The first General Meeting, in July 1851, had given the Council full powers to act to put the scheme into effect, though actual building was not to start until two thirds of the projected £18,000 would have been raised. There was a great deal to do before this could be accomplished.
BUYING THE LAND

According to the minute of the First General Meeting, Dr. Graham had offered land at Epsom 'upon terms which render the offer munificent'. However, in private, the Committee of the Council had their doubts. Apart from the 'irregular and inconvenient outline', mentioned in the previous chapter, it was felt that Dr. Graham was charging too much.

Dr. Graham was quick to put the Council's mind at ease. He immediately promised to try to make the proprietors of neighbouring land sell enough to the College to even out the outline, and he also mentioned that other residents of Epsom intended to purchase an acre and a half of additional land, suitable for 'an excellent playground for the Boys', as a gift to the College.

Dr. Graham then began to negotiate the purchase and enfranchisement of nine extra pieces of land, which proceeded slowly over the next year. By April 1852, the Council was becoming worried at the slow rate of negotiations. Their letter to Dr. Graham prompted a testy reply and the presence of his solicitor at the following meeting on 4th May. Mr. White, Dr. Graham's solicitor, explained that there were problems with a right-of-way over Lord Egremont's land, near the present Main Gate. The Council were persuaded that Dr. Graham was acting in good faith, and relieved him of his obligation over the right-of-way. By June the Council was asking Dr. Graham to appoint a solicitor to deal with the transfer of the land to the College, which he refused, on grounds of the expense, wanting to act for himself. Mr. Harris, the College solicitor, had pointed out that the College could not legally pay an annuity on the land, so the Council asked Dr. Graham for what sum he would sell the land outright. Dr. Graham valued the land at about £1,000, but generously agreed to sell it to the College for £420. Negotiations dragged on so that it was only on 23rd October 1852 that Dr. Graham's land was finally conveyed to the College. Other parcels followed over the next few months, allowing the Council to move forward with their building plans.

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Dr. Graham offers to sell the ground for an annuity of £50 to be paid during the lives of himself (aged 55) and Mrs. Graham (aged 58) and that of the survivor; and we find that such an annuity is worth, according to the Government Tables, about £700. We consider the ground worth the rent of a guinea an acre from a farmer, and that for the purposes of investment it would realise £30 an acre, or £600. Before any treaty is entered upon with Dr. Graham it will be essential to ascertain that an abundant supply of good water can be obtained at a moderate cost.

(The Medical Benevolent College, Minutes of the Council, August 1st, 1851)
3.2 The Buildings

The buildings

An architect had been appointed in March 1852, when Edward Clifton, the son of Nathaniel Clifton, Member of Council, was asked to prepare plans in accordance with the prospectus. This prospectus had suggested a 'great quadrangle' plan, with 100 pensioners' flats hemming in a small school, and with a small chapel in the centre. These were ready by July, when Edward Clifton agreed to submit his proposals to Professor Hoskins for his professional opinion. There exist several sketches, each of which shows a stage in the evolution of Clifton's plans during 1852 and 1853.

By the time the foundation stone was laid, in 1853, the plans had been transformed from oriental, through perpendicular to the 'Elizabethan gothic', which forms the background to College life today. However, the intention was still to build the same 'great quadrangle', which would have made the further development of the school very difficult. The whole balance of the College would have been quite different, with 100 pensioners on site and with a Warden of Pensioners of greater importance than the Headmaster.

Much of the final building contract still exists. Finely drawn plans, sections and elevations are signed by John Propert, Edward Clifton and Mr Perry, the builder. The most interesting of these shows the original arrangement of the school rooms, the main room being the present Masters' Common Room and the smaller rooms being on the ground floor, off the main corridor.

The arrangements were for 100 boys and clearly show the old-fashioned nature of the school as envisaged by the Council. Schooling at this time was clearly closer to the medieval grammar school of 300 or 400 years before than to the
schooling of 50 or 100 years later. Heating would be by open fires and lighting by gas. Water would be from the well, seven feet in diameter, sunk some 300 feet deep into the chalk, now capped in the Well Room. However, one feature was certainly innovative - the ceiling of the main corridor was formed of factory-made tiles, more reminiscent of the Great Exhibition of 1851 than of the gothic building that contained it.
3.2 Foundations and Opening

On 1st December 1852 the land had been formally taken into the College's possession in a ceremony under the chairmanship of J.W. Freshfield MP. After suitable adjustment of the stake, a prayer was said by Rev. George Pocock of St. Paul's, Marylebone and after a pleasant stroll around the grounds the party retired to the Spread Eagle, where they were joined by 'some of the neighbouring gentry and inhabitants of Epsom'. About 80 sat down to dinner; after which several excellent speeches were made 'and the party broke up soon after nine, much gratified with the entertainment and returned to London by special Train which had been provided for them by the Directors of the London and Brighton Railway Company'.

However, the next few months were less easy; as it was realised that the tenders to build the school were late and much more expensive than had been projected. The time was extended from January to February 1853, but when the tenders were read in March the start of building was immediately postponed. Building materials and labour had shot up in price since the original proposals for the College had been calculated. This was probably partly because of the mid-century boom that was now beginning to have a great effect, and partly because of the extension of the railways in the Surrey area, making it a possibility for the first time to live as far away as Epsom and work in London. It was not until May that tenders were invited again, and by this time it was quite obvious that the whole College as planned would not be built. It would not be until September, four months after the foundation stone had been laid, that Mr. Perry would finally be able to start work on the foundations.

Prince Albert had been asked to lay the stone, but on the day he was ill with measles. Earl Manvers, the President of the College, kindly stood in for him. A procession was formed of parochial school children, the Parish Beadle of Epsom, Churchwardens and Overseers, the Vicar of Epsom, Members of Council, Vice-Presidents, the Builder etc. A scroll and coins were placed in a vase, covered by an engraved plate in the top of the stone, which was then lowered into place in front of a crowd of four or five hundred people, several hundred of whom then dined in the tent provided. Although the assembly must have been disappointed at the non-arrival of Prince Albert, the event was greatly enjoyed. Perhaps the crowd was especially well-behaved since the Council had employed 25 policemen to oversee the proceedings.

The next two years were very busy ones for the Council. They discussed the Bye Laws (rules) by which the College would be governed in great detail, continued to raise more donations and gradually agreed to build more and more of the College. The buildings, finished in time for the opening in 1855, would include everything from the Headmaster's House (Old Granville) along the frontage to the end of the first five pensioners' houses in the Terrace - the greater part of the main range in the original plans. In March 1855 Queen Victoria finally consented to become the Patron of the College, allowing its name to be changed to the Royal Medical Benevolent College. This would be announced on the opening day.

Meanwhile the royal coat of arms, and those of the Earl of Manvers and John Propert, were 'attached' to (in this case carved into) the canopy over the main door.
By July 1855 staff were appointed and the buildings almost finished; the grounds having been laid out during the previous year. On Monday 25th June the College was finally opened and the first of several royal visits took place. In front of a crowd of several hundreds, His Royal Highness Prince Albert with his son (also Prince Albert, later King Edward VII) declared the College open, toured the buildings and accepted donations. Also present were Charles Sumner, Bishop of Winchester and Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford. The newspaper reports give the first glimpse of the College buildings as well as giving some idea of the great importance of the occasion to the College, the medical profession and the locality.

The arms of the Potentate, H.M. the Queen

The arms of Earl Manvers

THE ROYAL MEDICAL BENEVOLENT COLLEGE

The ceremony of opening this institution took place on Monday 25th of June, at half past 3 p.m. amid a large concourse of four or five thousand persons. His Royal Highness Prince Albert presided over the duties of the day, and was attended by the Prince of Wales (who, we understand, was present as a compliment to Mr. Propert, who is a Welshman, the Marquis of Abercorn, Col. the Hon. C.B. Phipps... The following address was delivered in the porch to His Royal Highness Prince Albert by the Bishop of Oxford.

"May it please your Royal Highness, - We, the President, Vice Presidents, and Council of the Royal Medical Benevolent College, beg most respectfully to express to your Royal Highness our deep gratitude for your kindness this day in honouring the inauguration of this College with your royal presence..."

His Royal Highness replied in the following terms: -

"Mr. President and Gentlemen, - It has given me great pleasure to attend here this day to open this valuable institution. Gratitude to the members of the Medical Profession is a feeling in which all must participate, and I have gladly availed myself of the opportunity of expressing the approbation which I feel. It is with the greatest satisfaction that I learn that the Queen has, by a gracious Order in Council, appointed you the Patroness of the Institution..."

On July 23rd 1855 the Royal Medical Benevolent College Act became law, incorporating the College, allowing it to hold land in its own name and to make legal contracts. This was the first of several Acts of Parliament through which the changing nature of the College can be traced as it grew and prospered.