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978-1-107-62549-5 - Studies in the History of Ophthalmology in England: Prior to the Year 1800

R. Rutson James

Frontmatter

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STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF  
OPHTHALMOLOGY IN ENGLAND

PLATE I



WAX IMPRESSIONS OF THE CIRENCESTER (2) STAMP

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IN ENGLAND  
PRIOR TO THE YEAR 1800

by

R. RUTSON JAMES, F.R.C.S.ENG.

Consulting Ophthalmic Surgeon to St George's Hospital and  
Senior Editor of the British Journal of Ophthalmology

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers  
that begat us. ECCLESIASTICUS XLIV. 1

*Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artis,  
Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo.*

VIRGIL, *Aeneid* VI

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## PREFACE

IN the following pages an attempt is made to trace some phases of the history of ophthalmology in England from the earliest times to the end of the eighteenth century.

Much of the contents does not now appear for the first time. During the past nine years, in which I have been a member of the editorial staff of the *British Journal of Ophthalmology*, I have contributed to that journal, and to some others, numerous papers of a biographical and quasi-historical nature. For the most part these papers have undergone abstraction in this book; some, *e.g.* those on Anglo-Saxon Ophthalmology, Turberville of Salisbury and William Briggs are here presented almost as they were first printed.

I am under an obligation to Sir John Parsons, F.R.S., the Chairman, and to the other members of the editorial committee, for encouragement, permission to utilise the articles which have appeared in the journal, and for the loan of blocks for illustration. I have permission to reprint the historical papers by the late George Coats, F.R.C.S., which are contained in the last volume of the Moorfields Reports. It was felt to be a pity that these biographical papers of the first class, by one who was a dear friend to many of us, should not have a wider circulation than was possible in their original setting. And so it was determined to include them. Coats's paper on the Chevalier's grandson oversteps my limit of the end of the eighteenth century, but it was thought best to reproduce them in their entirety. I am afraid that many of the chapters are superficial. They do not claim to be exhaustive; and I plead guilty to having neglected the subject of optics after the thirteenth century. Those of my

readers who expected to find more detail on optics than is contained here must be content to:

“Doat with Copernicus, or darkling stray  
With *Bacon*, Ptolemy, or Tycho Brahe!”

to make a small variation in the couplet from “Architectural Atoms” in the *Rejected Addresses*.

I have to record my grateful thanks to my friends Mr Duke-Elder, Dr Ernest Thomson, of Stirling, and Mr Arnold Sorsby. The former read the manuscript, gave me the benefit of his criticism and has helped in correcting the proofs; Dr Thomson has read the proofs also and has polished my rough prose; while Mr Sorsby has kindly allowed me to abstract his valuable paper on Milton’s blindness, and those on the books of Richard Banister, “A.H.” and Sir William Read. To him I also owe my acquaintance with the little book by Robert Turner.

My heaviest debt of gratitude is due to Mr J. Harvey Bloom for undertaking the necessary research at the British Museum, at the Public Record Office and at Somerset House. My knowledge of the important MS. in the Sloane Collection is entirely due to him, and I am glad to testify to the advantages this book has derived from the work of so experienced an authority on records and record-searching.

Finally, I must record my indebtedness to the members of the Library staff of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and the Royal Society of Medicine, and to the Cambridge University Press for the care they have taken. All the blocks for illustration with two exceptions have been made by Messrs George Pulman and Sons of Thayer St., Manchester Square.

I hope that some English surgeon may be tempted to complete the work by adding a volume, later, on the giants of the nineteenth century.

R. R. JAMES