Edinburgh School of Surgery

Surgical affairs in Edinburgh, including the practice and maintenance of standards of the craft of surgery, were first vested in the Incorporation of Barbers and Surgeons, who were awarded a Seal of Cause by the City in 1505. King James IV of Scotland confirmed the Seal in a Royal Charter in the following year. Much later (1778), the Incorporation became by charter the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

Scottish students wishing to study medicine increasingly found their way to Lieden, a link that had been established at the end of the 17th Century by Archibald Pitcairne who had become Professor of Medicine in Leiden before his return to Edinburgh in 1693. Boerhaave had received world-wide acclaim for his bedside teaching in Leiden and it was from there that John Munro brought back to Edinburgh a determination to create a medical faculty within the University of Edinburgh.

This youngest of the Scottish Universities lacked the papal imprimatur of the others, but this was largely compensated by acceptance of the intellectual mandate of the people of Edinburgh to form the 'Town's College'. The citizens of Edinburgh were receptive to John Munro's idea and in 1726 appointed the first six Professors in the Medical School, among them Alexander Monro primus as Professor of Anatomy. Surgery first became an academic discipline in Edinburgh in 1777 when his son, Alexander Monro secundus was granted a commission by the Town Council, 'expressly bearing him to be Professor Medicine in particular of Anatomy and Surgery'. This arrangement did not meet with universal approval, however, and the College of Surgeons in particular protested.

(Regius) Chair of Clinical Surgery
The controversy which ensued was partly responsible for the establishment of a (Regius) Chair of Clinical Surgery by George III in 1803, although the position became confused by the establishment by the Royal College of Surgeons in 1804 of a Chair of Surgery and, in 1805, by the Regius Chair of Military Surgery.
Both these RCSEd chairs were later discontinued and the University established a second chair - the Chair of Systematic (as opposed to Clinical) Surgery in 1831. Happily, relationships between the University and the Royal College of Surgeons have improved greatly over the years!

The Regius Chair of Clinical Surgery has been held by:
1803 - Professor James Russell
1833 - Professor Sir James Syme
1869 - Professor Joseph Lister
1877 - Professor Sir Thomas Annandale
1908 - Professor Francis Caird
1919 - Professor Sir Harold Stiles
1925 - Professor Sir John Fraser
1946 - Professor Sir James Learmonth
1956 - Sir John Bruce
1971 - Sir Patrick Forrest
1988 - Professor Sir David Carter
2000 - Professor O James Garden