THE ATHENÆUM CLUB, THE ROYAL SOCIETY AND THE REFORM OF
DENTISTRY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN: A RESEARCH REPORT

by

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In 1978 M. J. Peterson examined the role played by the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) in nineteenth-century dental reform, noting the establishment of its Licence in Dental Surgery (LDS) in 1859. In a paper published in *Notes and Records* in 2010, the present author described the influential role played by Fellows of the Royal Society during the nineteenth-century campaign for dental reform led by Sir John Tomes. Key players in this campaign, including the dentists Samuel Cartwright, Thomas Bell and James Salter, were, as well as being Fellows of the Royal Society, members of the Athenæum Club. The present research report indicates the roles played by those members of the Athenæum Club who were also Fellows of the Royal Society in the scientific and professional reform of nineteenth-century dentistry. Although it does not attempt to document meetings at the Club, it suggests the potential for a symbiotic effect between the Royal Society and the Athenæum. Where the previous paper proposed an active scientific role for the Royal Society in reforming dentistry, this paper presents the Athenæum as a significant extension of the sphere of influence into the cultural realm for those who did enjoy membership of both organizations.

Keywords: Athenæum Club; Royal Society; dentistry

INTRODUCTION

In 1978 M. J. Peterson examined the role played by the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) in nineteenth-century dental reform, noting the establishment of its Licence in Dental Surgery (LDS) in 1859.¹ In an earlier paper published in *Notes and Records* in 2010, the present author described the influential role played by Fellows of the Royal Society during the nineteenth-century campaign for dental reform led by Sir John Tomes FRS (1815–1895).² Three key players in this campaign, the dentists Samuel Cartwright, Thomas Bell and James Salter, were, as well as being Fellows of the Royal Society, Members of the Athenæum Club—although Tomes was not, either from choice or having fallen foul of the ‘very influential’ Richard Owen (1804–1892; elected 1840).³ Indeed, Appendix 1 lists no

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Figure 1. Sir Humphry Davy Bt in 1803. Henry Howard RA (1769–1847). Oil on canvas, repainted in 1835 from the original. Presented to the Club in 1924 by Sir Humphry Davy Rolleston Bt. © The Athenæum. (Online version in colour.)

fewer than 24 Members of the Athenæum who appear in the earlier paper's discussion of dental reformers.

The present research report indicates the roles played by those members of the Athenæum Club who were also Fellows of the Royal Society in the scientific and professional reform of nineteenth-century dentistry. Although it does not attempt to document meetings at the Club, it suggests the potential for a symbiotic effect between the Royal Society and the Athenæum. In her seminal study of the mid-nineteenth-century 'X Club', Ruth Barton wrote: 'The Athenæum, representing both social standing and intellectual achievement, was the embodiment of cultural authority.'⁴ Where the previous paper proposed an active scientific role for the Royal Society in reforming dentistry, this paper presents the Athenæum as a significant extension of the sphere of influence into the cultural realm for those who did enjoy membership of both organizations. That this extension was important was a view taken strongly by Samuel Cartwright.

The intimate association between the Athenæum and the Royal Society began in 1823, when John Wilson Croker FRS (1780–1857) wrote to Sir Humphry Davy (1778–1829) (figure 1), then President of the Royal Society, to propose the formation of the Club.⁵ When the embryo Committee, referred to as 'The _ _ _ Club' as no name had yet been decided upon, met on 16 February 1824 in the Royal Society's rooms at Somerset House, nine of the twelve present were Fellows of the Society.⁶ Of the 506 Members of the new

Figure 2. Samuel Cartwright FRS in 1858. John Wood. Copyright © Collection of the Royal Society of Medicine; reproduced by kind permission. (Online version in colour.)

Athenæum listed on 22 June 1824, and considered to be Founder Members, one third (169) were Fellows of the Royal Society, and of the first ten Chairmen of the General Committee of the Club, seven were Fellows.⁷ The Club embodied a concentration of learning which spread across the arts and sciences. A Member might not encounter another, but he could do so, and serendipity is more to be experienced in a prepared environment. Barton quotes Charles Robert Darwin FRS (elected 1838): ‘One meets so many people there, that one likes to see.’⁸

SAMUEL CARTWRIGHT, THOMAS BELL AND JAMES SALTER: FELLOWS, MEMBERS AND REFORMERS OF DENTISTRY

The first dentist to be elected to the Athenæum was Samuel Cartwright FRS (1789–1864) (figure 2), Dentist in Ordinary to George IV. His election to the Club came 11 years before his Fellowship of the Royal Society. As Candidate Number 316, with the profession of ‘Surgeon Dentist’, he was proposed and seconded by two Members of the Club who were Fellows of the Royal Society: the naval surveyor John Knowles FRS (1781–1841) and the physician John Ayrton Paris MD FRS FLS (1785–1856). Cartwright was duly elected on 13 July 1830.⁹ He was a Member of the Royal College of

Surgeons (RCS), became a Fellow of the Linnean Society and a Fellow of the Geological Society, and in 1856 was elected the first President of the Odontological Society (now incorporated in the Royal Society of Medicine).¹⁰

When elected to the Royal Society in 1841, three of his six sponsors under 'General Knowledge' were Members, and 14 of his 19 signatories under 'Personal Knowledge' were or were to become Members.¹¹ Cartwright was keen to reform the profession and to emphasize its learned status, in 1857 saying:

It cannot be doubted that a liberal education is of the greatest advantage to those engaged in practice; and the more education is extended in all ranks of society, the more it becomes necessary that the members of our profession qualify themselves as highly as they can; for those who employ the services of the dentist in these days have a right to look, and do look, to the qualifications of the mind as well as to the mechanical adroitness of the fingers.¹²

In 1843 he was one of the signatories of a letter to the RCS which requested that no one should be allowed to practise dentistry without having undergone examination by the College. He also called for the establishment of a dental fellowship of the College. Recording Cartwright's death, Hill, the late nineteenth-century chronicler of the profession of dentistry, wrote:

He had been one of the brightest ornaments, and in himself had exemplified to what a pinnacle of prosperity large gifts and high qualities, when properly and steadily employed, could raise the possessor.¹³

Following Cartwright into the Athenæum, and equally concerned with professional reform, was Thomas Bell FRS (1792–1880) (figure 3). Bell was proposed on 26 May 1849 as 'Surgeon Dentist, and Secretary of the Royal Society, Professor of Zoology King's College' by Spencer Compton, second Marquess of Northampton FRS (1790–1851; elected 1840). He was seconded by Robert Brown FRS (1773–1858; elected 1830), Keeper of the Botanical Department at the British Museum. Bell was elected on 29 January 1850 under Rule II, which allowed for 'persons of distinguished eminence in their particular fields ... elected by unanimous vote of the Committee'.¹⁴ Eight Athenæum Members (six of them Founder Members of 1824) were among the 16 Fellows who had supported Bell at the Royal Society in 1827, and one more became a Member of the Club in 1830.¹⁵

As would be expected of a Rule II Member, his interests extended well beyond dentistry, on which subject he had written a standard textbook, and he was appointed lecturer in Zoology at King's College London in 1836. He was Secretary to the Royal Society from 1848 to 1853 when he became Vice President (1853–1854, 1858–1860), interlocking in the Vice-Presidential post with Sir William Robert Grove (1811–1896; elected 1851) who had also been Vice President when Bell was Secretary.¹⁶ After his retirement to Selbourne, Bell published in 1878 a new edition of Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne*.¹⁷

Bell and Cartwright were followed into the Royal Society and the Athenæum by Bell's nephew, Samuel James Augustus Salter FRS MB FLS (1825–1897) (figure 4). James Salter's proposal form for membership of the Club in 1878 stated that he was: 'Surgeon Dentist. Author of various original scientific Papers published in the Transactions of the Royal & Linnean Societies.' He was proposed by William Sharpey FRS (1802–1880), long-serving Secretary of the Royal Society (1853–1872). Sharpey was elected to the

Figure 3. Thomas Bell FRS in 1855. Maull and Polyblank. Copyright © the Royal Society. (Online version in colour.)

Athenæum in 1846 and had been one of Cartwright's supporters for election to the Royal Society in 1841. Salter was seconded by Sir William Erle FRS (1793–1880; elected 1826) and as Club Archivist Jennie de Protani points out: 'There is a mass of signatures on his candidate's sheet.'¹⁸

Salter had been proposed for the Royal Society as plain 'Dentist' in 1863 and of his 19 supporters for the Society, 13 were Members of the Athenæum.¹⁹ Like his uncle, Thomas Bell, he was adamant that dentists must have the RCS qualification and so opposed the 1878 Dentists Act which enabled legal registration of those unqualified but already in practice. Although he appears in the Club records as 'Surgeon Dentist', Salter was one of a rare breed of dental physicians that left to others the practical side of the profession, a thing for which he had no liking.²⁰ Salter was a founder member of the 'Odontological Society'.²¹

ATHENÆUM MEMBERS AND LEGISLATION IN BRITAIN

The previous paper explained that the LDS proposal had to go to Parliament for the necessary Act and on that occasion Members of the Athenæum were, once again,

Figure 4. James Salter (undated). Maull & Co. Copyright © the Royal Society. (Online version in colour.)

involved. In 1858 it was Alexander James Beresford Beresford-Hope FRS (1820–1887; elected 1851) who inserted into William Cowper’s Medical Bill the clause which allowed the RCS to examine dentists.²² Cowper was President of the General Board of Health and the stepson of the Prime Minister, Viscount Palmerston FRS (1784–1865; elected 1824).²³

The drafting of Cowper’s Bill was the responsibility of Sir John Simon FRS (1816–1904; elected 1867), Chief Medical Officer to the General Board of Health.²⁴ One of the most important figures in public health in the nineteenth century, Simon was a year younger than Tomes and had been his contemporary at King’s College Hospital. He had been the apprentice of Joseph Henry Green FRS (1791–1863; elected 1824) and like Tomes he was a close friend of Sir William Bowman FRS (1816–1892; elected 1851) who had presented Tomes’s first paper, on rodent teeth, to the Royal Society.

Of the examiners selected in 1860, the three appointed by the RCS were Sir William Lawrence FRS, Joseph Henry Green FRS and James Moncrieff Arnott FRS, all of whom were Members of the Athenæum. Of the three dentist examiners proposed by the

Odontological Society, one was Tomes and another was Thomas Bell (a Member). James Salter (a Member) was to succeed Bell.²⁵

The final chapter in this history of Club members and their involvement in the preparation of a mature dental profession in the nineteenth century came on 15 July 1878 when Sir John Lubbock FRS, later Lord Avebury (1834–1913; elected 1857, Athenæum Trustee (1874–1913) and Chairman (1902/3 and 1911/13)) successfully piloted the Dentists Act (1878) through its stages in the House; this allowed dentists to Register.²⁶ Sir John was a member of the X Club, all of whose members (listed in Appendix 2) were members of the Athenæum. Founded in 1864 by T. H. Huxley FRS (1824–1895; elected 1858), the X Club was extremely important in the affairs of the Royal Society in this period, as Ruth Barton has shown.²⁷

Discipline for the new licensed and registered dentists devolved on the General Medical Council (GMC). The first and second presidents of the GMC (established 1858) had been Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie PRS (1783–1862; elected 1846, Trustee of the Athenæum 1859–1862), who had sponsored Tomes for his Royal Society Fellowship, and Joseph Henry Green FRS (see above), co-examiner with Tomes for the new LDS.²⁸ The President of the GMC when the first Dentists' Register was published in 1879 was Sir Henry Wentworth Dyke Acland MD FRS (1815–1900; elected 1844).²⁹

CONCLUSION

This research report uses episodes in the history of the reform of the dental profession to suggest that a scientific monoculture like the Royal Society, already an effective agent for beneficial change, might be enhanced by a symbiotic relationship with a mixed culture like that of the Athenæum. In doing so it validates the original intentions of John Wilson Croker and Sir Humphry Davy when founding the Club. In the case of dentistry, something exceptional was achieved by Members of the Club and Fellows of the Royal Society. In particular, Peterson isolated the establishment of the LDS as a watershed.³⁰

Peter Collins, in his review of the place of the Royal Society in the promotion of science since 1960, gives examples of important twentieth-century discussions in the Athenæum, reinforcing the status of the Club as a neutral, informal and private meeting ground.³¹ In 1960, Collins notes, 28% of Royal Society Fellows were Members of the Athenæum and they constituted 8% of the Club's membership. This meant that both when engaged in Society affairs and at other times they had another 92% of the Members with whom to socialize and fulfil Croker's aim of bringing together the best in all academic fields. Collins relates how a distance began to grow between the two institutions from 1978, when Dame Mary Cartwright FRS (1900–1998) pointed out that as a woman she could not be a Member of the Athenæum, and the Royal Society Yearbook, which since 1897 had noted the Athenæum membership of Fellows, ceased to do so. It was to be 22 years before women were admitted, and at present 50 Fellows of the Royal Society are among the 2000 members of the Club. Something over 20 dentists have been elected since 1977.

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APPENDIX 1: ROYAL SOCIETY FELLOWS INVOLVED IN REFORM WHO WERE MEMBERS OF THE
ATHENÆUM, BY DATE OF ELECTION AS MEMBER

Joseph Henry Green (1791–1863)	1824
Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865)	1824
Herbert Mayo MD (1796–1852)	1825
Sir William Lawrence (1783–1867)	1830
Samuel Cartwright (1789–1864)	1830
John Edward Gray (1800–1875)	1835
Gideon Algernon Mantell (1790–1852)	1840
Sir Richard Owen (1804–1892)	1840
Sir Henry Wentworth Dyke Acland MD (1815–1900)	1844
Edward Forbes (1815–1854)	1845
Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie (1783–1862)	1846
Thomas Bell (1792–1880)	1850
Sir William Bowman (1816–1892)	1851
Alexander James Beresford Beresford-Hope (1820–1887)	1851
Robert Gordon Latham MD (1812–1888)	1851
James Moncrieff Arnott (1794–1885)	1853
John Gould (1804–1881)	1854
William Benjamin Carpenter MD (1813–1885)	1857
Sir John Lubbock, first Baron Avebury (1834–1913)	1857
Thomas Henry Huxley MD (1825–1895)	1858
Robert Bentley Todd (1809–1860)	1859
Sir John Simon (1816–1904)	1867
Sir William Fergusson (1808–1877)	1869
Samuel James Augustus Salter (1825–1897)	1878

APPENDIX 2: YEAR OF ELECTION TO ATHENÆUM CLUB OF X CLUB MEMBERS WHO WERE
FELLOWS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY

Joseph Dalton Hooker MD (1817–1911)	1851
John Lubbock (1834–1913)	1857
Thomas Henry Huxley MD (1825–1895) (X Club founder)	1858
George Busk (1807–1886)	1859
William Spottiswoode (1825–1883)	1859
Edward Frankland (1825–1899)	1860
John Tyndall (1820–1893)	1860
Thomas Archer Hirst (1830–1892)	1866

APPENDIX 3: ROYAL SOCIETY FELLOWS AT THE FIRST COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
ATHENÆUM CLUB (16 FEBRUARY 1824)

Sir Humphry Davy (1778–1829)
Sir Francis Legatt Chantrey RA (1781–1841)

Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765–1837)
 Davies Gilbert (1767–1839)
 Charles Hatchett (1765–1847)
 Joseph Jekyll (1754–1837) (elected 1825)
 Aylmer Bourke Lambert (1761–1842)
 Sir Thomas Lawrence PRA (1769–1830)
 Edward Hawke Locker (1777–1849)
 Sir Charles Long, first Baron Farnborough (1761–1838)
 Dr Thomas Young MD (1773–1829)

NOTES

- 1 M. J. Peterson, *The medical profession in mid-Victorian London* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), pp. 278–279. The enabling Act was passed on 2 August 1858. See the Medical Act, 1858 (21 & 22 Vict. Cap. 90) 48, which states: ‘It shall . . . be lawful for Her Majesty, by charter, to grant to the Royal College of Surgeons of England power to institute and hold examinations for the purpose of testing the fitness of persons to practise as dentists who may be desirous of being so examined, and to grant certificates of such fitness.’ Royal Assent was given in 1859. The Charter was drawn up on 8 September 1859 and the first examination was held on 13 March 1860. Lawrence, Arnott, Bell, Tomes and Rogers were examiners, 15 candidates were successful and the fee was 10 guineas. See E. M. Cohen, ‘The earliest licentiates in dental surgery’, *Dent. Historian* **37**, 32–34 (May 2000).
- 2 M. G. H. Bishop and M. Parker, ‘Sir John Tomes FRS, Fellows of the Royal Society and dental reform in the nineteenth century’, *Notes Rec. R. Soc.* **64**, 401–416 (2010).
- 3 Sir V. Z. Cope, *Sir John Tomes, a pioneer of British dentistry* (Dawsons of Pall Mall, London, 1961), p. 33; R. Barton, ‘Huxley, Lubbock and half a dozen others: professionals and gentlemen in the formation of the X Club, 1851–1864’, *Isis* **89**, 410–444 (1998), at p. 429. Unless otherwise stated, dates of election given in this paper are as Members of the Athenæum Club.
- 4 Barton, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 429. The variant ‘X-Club’ has also been used.
- 5 J. W. Croker to Sir Humphry Davy, letter dated Admiralty, 12 March 1823, tipped into the Athenæum Minute Book (1824).
- 6 Minute Book of the Athenæum Club (1824), pages unnumbered. For the complete list, see Appendix 3 to this paper.
- 7 J. L. Elliot, *Original list of members of the Athenæum* (Privately printed, London, 1878). Elliot places the February 1824 Committee meeting in the house of Mr Jekyll in Spring Gardens. F. R. Cowell, *The Athenæum Club and social life in London: 1824–1974* (Athenæum Club, London, 1975), pp. 161–162.
- 8 Barton, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 429.
- 9 Athenæum Archive Record (no class mark) for Samuel Cartwright.
- 10 L. Lindsay ‘Personalities of the past IX: Samuel Cartwright’, *Br. Dent. J.* (5 April 1955), p. 259.
- 11 Athenæum Archive Record for Samuel Cartwright and his election certificate, EC/1841/08, Royal Society of London.
- 12 A. Hill, *The history of the reform movement in the dental profession in Great Britain during the last twenty years* (Trübner, London, 1877), p. 86.
- 13 Hill, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 210.
- 14 Athenæum Archive Record for Thomas Bell.
- 15 Athenæum Archive Record for Thomas Bell and his election certificate, EC/1828/02, Royal Society of London.
- 16 Information derived from Royal Society’s online database of ‘Past Fellows’.

- 17 L. Lindsay, 'Personalities of the past IV: Thomas Bell', *Br. Dent. J.* (15 February 1955), p. 133.
- 18 Athenæum Archive Record for Samuel James Augustus Salter; Jennie de Protani, Club Archivist (personal communication).
- 19 Samuel James Augustus Salter, election certificate, EC/1863/14, Royal Society of London.
- 20 L. Lindsay, 'Personalities of the past V: S. J. A. Salter', *Br. Dent. J.* (15 February 1955), p. 134; Cope, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 64.
- 21 Hill, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 58.
- 22 See note 1.
- 23 Hill, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 133.
- 24 M. J. D. Roberts, 'The politics of professionalization: MPs, medical men and the 1858 Medical Act', *Med. Hist.* **53**, 37–56 (2009), at p. 45.
- 25 E. M. Cohen, 'The earliest licentiates in dental surgery', *Dent. Historian* **37**, 31 (May 2000).
- 26 Dentists Act, 1878 (41 & 42 Vict. Ch. 33); an act to amend the law relating to dental practitioners, 22 July 1878: 'Whereas it is expedient that provision be made for the registration of persons specially qualified to practise as dentists in the United Kingdom.'
- 27 Barton, *op. cit.* (note 3).
- 28 'Brodie, Sir Benjamin Collins', *Plarr's lives of the fellows online*, Royal College of Surgeons, <http://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/biogs/E000016b.htm> (accessed 14 September 2016); 'Green, Joseph Henry', *Plarr's lives of the fellows online*, Royal College of Surgeons, <http://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/biogs/E000018b.htm> (accessed 14 September 2016).
- 29 'Henry Wentworth Dyke (Sir) Acland', *Munk's roll: lives of the fellows*, vol. IV, Royal College of Physicians, <http://munksroll.rcplondon.ac.uk/Biography/Details/10> (accessed 14 September 2016).
- 30 Peterson, *op. cit.* (note 1).
- 31 For example, P. Collins, *The Royal Society and the promotion of science since 1960* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 41, 103, 122.