

Family connections

Jacqueline Healy

During the 150th anniversary year of the Melbourne Medical School, the Medical History Museum has received many donations relating to the history of medicine in Australia and overseas. These gifts from alumni and the broader community range from *Med Medleys* (programs of student revues) to medical instruments, each revealing an intriguing perspective on student life, medical education and practice. This article focuses on a gift from one individual, Dr John Brenan: a suite of documents that maps the development of Western medicine in Victoria from its very beginnings until the present day. These papers tell us the story of a family whose destiny has been shaped by medicine.

Some of the first doctors to arrive in Australia from Europe were the ships' surgeons. Initially accompanying the voyages of discovery to the new world, they then sailed on convict ships and later were part of many waves of immigration. One of these surgeons was Dr Andrew Cairncross Livingston (c. 1812–1884). Educated in Edinburgh, in 1852 he was surgeon-superintendent (in charge of passengers) on the ship *Una*. He was paid ten shillings for every passenger delivered. The

Una left Liverpool on 25 August 1852, arriving at Port Phillip seven months later, in February 1853.

The gift presented to the Medical History Museum by Livingston's great-great-nephew, Dr John Brenan, tells us about the process of qualifying to be a doctor in Victoria in the mid-19th century, prior to the establishment in 1862 of the Melbourne Medical School. It comprises key documents including apprenticeship papers from 1828, degrees and medical registration certificates. The most significant is the degree of doctor of medicine awarded by the University of Melbourne to Dr Andrew Cairncross Livingston. The testamur, signed by Chancellor Sir Redmond Barry and Vice-Chancellor A.C. Brownless, is dated 1858, four years before Brownless was successful in establishing a medical school at the University of Melbourne. It acknowledges the qualifications Livingston had received at the University of Edinburgh.

Two other very significant pieces of paper relate to practising medicine in Victoria. A certificate issued by the Medical Board for the Colony of Victoria in 1853 to Dr Andrew C. Livingston is followed by a certificate of registration from the Medical Board of Victoria

(dated 1862). These show the formal procedures in place to acknowledge prior medical qualifications. There are other fascinating pieces of correspondence such as a 1903 letter from Lord Joseph Lister (the innovator of the use of carbolic spray in surgery) to a Dr Needham, asking for his opinion on an unspecified question. There is also a menu from the 1940 farewell dinner given for David Murray Morton, a pioneering figure in surgery at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne.

We are familiar with Livingston's physical appearance through a portrait gifted to the Medical History Museum,¹ and the resemblance to current family members is evident. Dr John Brenan and his wife, Marianne, daughter Jennie Nairn (trained nurse from St Vincent's, graduating in 1980) and granddaughter Sara Nairn visited the Medical History Museum recently to see part of their gift on display in the exhibition *A med student's life*.

The documents described are part of a larger gift that records the involvement with medicine of generations of the Brenan family. Dr Alexander Livingston, grandfather of Dr Andrew Cairncross Livingston, was a surgeon's mate in the 73rd Regiment of Foot and served at the Great Siege of



Dr John Brenan with his wife, Marianne, daughter Jennie Nairn and granddaughter Sara Nairn at the Medical History Museum. Photograph by Lee McRae.

Gibraltar, in which France and Spain sought to seize Gibraltar from England in 1779–83. We have the document commissioning Alexander Livingston as regimental surgeon in 1783.

Dr Andrew Cairncross Livingston's great-nephew, Andrew Joseph Brenan, commenced medicine at the University of Melbourne when he was only 15 years old; he was awarded his MBBS in 1908 followed by his MD in 1911 and MS in 1913. He served with the First Australian Imperial Force at Gallipoli, with the Third Australian General Hospital, and with the Third Field Ambulance at Poissier, in the Battle of the Somme. He then served as senior pathologist with the First Australian General Hospital at Rouen. In 1918 he was invited to take a hospital soccer team to Paris. A.J. Brenan was a physician, surgeon and pathologist

and a member of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and Royal Australasian College of Pathologists. He had a long association with St Vincent's Hospital.

The medical tradition continued in the Brenan family. Dr John Brenan followed his father, Dr A.J. Brenan, completing medicine at the University of Melbourne Medical School in 1951. He then pursued a highly distinguished career as a dermatologist, commencing as a resident medical officer at St Vincent's Hospital in 1952, and serving as president of the Australasian College of Dermatologists from 1972 to 1974. Dr A.J. Brenan's daughter Anne completed her degree in dentistry in 1952 at the University of Melbourne, where she met her future husband

William Heath, a 1953 graduate of Melbourne Medical School who eventually became a senior physician at St Vincent's. Their daughter Jane graduated from Monash University Medical School in 1980 and their son John graduated from Melbourne Medical School in 1993 and started his internship at St Vincent's in 1994. This year—the sesquicentenary year of Melbourne Medical School—A.J. Brenan's great-granddaughter Sara Nairn has been offered her internship at St Vincent's Hospital, and thus the pattern continues.

Due to the Brenan gift of more than 30 documents a window has been opened on early medical practice in Victoria and a family deeply engaged in medicine.

Dr Jacqueline Healy is Curator of the Medical History Museum.

The Medical History Museum is located on the second floor of the Brownless Biomedical Library on the Parkville campus. It is open Monday to Friday from 10 am to 5 pm, and Saturday from 1 pm to 4 pm. See <http://museum.medicine.unimelb.edu.au/> for further information.

1 Portrait of Andrew C. Livingston, c. 1860, pencil on paper, 37.0 x 27.0 cm. Gift of Dr John Brenan, Medical History Museum, University of Melbourne.