
The College archives

Minutes yesterday and today

Margaret Harcourt Williams

The core of the College archives is a series of minute books recording annual and council meetings. The first minute book contains details of the meeting on 27 July 1841 at which the decision was taken to establish the Association of Medical Officers of Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane, forerunner of the College. For the next few years minutes of the Association's annual meeting were written by hand into this book but this practice ceased after the *Journal of Mental Science* was established in 1853 as this included printed reports of annual meetings.

The earliest council minute book in the archives dates from 1887. There is evidence of a council earlier than this, for the annual meeting in 1856 referred to the appointment of a committee to deal with urgent business between annual meetings, and by 1864 a managing committee or council was in being. There seems to be no way of knowing if the minute book starting in 1887 is the first that was kept or if there were earlier ones that have been lost. The series of council minutes is complete from 1887 until the present day but they are no longer recorded by hand in exercise books!

The minutes are a mixture of routine business and discussion. From the beginning, the Association appointed special committees, the first of which was the Registers and Tables Committee

in 1841; unfortunately their reports are not always included. As they came to be appointed, standing committee reports were regularly submitted and discussed. Predictably, the amount of business and discussion increases over the years; some of the minutes of Council meetings in the 1880s are only a few lines long compared with 10 pages in the early 1970s.

From these minutes it is possible to trace the development of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association from a small group of asylum medical officers to a body respected by the medical profession and consulted by the government. The development of the Association itself can be traced in the appointment of officers and standing committees. However, the Association was always mainly concerned with administration and there are not many references to clinical matters.

Details of annual and council meetings up to the formation of the College have been abstracted onto a database which may be consulted by College members.

These notes are the first of a series prepared by Margaret Harcourt Williams, the College Archivist, on the different groups of records in the College archives