



Amongst all of its modernity and activity the Anatomy Museum at the Otago University Medical School still has many reminders of its past. The room is filled with fine woodwork and natural light from the Edwardian-style skylights. Replicas of classical statues stand atop a glass case containing rows of fine plaster models, while around the room are other unmistakable examples of model-making from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Old and new combine with the ever-present fascination for human anatomy to produce a truly unique environment.

The Museum's early history was bound up with the establishment of the Medical School at the University of Otago and owed a great deal to the Professors of Anatomy who almost single-handedly brought it into existence. The University itself was opened in 1871, only 23 years after the first Scottish colonists arrived in Otago, and ten years after the Otago goldrush. Millen Coughtrey, aged 26, was appointed as the first Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in 1874, and classes for the first four medical students started the following year.

Coughtrey had graduated in Edinburgh in 1871, had held junior posts at Edinburgh and Liverpool and was well recommended.

The whole of the University at the time was in a building in the Exchange, in central Dunedin, which later became the Stock Exchange and was eventually pulled down to make room for John Wickliffe House. There are no records of an Anatomy Museum from that time but specimens from dissections would have been preserved, and one can imagine enthusiastic local doctors providing curiosities for the fledgling Medical School.

Coughtrey was appointed in 1874 but there was not even an office for him in the first University of Otago building in Customhouse Square, and his classes in 1875 drew only four enrolments.

Coughtrey was a forceful character, but at the start of the academic year in 1876 he had only two students, and one of these soon switched to law. To pass the time and to supplement his income he began seeing private patients in contravention of his terms of employment. The local profession resented this and complained.

The first few years were rather shaky. Coughtrey gave public lectures around Otago to popularise the need for a Medical School, but insufficient planning resulted in a failure to gain essential recognition from the "Home" Universities and he was unable to raise any enthusiasm in England.

After a stormy session with the University Council, Coughtrey resigned in 1876 because he was not allowed to treat patients and so make a reasonable living, and the whole idea of a Medical School was almost dropped. However, James Macandrew, the Superintendent of Otago, was convinced of its importance to the new colony and eventually won over the University Council to try it again. Maybe it was because it was thought that efforts were being made to open a medical School in Christchurch which convinced the Council.

The Zingari Rugby Club had been formed in 1879, with James Allen as its first recorded president in 1882. Following Allen as president, Dr. Millen Coughtrey assumed office in 1883, and was to continue in that position when Zingari amalgamated with the Richmond Club in 1879. He was Zingari-Richmond's longest serving president, finally stepping down in 1896 after 14 years in the office. He was also a member of the Otago Union from 1883 to 1892, and was the union's second president, following J.P Maitland, from 1887 to 1890.

Coughtrey Street in St. Clair was named after him as his early mansion was in that area.

Millen Coughtrey died at Dunedin on 17 October 1908 aged 60 years, and is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery