

JOHN ALDERSON, M.D.

Fifteen thousand people attended the funeral of Dr John Alderson in September 1829 at St Mary's, Lowgate. They were mourning a man who had done much for the health and culture of Hull.

He was born in Lowestoft, Suffolk, the youngest child of the Rev. James Alderson, a dissenting minister, and his wife Judith née Mewse. He was only 3 when his father died, and he grew up in Ravenstonedale, Westmorland. Medicine was a family profession, and John trained as a surgeon under his brother, James, and first came to Hull as a lieutenant and surgeon to the West Norfolk Militia in 1780. He then studied medicine in Edinburgh before starting practice in Whitby. He married Sarah Scott of Beverley and the family moved to Hull in 1787. The couple had eleven children, though only five survived infancy. In 1805 Sarah and three of their daughters died within a few months of each other. Alderson lived in Savile Street until the death of his wife, when he moved to 4, Charlotte Street.

Alderson acquired a large medical practice in Hull, and was elected physician to the Hull General Infirmary, which had opened in 1782 and moved to its Prospect Street site in 1784. Alderson gave his services to the hospital free, and was honorary physician there for 40 years. He had many other interests. He lectured in physiology and was consulting physician to the Hull lying-in charity. In 1814 he founded the Sculcoates Refuge for the Insane, in which it was claimed, "every attempt consistent with humanity will be made to restore the patient". He was made a freeman of the city in 1813 and worked towards the provision of commercial education. He was president of the Hull Subscription Library in 1801 and of the Literary and Philosophical Society in 1822. He founded the Hull Mechanics' Institute in 1825. He also founded the Hull School of Medicine in Kingston Square, a building which subsequently became the Co-operative Institute, and is remembered now only because its entrance was preserved and incorporated into a modern apartment block. Alderson died two years before the Medical School was opened, and the first lecture there was given by his son James.

His published works show his wide-ranging interests. He wrote, among other titles, *An Essay on the Nature and Origin of the Contagion of Fever* (1788), an essay on sumach's efficacy in the treatment of paralysis, a work on the improvement of poor soils and a lecture on apparitions (which was concerned not with ghosts but with the hallucinations and illusions experienced by the sick).

Alderson died on 16 September 1829. There is a marble monument to him in the north transept of Holy Trinity Church, and a statue, originally in the old Royal Infirmary, but now moved to the new hospital. Three of his sons – Christopher, Ralph and James (later Sir James) – became doctors, and one, John, became a solicitor.

Principal source – Dictionary of National Biography

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