John Macfie was born at Greenock, Renfrewshire, on 12 September 1826, into a family whose name had become closely associated with the nineteenth-century Scottish sugar-refining industry. He was the son of William Macfie, himself a sugar refiner, and Janet Marshall. The commercial world into which Macfie was born was therefore not incidental to his later career: sugar refining formed part of the economic life of his family and would eventually provide the principal occupation of his own adult life.

Macfie subsequently became associated with Macfie and Sons, the Liverpool sugar-refining firm, in which he worked for many years alongside his brothers Claude and David. The importance of this connection is evident from the contemporary notice published immediately after his death, which described him as the senior partner of the firm. Liverpool, one of Britain's great nineteenth-century commercial ports, consequently formed an important part of Macfie's business life even though his later years were firmly centred upon Edinburgh.

On 11 June 1851, Macfie married Lillias Fullarton. Their marriage preceded by several years the somewhat unusual episode that brings him within the present study. Unlike the many young men who entered John Goodsir's anatomy classes as part of a conventional programme of medical education, Macfie was already an adult businessman and married man when he appeared among the students of the University of Edinburgh. He was therefore to represent a very different type of figure within Goodsir's extraordinarily diverse student body.

The extent of Macfie's subsequent commercial standing is perhaps best indicated by the description preserved at his death. He had risen to become senior partner of Macfie and Sons, although he eventually withdrew from active participation in the business. After his retirement, he made Edinburgh his principal home, residing at 14 Hope Terrace. His connection with the family firm nevertheless remained an important element of his public identity, while his cousin, Colonel William Macfie, succeeded to the active leadership of the concern. Macfie's later Edinburgh years would reveal interests extending considerably beyond commerce and into spheres that could scarcely have been predicted from his family's sugar-refining enterprise.

Macfie's appearance at the University of Edinburgh is unusual when viewed against the more conventional educational paths of many of Goodsir's students. He matriculated for the session 1859–60 under matriculation number 995, when he was thirty-three years of age. He returned to the University in session 1861–62, matriculating as number 298. No evidence has been found that he proceeded to a university degree.

His presence in Goodsir's class is therefore particularly significant. Macfie was not a young medical student embarking upon the customary sequence of study leading towards professional qualification, but a mature man whose established life lay outside medicine. His attendance demonstrates that Goodsir's teaching reached beyond those whose names subsequently appeared in the University's medical graduation records and included individuals who attended without ultimately entering the medical profession.

What Macfie intended to gain from his university studies cannot presently be determined. The surviving evidence establishes his attendance but provides no explanation for his decision to study anatomy under Goodsir. His later activities, however, suggest that intellectual and scientific interests were by no means foreign to him. This is particularly apparent from evidence concerning both the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and a geological observation that Macfie subsequently brought to the attention of Professor John Duns.

In 1868, only a few years after his period at the University, Macfie contributed £100 towards the rebuilding of the Medical Hospital of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. A preliminary subscription list published in *The Lancet General Advertiser* on 16 May identified "John Macfie, Esq., Hope-terrace, Whitehouse" among the contributors. His subscription was substantial and provides an interesting later connection between this former student of Goodsir and one of Edinburgh's foremost medical institutions. There is no evidence that Macfie's attendance at the University prompted the gift, but his support for the rebuilding project deserves notice in considering the breadth of his interests beyond commerce.

An even more revealing indication of Macfie's scientific curiosity emerged in connection with events at Liverpool. Professor John Duns later recalled that in 1874 Macfie had informed him of an unusual discovery made during the sinking of a well in Vernon Street. Lumps of sandstone had been brought to the surface containing loose discs of a peculiar character. Macfie recognised that the material was worthy of further attention and obtained a number of specimens for Duns.

The specimens were not forgotten. More than a decade later, on 8 February 1886, Duns presented his paper "On Some Rock-Markings" before the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. In discussing the Liverpool discovery, he specifically acknowledged "John Macfie, Esq., Hope Terrace, Edinburgh" as the source of the information and specimens. Several of the pieces Macfie had obtained in 1874 were actually exhibited before the Society while Duns delivered his paper.

Macfie's role should not be exaggerated into that of a practising geologist, for the surviving evidence does not justify such a description. Nevertheless, the episode reveals a capacity for observation and an interest in scientific phenomena that adds considerably to our understanding of the man who had earlier entered Goodsir's classroom. He recognised potentially significant material, communicated its discovery to an appropriate scholar and ensured that specimens were preserved for examination. Their eventual use before a learned society twelve years later gives his seemingly modest intervention a lasting scientific context.

Macfie's University attendance consequently assumes greater interest than it might at first appear. Although he neither graduated nor pursued medicine professionally, his subsequent support of the Royal Infirmary and his contribution to Duns's investigation show that medicine and science were not wholly remote from his later life. They formed part of a much broader range of interests, one of which would bring him considerable prominence within another sphere of nineteenth-century Edinburgh intellectual and social life: the game of chess.

Chess was to become one of the most sustained interests of Macfie's later life. His involvement was not confined to occasional recreational play. Surviving records place him within the organised chess life of Edinburgh for at least two decades and show him successively as a club office-holder, competitive player and, eventually, an administrator within the national organisation of Scottish chess.

In 1867, Macfie was already sufficiently established within Scottish chess circles to be appointed to the Local Committee of the British Chess Association Congress held at Dundee. The published programme for the Congress listed "John Macfie, Esq.; Edinburgh" among a substantial body of local organisers drawn from Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow and elsewhere. His participation in the organisation of this important national gathering provides the earliest presently identified evidence of his formal involvement in organised chess and demonstrates that his connection with the game was established several years before he became President of the Edinburgh Chess Club.

By 1870–71, Macfie's standing within Edinburgh chess had become still more prominent. The historical Roll of Honour of the Edinburgh Chess Club records him as President for that session. His election to the presidency therefore represents not the beginning of his documented chess activity, but the next stage in an involvement that can now be traced back at least to the Dundee Congress of 1867.

Further evidence of his playing strength followed in May 1872, when he was selected to represent the East of Scotland in a match against the West of Scotland. Played on 4 May at the rooms of the Glasgow Chess Club, the encounter brought together leading players from the two sides of the country. Macfie was paired with Duguid of the West and played three games against him. He won two and lost one, thereby making a positive contribution to the eastern side's performance. Contemporary reports of the match appeared in both the *Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald*, providing unusually detailed evidence of Macfie's participation.

His connection with the Edinburgh Chess Club remained active. At the Club's Annual Special Meeting on 29 June 1875, prizes were presented for the preceding competitions. A contemporary report in W. N. Potter's *City of London Chess Magazine* records among the awards: "Macfie Chessmen, Mr. John Macfie." Whatever the precise origin of the designation "Macfie Chessmen", which cannot presently be established from the surviving report alone, the notice provides further contemporary evidence of his participation in the competitive life of the Club.

Taken together, these records show that chess had become considerably more than a passing diversion for Macfie. Within little more than a decade of his final recorded session at the University of Edinburgh, he had risen to the presidency of the Edinburgh Chess Club; he subsequently represented the East of Scotland in inter-regional competition and continued to participate in club contests. His involvement also coincided with a formative period in the development of organised Scottish chess, before the creation of a permanent national association brought players and clubs from across Scotland into a more formal structure.

When that national organisation finally emerged in the 1880s, Macfie would be among those associated with it. His subsequent appearances in the Scottish Championship and his service within the Scottish Chess Association demonstrate that the involvement now documented from the British Chess Association Congress of 1867 was to endure well into his later life.

The establishment of the Scottish Chess Association in 1884 provided Macfie with a wider arena for an interest that had previously been documented principally through the Edinburgh Chess Club. When the Association was founded on 2 February 1884, contemporary material subsequently assembled by chess historian Alan McGowan listed "John Macfie, Edinburgh" among its members. Macfie was thus associated with the national organisation from its beginnings.

His most significant surviving competitive appearance came the following year. At the Scottish Chess Association Congress held in Edinburgh in 1885, Macfie entered the Major Tournament, the competition for the Scottish Championship. Twelve players participated, placing Macfie among a select field competing for the principal national title.

Macfie finished the tournament with four points. His score included victories over John Fraser, Sheriff Spens, James Marshall and Robert Pirrie. Although he did not win the championship, his participation is significant in assessing his standing as a player. By this time, he was approaching sixty years of age, yet he was still prepared to compete in the foremost tournament organised by the recently established national association. His appearance in the championship confirms that his place within Scottish chess rested upon more than administrative or social involvement.

A particularly valuable record of Macfie's association with the chess community survives from two years later. He was present at the Scottish Chess Association Congress held in Edinburgh in 1887 and appears in the surviving group photograph of participants. Macfie is specifically identified among the figures in the photograph. This image provides a rare visual record of the former Goodsir student in later life and places him physically among the community of Scottish chess players with whom he had by then been associated for many years.

Macfie's involvement with the Association continued into the following decade. At the seventh Annual Congress, held at the Dundee Chess Club in April 1890, the Association conducted its Annual General Meeting on 18 April. The proceedings recorded "John Macfie, Edinburgh" among the directors appointed for the ensuing year. His position as a director demonstrates that, long after his first known involvement with organised chess, he continued to participate in its institutional development at national level.

The surviving evidence consequently traces an unusually long progression. Macfie had moved from leadership within an individual Edinburgh club to inter-regional competition and ultimately into the national organisation of the game. By the 1880s, his name belonged not merely to the history of the Edinburgh Chess Club but to the formative period of organised Scottish chess itself. His championship appearance, preservation in the 1887 congress photograph and later service as a director together provide a remarkably complete picture of a man whose engagement with chess endured into his sixties.

Although Macfie had withdrawn from the active management of the family sugar-refining concern, retirement did not amount to withdrawal from the wider affairs of Edinburgh. His obituary records that he served as a director of the Scottish Provident Insurance Society, placing him within another substantial Scottish institution and suggesting that the experience accumulated during his commercial career continued to be valued after he ceased taking an active role in Macfie and Sons.

Macfie's political sympathies also changed during his later life. He was described at his death as having been a Liberal until a few years previously, when he joined the Unionist ranks. The same account makes clear, however, that he did not take an active part in politics. This accords with the obituary's description of him as a man of "quiet and retiring disposition", a characterisation that is particularly interesting when set against the range of organisations and activities with which the surviving record connects him.

A further glimpse of Macfie's interests appears only months before his death. On 3 January 1896, the *Greenock Telegraph & Clyde Shipping Gazette* reported a presentation made during a weekly social of the Independent Order of Good Templars in Duff Street. Following a draughts competition, a silver cup and badge were presented to Brother G. Gaule, and the newspaper specifically recorded that the cup was the gift of "Bro. John Macfie". Macfie's origins in Greenock and his continuing connections with the town provide the context for this late appearance of his name there.

The presentation is a small episode, but a revealing one. It places Macfie in connection with the Good Templar movement and shows him providing a prize for the activities of one of its local groups during the final year of his life. It also adds another strand to a pattern already visible elsewhere in the surviving evidence: Macfie repeatedly appears not simply as a participant in institutions and associations, but as someone willing to support their activities materially.

Taken as a whole, the evidence for Macfie's later years presents a man whose public presence was broader than the description "retired sugar refiner" might suggest. His activities ranged across commercial and financial institutions, voluntary association and philanthropy, while contemporary testimony suggests that he pursued them without cultivating a conspicuous public persona. The contrast is striking: the documentary record reveals a man involved in numerous aspects of Victorian civic and associational life, while those who remembered him characterised him as personally quiet and retiring.

John Macfie died at his residence, 14 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, at eight o'clock on the morning of 6 July 1896. He was sixty-nine years of age. His statutory death record described him simply as a retired sugar refiner and confirmed his parentage as William Macfie, sugar refiner, and Janet Macfie, née Marshall. The cause of death was acute pneumonia of seven days' duration, together with general debility.

News of his death appeared immediately in the Scottish and English press. The *Liverpool Daily Post* published a substantial obituary on 7 July, reflecting the continuing association of Macfie's name with the city in which so much of his commercial life had been spent. It noted that he had died after only a short illness and recorded that his widow, one son and a daughter survived him.

The same obituary provides one of the few surviving contemporary descriptions of Macfie's personality. He was remembered as a man of "quiet and retiring disposition". The observation is valuable precisely because the documentary evidence for his life reveals such a wide range of activities. Macfie evidently combined sustained participation in public, intellectual and associational life with a temperament that did not seek personal prominence.

Further evidence of the scale of Macfie's commercial success is provided by the record of his estate. Confirmation was granted at Edinburgh on 15 August 1896 to the executors named in his will, including his son Allan Fullarton Macfie. His estate was valued at £105,150 14s. 5d., a substantial fortune which provides a striking indication of the wealth Macfie had accumulated during his long association with the sugar-refining industry.

A death notice in the *Glasgow Herald* supplied the arrangements for his funeral. Macfie's remains were to leave 14 Hope Terrace at two o'clock on Thursday, 9 July, for Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh, with friends invited to attend and flowers respectfully declined. He was subsequently buried there, bringing to a close a life that had begun at Greenock nearly seventy years earlier.

John Macfie occupies an unusual and important place among the Students of Goodsir precisely because his life does not conform to the pattern that might ordinarily be expected of a nineteenth-century student of anatomy. He acquired no medical degree, entered no medical profession and left no known body of anatomical or medical work. Were the investigation of Goodsir's students confined to graduates and practising physicians, Macfie might easily have disappeared from the record altogether.

His identification therefore illustrates one of the central difficulties, and one of the principal values, of reconstructing Goodsir's student body. Matriculation records preserve individuals whose subsequent lives can lead far beyond the conventional boundaries of medical biography. In Macfie's case, the trail leads into Victorian commerce, scientific observation, institutional life and, most strikingly, the organised development of Scottish chess. These apparently disparate strands belong to the same individual who, in middle age, entered the University of Edinburgh and sat among Goodsir's students.

Macfie is also a reminder that attendance in Goodsir's classroom need not have represented the beginning of a career. For some students, it formed only one episode within a much larger intellectual life. The reason Macfie chose to study anatomy remains unknown, and it would be wrong to manufacture an explanation where the evidence is silent. Yet the fact of his attendance is itself significant. A successful businessman in his thirties considered Goodsir's teaching sufficiently worthwhile to enter the University, and he returned for a second recorded session.

That circumstance enlarges our understanding not merely of Macfie but of the constituency reached by Goodsir's teaching. The professor's classroom contained men whose destinations cannot be recovered from medical registers alone. Some became physicians and surgeons; others followed entirely different paths. Macfie's survival in the matriculation albums allows one such path to be reconstructed with unusual fullness.

For the Students of Goodsir project, that may ultimately be his greatest significance. John Macfie demonstrates why the non-graduate must be pursued with the same determination as the distinguished physician. Behind two matriculation numbers stood a life that intersected with several important currents of nineteenth-century Scotland yet might otherwise have remained almost invisible within the history of medical education. Recovering that life restores to Goodsir's classroom something that lists of graduates can never provide: the extraordinary human range of the men who passed through it. (University of Edinburgh, Matriculation Album, session 1859–60, John Macfie, matriculation no. 995; University of Edinburgh, Matriculation Album, session 1861–62, John Macfie, matriculation no. 298; *The Chess Player's Magazine*, volume III, 1867, page 252, "British Chess Association: Congress in Dundee, 1867," programme of the Congress, listing John Macfie, Esq., Edinburgh, among the members of the Local Committee; Edinburgh Chess Club, "Roll of Honour 1822–1972," John Macfie, President, session 1870–71, revised historical roll compiled from club records,

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cup as the gift of Brother John Macfie; Death Record of John Macfie, 6 July 1896, Edinburgh Newington Parish Records, Statutory Deaths 685/5/600; *Glasgow Herald*, 7 July 1896, death notice of John Macfie, 14 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, aged 69, funeral to Grange Cemetery, 9 July 1896; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 July 1896, page 6, "Death of Mr. John Macfie," obituary of John Macfie of Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, senior partner of Macfie and Sons, sugar refiners, Liverpool; *Market Harborough Advertiser & Midland Mail*, 14 July 1896, page 7, death notice of John Macfie of Edinburgh, senior partner of Macfie and Sons, sugar refiners, Liverpool; England and Wales, National Probate Calendar, 1896, John Macfie, sugar refiner, 14 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, died 6 July 1896, confirmation granted at Edinburgh 15 August 1896, estate £105,150 14s. 5d.; *Greenock Telegraph & Clyde Shipping Gazette*, 14 May 1901, "The Sugar Industry: The Macfie Family," retrospective account of the Macfie family and sugar-refining business, identifying Colonel William Macfie of Airds as a cousin of the late John Macfie of Hope Terrace, Edinburgh; Find a Grave, "John Macfie," born 12 September 1826, died 6 July 1896, Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh, Memorial ID 212853999).