

MAGAZINE

PROSECTORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE



Margaret Whyte. From a photograph taken in 1887 of the first women admitted to the medical course at the University of Melbourne. Photo courtesy Medical History Museum



John Eccles as a medical student. From a group photograph of fifth year medical students taken in 1924. Photo courtesy Medical History Museum



Henry Burger AO is now Emeritus Director of Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research and Honorary Professorial Fellow of the Faculty of Medicine at Monash University.

THE TERM 'PROSECTOR', from the Latin *pro* (before) and *secare* (to cut), has been in use for a long time meaning a number of different things, but it is generally understood to refer to someone appointed to dissect dead bodies in preparation for autopsy, anatomical research or demonstration.

At the University of Melbourne, prior to the arrival of Berry in 1906, the term was used for senior students chosen to be demonstrators and supervisors in the dissecting room. At that time there were some 100 students dissecting for extended periods of time. Berry formalised the position and gave it significance and prestige. Specific cadavers were set aside for the prosectors and their duties included preparing specimens for the museum. This practice continued for some time, but gradually the term came to be used simply for the students with the top marks in anatomy.

The prosector honour board is located in the foyer of level three of the Medical Building, next to the new Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology. It lists the names of prosectors, starting in 1907 and proceeding without interruption to 2000. The list contains many highly successful people including Nobel laureate, John Eccles (1921/22), former faculty deans Sir Sydney Sunderland (1932) and Richard Larkins (1963), twin brothers Professor Emeritus Gerard and Henry (Harry) Crock (1950), and Henry Burger AO, Emeritus Director, Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research (1953).

In the new medical curriculum, there is no separately identifiable subject of anatomy. Rather, the first two-and-a-half years of the course are divided into systems, with all the basic sciences taught concurrently. In order to preserve the tradition of the honour boards, however, faculty decided to initiate the Margaret Whyte Honour Board which, beginning in 2001, lists medical students with the best overall marks in semesters two to five.

The new board is named in honour of Margaret Whyte (1868-1946) who, with Clara Stone, was one of the first women to graduate in medicine from the University of Melbourne and one of the first locally-trained women registered to practise medicine in Australia.

Margaret Whyte was one of the year's top five students, collecting first prize and scholarships in two fields. Her academic success infuriated the men, and even though the top five students in the honours list were automatically offered residencies at the (now Royal) Melbourne Hospital, she was excluded. She compromised and went to the Women's Hospital. All the new women medical graduates found themselves forced to go to the Women's Hospital for their residencies, to the extent that the (largely female) board of the hospital took fright at the number of women graduates seeking appointments and by 1896 resolved that it would, on principle, appoint a man over a woman if their abilities and qualifications were equal.

Professor Antony Goodwin (Head, Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology) and Professor Janet McCalman (Centre for Health and Society)



L-R: Brothers Gerard W Crock AO & Henry (Harry) V Crock AO took advantage of the opportunity to view specimens they prepared while working in the Department of Anatomy in earlier days, when they attended the 2005 UMMS function in the Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology. Professor Emeritus Gerard Crock was foundation professor of ophthalmology at the university (1963-1986). His dissection of the left half of a male head is pictured on the cover of this issue of *Chiron*.