



## Scots who made their mark on.....

### *Medicine 3 : Pringle and Wyllie*



**Sir John Pringle  
(1707-82)**

**Father of Military  
Medicine**



John Pringle was the youngest son of Sir John Pringle of Stichill in The Borders and was educated at the Universities of St Andrews, Edinburgh and in Leiden in The Low Countries, from which in 1730 he graduated Doctor of Physics in 1730.

He set up home in Edinburgh offering his services as a physician but also taught at The University of Edinburgh as a Professor of Moral Philosophy for ten years before becoming physician to the commanding officer of the British Army in Flanders, fellow Scot Field Marshal John Dalrymple the 2nd Earl of Stair, fighting in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-8) in which Austria, Great Britain and The Low Countries opposed France, Prussia and Bavaria.

During the Battle of Dettingen fought in Bavaria in 1743 Pringle negotiated with the French Commander the Duc de Noailles that military hospitals should be regarded as neutral sanctuaries for the sick and injured, a concept enshrined 200 years later in the Geneva Conventions agreed after World War II !

In 1744 Pringle became Physician General to the British Army in The Low Countries and when the war was over he settled in London becoming physician in ordinary to Prince William, Duke of Cumberland, son of King George II and well known to Scots because of his role in The Battle of Culloden, which had gained him the sobriquet "Butcher" Cumberland.

Pringle published a text in 1750 on the nature of "Hospital and Jail Fevers" and presented papers to the Royal Society which gained him the Copley Medal in 1752, in which year he published *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Camp and Garrison*, a subject Florence Nightingale would study and pronounce on a hundred years later.

Pringle rubbed shoulders with the great and the good like American polymath Benjamin Franklin and the eccentric evolutionary thinker James Burnett, Lord Monboddo. He was knighted in 1766 and eventually became physician to King George III. For six years from 1772 he was President of the Royal Society. In his spare time Pringle was a keen botanist and a number of stamps exist for flora named in his honour as the current President of the Royal Society such as the Kerguelen Cabbage useful in the prevention of scurvy because of its Vitamin C-rich oil.



TAAF 2002  
Kerguelen cabbage  
whose Latin name is  
*Pringlea antiscorbutica*



**Sir James Wyllie  
(1768-1854)**

**Doctor to the Tsars**

This "lad o pairts", born in Tulliallan, became a revered figure in the circles of the Russian Romanov dynasty and was the model for a character in an epic Russian novel.

Wyllie was born into a modest home and although he attended Edinburgh University to study medicine in the late 1780 he left without graduating, with a possible stain on his character around which mystery exists. This may explain why he exiled himself and went to Russia where in 1790 he became a senior surgeon in the Eletsy Regiment. Within four years he had become physician to the imperial court in St Petersburg and by the end of the decade was surgeon-in-ordinary (i.e. staff surgeon) to Tsar Paul I (son of Catherine the Great) and physician to the heir-apparent, Grand Duke Alexander.

In 1799 Wyllie performed the first laryngotomy ever witnessed in Russia on Count Kutaisov, whose abscess was choking him. Because the Count was a favourite of Tsar news of the Scot's medical prowess spread quickly.

Around the turn of the century Wyllie helped to found the Medical Academy of St Petersburg and Moscow and was made Inspector General of the Army Board of Health. In the second decade of the 19th century Wyllie was staff physician to Tsar Alexander I and the writer of a number of medical texts in Russian. He also wrote a paper on Yellow Fever which gained him an MD from The University of Aberdeen.

Wyllie was also commended for his services in tending the sick and wounded as Head of the Medical Corps during the Battle of Borodino on September 7th 1812 between the Russians and Napoleon's invading army which resulted in 70,000 casualties. Wyllie apparently attended to as many as 200 casualties on the one day of the battle. Because of his humane approach in tending to enemy soldiers as well as his own Wyllie was also awarded the Legion d'Honneur by Napoleon. Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) depicted Wyllie as an inspired and hardworking surgeon who tends to two of his badly wounded characters in Book Three of his novel *War and Peace* (1869) referenced in this 1956 Soviet issue.



On a visit to the court in London in 1814 Wyllie was knighted by the Prince Regent. Tsar Alexander died in December 1825 attended by Wyllie and was eventually succeeded by Nicholas I who requested the Scot to continue with his court duties. When Wyllie died he had become a rich man and he donated most of his wealth to his adopted country. A clinic in St Petersburg was built in his name "Jacob Basil Villiers" and a large statue to him still stands in its grounds.