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# The science of woman

Gynaecology and gender in England, 1800–1929

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*To my children Giacomo and Jessica*



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## Preface

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This book began as a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Oxford in 1984. It traces the evolution of gynaecology from the elaboration of modern medical theories of femininity to the establishment of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in 1929. Its geographical focus is England, and London in particular. This is not because other parts of Britain are less interesting, but because London, with its wealthy and aristocratic clientele, has led the way in gynaecological professionalism.

The history of obstetrics and gynaecology is a burgeoning field and I have learnt a great deal from the work of feminist and socialist historians. Unfortunately Frank Mort's work came to my attention after the typescript was completed. It is clearly impossible to provide a truly comprehensive account of such a vast subject. Gynaecological practice at provincial hospitals, for example, demands further research; so does the influence of gynaecological surgery on obstetrical practice. The relations between science and technological innovation in gynaecology are currently being investigated by Michael Bevan.

It would not have been possible to complete this book without the help of many people. My first debt is to Dr Ludmilla Jordanova, who supervised my doctoral thesis and read parts of the manuscript. Her continuing encouragement and unstinting help are greatly appreciated. I am grateful to the members of the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, Oxford, especially to Dr Charles Webster and Dr Irvine Loudon, for their generous support and advice. My thanks also go to Dr Adrian Wilson for commenting on sections of the draft. Dr M. Jeanne Peterson and Karl Figlio contributed precious comments in the early stages of the research.

I am grateful to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for granting me access to its archives and to all those

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people who helped with the arduous task of retrieving archival material relating to the hospital care of gynaecological patients. The Chelsea Hospital for Women and Queen Charlotte's Hospital Joint Medical Committee gave me permission to look at the case-records at the Chelsea Hospital for Women. The late Mr W. Winterton, FRCOG, allowed me to consult the records relating to the Hospital for Women in Soho Square. Miss Patricia Want, Librarian of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Mrs Claire Daunton, former Archivist of the College, and all the staff of the RCOG Library deserve a special mention for answering my queries with enormous patience and kindness. My thanks also go to the staff of the Royal Society of Medicine Library, of the Radcliffe Science Library, Oxford, and of the Wellcome Institute Library, London, for their unfailingly competent and prompt assistance.

Miss Patricia Want organised the photograph of Protheroe Smith's bust, which appears courtesy of the RCOG. All other illustrations appear by permission of the Wellcome Institute Library.

Financial support for the original research on which this book is based came from the Wellcome Trust and from a scholarship awarded by Magdalen College, Oxford. I am grateful to both these institutions for making this book possible.

My husband Christopher Bridgett helped in a multitude of ways which it would be too long to enumerate. I very much doubt that I would have completed this work without his moral and practical support. My seven-year-old son Giacomo once declared that writing a book about 'doctors and women' was 'pretty daft'. On many occasions when the strain on the whole family seemed too great, I have been close to agreeing with him. One day Giacomo and his sister Jessica will know why this book is dedicated to them.