

In 1792 Andrew Duncan started an appeal to found an asylum in Edinburgh. Voluntary contributions were slow at first. However, a government grant of £2,000 in 1806 increased the funds considerably and enabled the purchase of a villa and four acres of surrounding land in Morningside. Soon afterwards, in the spring of 1807, a Royal charter or warrant, granted by His Majesty King George the Third, established the Edinburgh Lunatic Asylum (ELA) as a body corporate. The foundation stone of a building designed by the architect Robert Reid was laid on the 8th of June 1809. The ELA admitted its first patient on the 19th of July 1813.

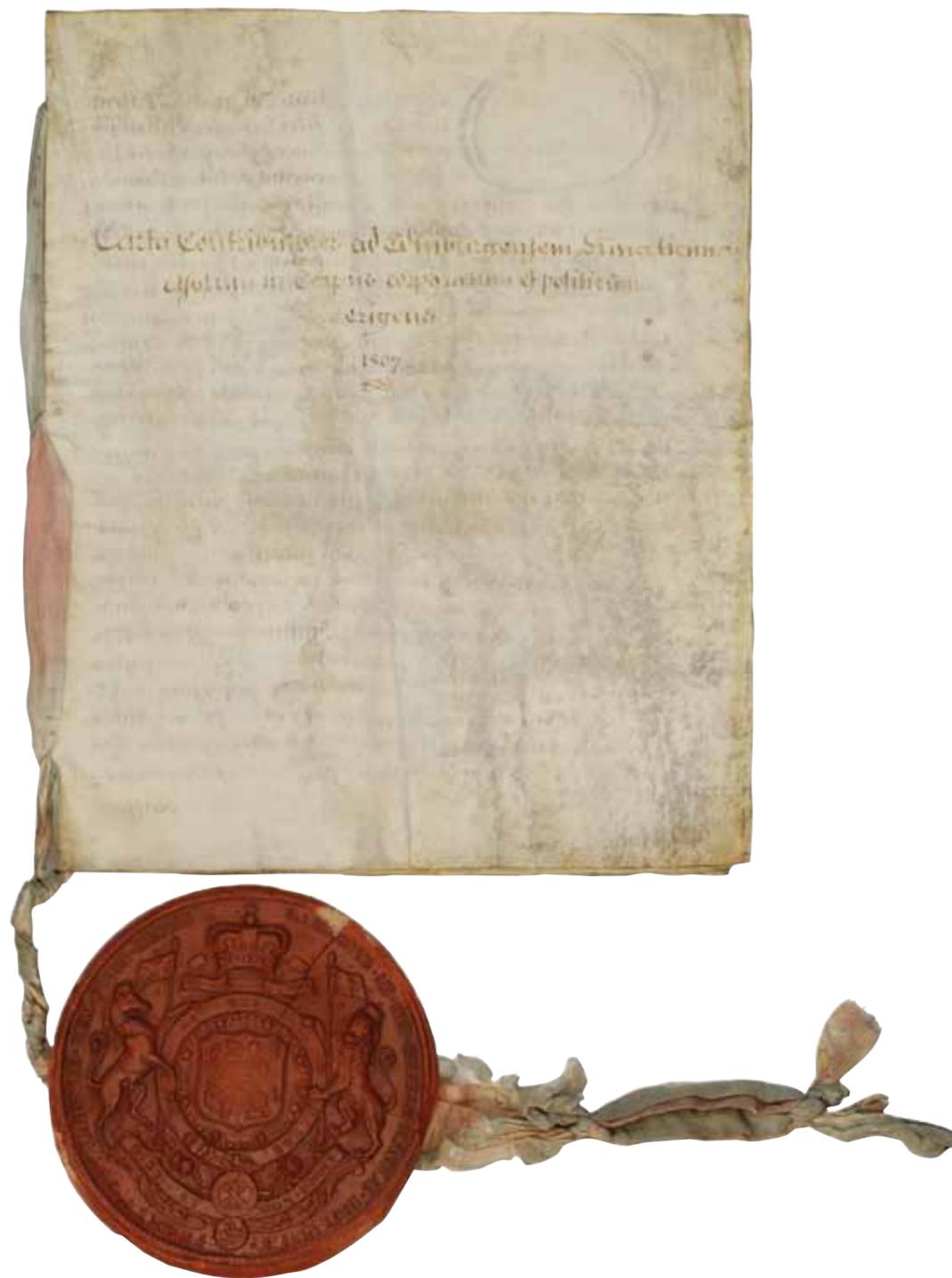
As well as extending royal patronage, the warrant made the ELA into a public body. This gave legal rights to use a common seal, to perpetual succession, to sue and be sued, to own lands, to lend money and to receive donations and legacies. It could also make bye-laws, rules and regulations, provided they were consistent with the institution's charitable purpose.

The warrant also specified how the ELA was to be run. Twenty named extraordinary managers and twelve named ordinary managers were elected. They were drawn from Edinburgh Town Council, the law, the University and the local medical profession. A governor and five deputy governors, along with four ordinary managers, could be chosen from among charitable contributors who had given £10 or more and who resided in or near Edinburgh.

The warrant consists of four sheets of parchment folded to make eight pages. The text, in Latin, is inscribed onto each page except the last, which is blank. The Great Seal of Scotland is attached by means of intertwined silk threads. Its wax relief shows King George in military uniform, mounted on a rearing stallion and overlooking the City of Edinburgh. An idealised, but still identifiable, panorama of the Castle, the churches and tenement buildings of the Royal Mile and Salisbury Crags can just be made out behind the horse's legs.

In 1841 Queen Victoria allowed the prefix 'Royal' to be added and, ten years later, the name was officially changed to the Royal Edinburgh Asylum by a private Act of Parliament. In 1927 a new charter was obtained which changed it to the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Mental and Nervous Disorders. Today it is simply known as the "Royal Edinburgh".

A new building, designed by William Burn, was added in 1842. Referred to originally as West House, it was later re-named after Dr William M'Kinnon, the first Resident Physician from 1839 to 1846. Further accommodation was provided in 1894 when Craig House opened nearby. East House, as the original building soon became called, was eventually demolished. In the twentieth century a series of further outpatient and residential developments took place on the Hospital's site. The Royal Edinburgh Hospital was granted a Coat of Arms in 1959.



Warrant and Seal of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, 1807



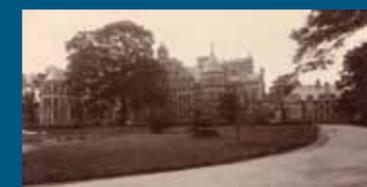
Coat of Arms, 1959



Design for Edinburgh Lunatic Asylum, 1808



Mackinnon House, c.1950



Craig House, c.1900



Royal Edinburgh Hospital
aerial view, 1989
© RCAHMS

Charter of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital