training, but any hypotheses about what he read or was taught by his masters will appear more tentative than the information of this article.<sup>32</sup> Medical instruction throughout the British Isles in the early eighteenth century was provincial, somewhat unorganized by modern standards, and lacking any consensus in theory. Beyond what I have included here, there is little in Glasgow to find a document of--no published syllabus, much less any lectures to preserve notes from, or any records of attendance. But it is hoped that the foregoing material will lend some air of substance to a little-known period of Smollett's life.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Doctor of Men and Manners* (Princeton, 1949), pp. 12-4..

<sup>2</sup> According to John Ramsay of Ochertyre, John Johnstoun, Professor of Medicine at Glasgow, was thought to be the model for Crab, although he did not seem to fit the part. Johnstoun was "a free liver, and, what was in those days still more rare, a free thinker, at least in talk....Though regarded by good people as a sort of heathen, they were glad to have recourse to him in dangerous cases, he being most sagacious and successful in his practice. And as he was a joyous, manly, honourable man, he was a most delightful companion over a bottle-- he having a fund of wit and humour, and even of profanity, peculiar to himself" (*Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. [Edinburgh, 1888], I, 277-8). Whether *The Erment* or Ramsay is correct on "Crab" is impossible to say, but Ramsay's information might be closer to the source.

<sup>3</sup> These are preserved at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Duncan, *Memorials of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, 1599-1850* (Glasgow, 1896), p. 250. The manuscript Minutes of the Faculty are missing for this period.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Renwick, ed., *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow, A.D. 1718-1738...* (vol. V of "Scottish Burgh Records Society," Glasgow, 1909), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> See T. M. Devine, *The Tobacco Lords* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. Lewis M. Knapp (London, 1966), pp. 246-7.

<sup>8</sup> The only John Gordon baptized in Glasgow between 1690 and 1710 is a lawful son to John Gordon of Kirkconnel and Jane Hamilton, June 8, 1710 (Glasgow Parish Registers: Births. Typescript prepared by Dr. Arthur Jamieson for the Strathclyde Regional Archives and cited with his permission. Original in New Register House, Edinburgh).

<sup>9</sup> Duncan, *Memorials*, p. 251.

<sup>10</sup> James Coutts, *A History of the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1909), p. 484.

<sup>11</sup> The Minutes of Town Council cite him in 1732 as one of the founding directors of the poor's workhouse, and from 1736 Stirling and he are frequently appointed "touns surgeons...to take care of the poor and apply medecines [sic] and drugs to them, and their sallary for their drugs and medicaments and cures and service to be 10 sterling" (*Extracts*, V, 368-70; 468).

<sup>12</sup> *Extracts*, VI, 351-2.

<sup>13</sup> Lt. Col. George Hamilton, *A History of the House of Hamilton* (Edinburgh, 1933), pp. 710-1.

<sup>14</sup> *Glasgow Journal*, July 16, 1772.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Duncan, p. 120; and Knapp, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Anderson, ed., *The Works of John Moore, M.D. with Memoirs of His Life and Writings*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh, 1820), I, v.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, I, vii. On his experiences in Paris, see Moore's letter to William Cullen dated "Paris, 1749" among the Cullen manuscripts of the University of Glasgow and printed in John Thomson, *An Account of the Life, Lectures, and Writings of William Cullen, M.D.*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh & London, 1859), I, 586. (My thanks to Mrs. Helen Brock for calling the original to my attention.)

<sup>18</sup> The next apprentice booked was James Pollock, May 7, 1744, for three years. The manuscripts of the Faculty are cited with permission.

<sup>19</sup> National Library of Scotland Ch. 3434, the only such deed I have found of a medical partnership in Glasgow for that period. Cited with the permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

<sup>20</sup> Duncan, p. 250.

<sup>21</sup> It is no longer listed among other city closes and streets in the Glasgow City Postal Directory for that date.

<sup>22</sup> *From the Revolution to the Passing of the Reform Acts, 1832-1833* (vol. III of his

<sup>22</sup> From the *Revolution to the Passing of the Reform Acts, 1832-1833* (vol. III of his "History of Glasgow" [Glasgow, 1934], p. 381). He may be referring to the piece of property in the Saltmarket, near Princes Street, which Gordon acquired in 1726 (Glasgow Burgh Sasines, B10/2/12, f. 246, Strathclyde Regional Archives, Glasgow).

<sup>23</sup> Glasgow Burgh Register of Sasines, October 6, 1772 (B10/2/39, ff. 330-3, Strathclyde Regional Archives; cited with permission).

<sup>24</sup> A tenement was then, as now, simply "a domestic building of more than a single story, built for multiple occupants, access being by a common entrance and stair"; and such a building was the usual accommodation in Scottish cities in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Frank Wardsall, "Four Hundred Years of the Glasgow Tenement," *Scottish Art Review*, XIV [June, 1974], 4-7; and Roger Smith, "Multi-dwelling Building in Scotland, 1750-1970: A Study based on Housing in the Clyde Valley," in *Multi Story Living: The British Working Class Experience*, ed. Anthony Sutcliffe [London, 1974], 207-13). A "land" is a well-known Scottish word for tenement, and is defined as "a piece of land on which a house stands, a building site; land applies to the building itself, and specifically to one of several stories divided into flats a tenement house" (*The Scottish National Directory*).

<sup>25</sup> This map is an enlarged insert from John McArthur's "Plan of the City of Glasgow," 1778, reprinted in "Senex" [Robert Reid], *Glasgow, Past and Present* 3 vols., (Glasgow, 1884). An unrelated Minute of the Town Council helps to specify it further. Two merchants, William Gray and Robert Barrie, offered the city in 1751 a piece of improved property located "above the Cross, on the west side of the High Street, betwixt the lands of John Legat...on the south and the lands of George Danziell and others on the north...." (*Extracts*, VI, 329-30). This description places Gordon's property two lands north of Gray's and Barrie's and above the Cross, *below* Bell's Wynd. Such descriptions imply that Gordon's "Dispensatory" and the adjacent properties lay between the Cross and Bell's Wynd, not further north, nearer the university.

<sup>26</sup> The photographs can be found in *Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow*, intro. William Young (Glasgow, 1900)--and popularly known as "Annan" after the studio that took the pictures; the drawings of these tenements may be found in David Small, *By-Gone Glasgow: Sketches of Vanished Corners in the City and Suburbs*, (Glasgow, 1896), [Robert Stuart,] *Views and Notices*

of *Glasgow in Former Times* (Glasgow, 1848), Hugh Cochrane, *Glasgow--The First 800 Years*, (Glasgow, 1975). With special thanks to J. Fisher and the staff of the Glasgow Room, the Mitchell Public Library, Glasgow for these and earlier references to tenements, closes, and street-plans of the city.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Morgan, *Scottish University Studies* (London, 1933), p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Duncan. *Memorials*, p. 127, probably referring to Robert Wodrow, *Analecta*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1843), III, 332-3.

<sup>29</sup> *The Works of Tobias Smollett, M.D.*, ed. John Moore, M.D., 7 vols. (London, 1797), I, CX, cited in Knapp, pp. 14-5, and *History of the University of Glasgow*, p. 486. Paisley is known principally for owning the largest medical library in Scotland in his time. Cullen was apprenticed to him (see A.L. Donovan, *Philosophical Chemistry in the Scottish Enlightenment* [Edinburgh, 1975], p. 17).

<sup>30</sup> David Murray, *Memories of the Old College of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1927), p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., *A Short Account of the Touns Hospital in Glasgow, with the Regulations and Abstracts of the Expenses for the First Eight Years* (3rd ed., Glasgow, 1742), pp. 6, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon's early lectures in anatomy and his resourcefulness in midwifery suggest that surgery was his forte, in addition to a heightened consciousness of the problems of public health and epidemics. Nothing of Stirling's particular medical interests, beyond his involvement in the Touns Hospital, is known.