

ROBERT BRIDGES (1844–1930), POET LAUREATE, AND  
MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF  
LONDON

SEVERAL studies of Robert Bridges have stressed his medical training and professional life as a physician. In presenting this note on his Membership diploma, which is in the Medical College Library at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, we merely outline his career, and reproduce the certificate.

Robert Seymour Bridges was born at Walmer, Kent, on 23 October 1844, and was educated at Eton and Corpus Christi College, Oxford, graduating in classics in 1867. On 6 November 1869 he signed on as a student at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, giving his addresses as 'Vicarage, Rochdale,' and '35, Gt. Ormond St.' However, before starting his studies Bridges travelled abroad, returning to the Hospital in 1871. Qualifying B.M. (Oxon.) in 1874, at St. Bartholomew's Hospital he became successively House Physician to Patrick Black (1875–6), and Casualty Physician (1877–9). He was also Physician to the Great Northern Hospital, and Assistant Physician to the Hospital for Sick Children. Following an attack of pneumonia in 1881 Bridges retired from medicine, to become Poet Laureate in 1913, and to receive the Order of Merit in 1929.

Bridges was determined initially to devote only about fifteen years of his life to medicine, but crowded much into the shorter period. He took his Membership in 1876, and in that year described the examination in his Latin poem *Carmen elegiacum* [*etc.*] (pp. 17–18). His diploma of Membership is dated 27 January 1876 and bears the signatures of Sir George Burrows (1801–87), President of the Royal College of Physicians and the following Censors, [Sir] George Johnson (1818–96), [Sir] Alfred Baring Garrod (1819–1907), [Sir] Samuel Wilks (1824–1911), and Charles Bland Radcliffe (1822–89). The Registrar was [Sir] Henry Alfred Pitman (1808–1908). Bridges was elected F.R.C.P. in 1900.

Robert Bridges was the author of several medical papers, the best-known being 'An account of the Casualty Department' (*St. Bart's Hosp. Rep.*, 14, 1878, pp. 167–82), which was a shattering exposure of conditions existing in that department, and would not have been written by anyone hoping to progress within the Hospital. It is remarkable that it appeared in print in a publication of the Hospital, but it was obviously factual, and presents a not uncommon picture of hospital life at that period, and prevalent in some degree up to the present time. Had Bridges not decided at an early date that he did not intend to make medicine his career, he might well have achieved eminence as a physician. But in these circumstances he would have been unwise to be so critical.

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**Fig. 1**  
**M.R.C.P. diploma of Robert Bridges**