Dear Members of the Stonehouse History Group

I am delighted to present to both your societies my completed biographical study of Dr Douglas William Eshelby (1839–1922), a nineteenth-century physician whose remarkable career offers a fascinating glimpse into the medical, social and everyday history of Stonehouse, Stroud and the surrounding Gloucestershire communities.

Eshelby may not be a familiar name in local history today, but the surviving records reveal a man whose professional responsibilities brought him into direct contact with some of the most pressing concerns of Victorian society. His story takes us into rural cottages, coroners' inquests, public-health investigations, disputes over medical practice and even the polluted waterways of Gloucestershire.

By way of introduction, I am one of the last surviving members of the Goodsir medical and scientific family. I have been conducting an extensive historical research project entitled *The Students of Professor John Goodsir*, devoted to reconstructing the lives and careers of the students of Professor John Goodsir (1814–1867), the distinguished anatomist at the University of Edinburgh. Here are some of my past works which may be of interest:

https://independent.academia.edu/MichaelTracy6/Papers
https://www.royalscottishacademy.org/blog/19-an-honorary-member-for-10-days/

Eshelby studied medicine under Goodsir and graduated M.D. from Edinburgh in 1863, submitting a doctoral thesis entitled *On Diphtheria*. He subsequently established himself in Gloucestershire, where his appointments included service as a district medical officer and public vaccinator. His responsibilities connected him with Haresfield, Whitminster, Stonehouse, Stroud and neighbouring communities.

What makes Eshelby particularly interesting from a local historical perspective is the extraordinary variety of circumstances in which his name appears.

In 1867, he provided medical evidence at an inquest concerning Thomas Tilly, who had died after being detained in a police cell at Whitminster. In 1877, he publicly questioned the difficulties surrounding the registration of deaths without medical certification. Two years later, he appeared in another inquest involving the death of a newborn child at Hardwicke. These episodes illuminate not only the work of a Victorian physician but also the responsibilities of local officials, the workings of the coroner's court and the often difficult circumstances of ordinary families.

His activities extended well beyond the sickroom. Contemporary records place him within the developing system of rural sanitary administration, where inadequate cottage ventilation, drainage and the contamination of watercourses were matters of genuine public concern. His involvement in questions surrounding the Arlebrook is especially revealing of the practical difficulties faced by communities before modern public-health infrastructure became established.

Yet there is another, rather unexpected, side to his story.

While living at Frocester, Eshelby contributed a photograph and memorial transcription relating to Frocester Chapel for publication in *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries*. He also supplied an eyewitness account of the earthquake of 17 December 1896, describing the disturbance in terms reminiscent of a heavy traction engine or an underground railway train. His observation was subsequently included in Charles Davison's scientific investigation of the earthquake.

These details bring us considerably closer to the individual himself: a physician who was interested not only in the health of his neighbours but also in the history of their surroundings and the unusual natural events that disturbed their daily lives.

The accompanying biography has been reconstructed from contemporary newspapers, medical journals, university records, census returns, parliamentary reports and historical publications. It includes detailed bibliographical citations so that future researchers can identify and pursue the original evidence.

My purpose in presenting this study jointly to the Stonehouse History Group and Stroud Local History Society is to ensure that Eshelby's contributions to your local history are not overlooked. I hope that each society will find the manuscript a worthwhile addition to its historical reference material and that it may prove useful to members, local historians, genealogists and future researchers interested in nineteenth-century Gloucestershire.

I should also mention that the copyright in my *Students of Professor John Goodsir* research has been gifted to the University of Edinburgh. I am pleased to share this completed biographical study with both societies for historical reference and research.

It is remarkable how much of a community's history can be recovered through the life of a single medical practitioner. In Eshelby's case, the evidence takes us far beyond medicine, revealing something of the anxieties, institutions, living conditions and intellectual interests of the Gloucestershire communities he served.

Please accept the attached biography, *Dr Douglas William Eshelby (1839–1922)*, with my compliments and best wishes. I hope you will find his story as interesting to read as I have found it to reconstruct.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Tracy

Honorary Fellow
Edinburgh Medical School
The University of Edinburgh

Chicago, Illinois, USA