500 years of medical printing

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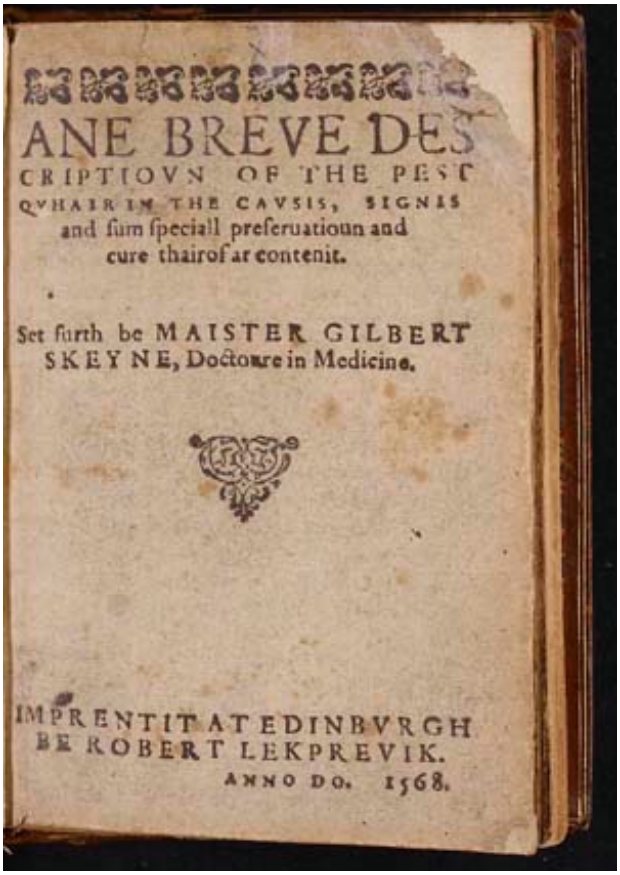
Last week I went to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh to attend the official launch of the **"Scotland and medicine in print" website**. This coincided with the opening of the exhibition "Written on the Body", which can be seen at the **Surgeons' Hall Museum** in Edinburgh. I have to admit that a few (not many!) of the exhibits are a bit gory for my taste, but then I am particularly squeamish ...

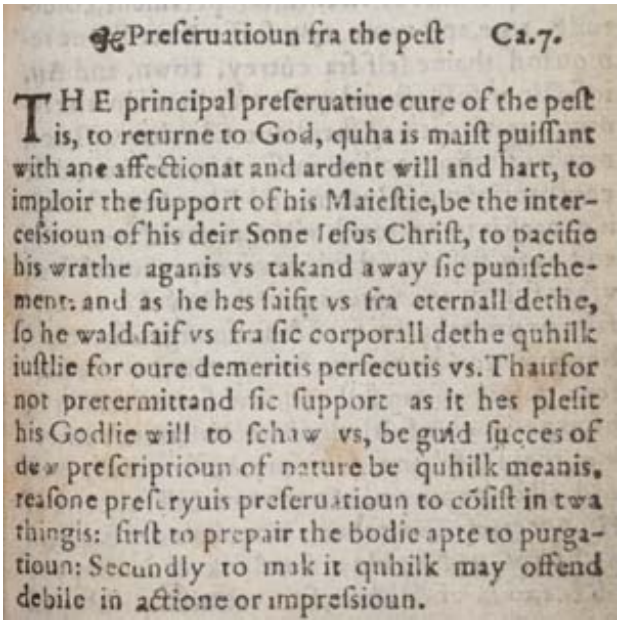
The "Scotland and medicine in print" website brings together a vast range of images with explanations of medical items printed in Scotland. The original items are held at a variety of partner organisations of the **Scotland and Medicine** project. One of the highlights of the website is a digital image of the earliest known book about medicine printed in Scotland:


ANE BREVE DES
CRIPTIOVN OF THE PEST
QVHAIR IM THE CAVSIS, SIGNIS
and ſum ſpeciall preſeruatioun and
cure thairof ar contenit.

Set furth be MAISTER GILBERT
SKEYNE, Doctoure in Medicine.

IMPRENTIT AT EDINBVRGH
BE ROBERT LEKPREVIK.
ANNO DO. 1568.

This "brief description of the plague" was written by the Aberdeen doctor Gilbert Skeyne (c. 1522-1599), who later became physician to James VI. The book was printed in 1568 and describes the plague that broke out in Edinburgh that year. It is written neither in Latin nor in English, but in Scots! That is because the work is a serious attempt to give advice to the population about how to avoid infection and, if it's too late for that, on the treatment of the plague. Although Skeyne regarded good hygiene as important, he stated that "the principal preservative cure of the pest is, to returne to God":



Preſeruatioun fra the peſt Ca.7.

THE principal preſeruatiue cure of the peſt is, to returne to God, quha is maiſt puiſſant with ane affectionat and ardent will and hart, to imploir the ſupport of his Maieſtie, be the interceſsioun of his deir Sone Ieſus Chriſt, to pacifie his wrathe aganis vs takand away ſic puniſchement: and as he hes ſaifit vs fra eternall dethe, ſo he wald ſaif vs fra ſic corporall dethe quhilk iuſtlie for oure demeritis perſecutis vs. Thairfor not pretermittand ſic ſupport as it hes pleſit his Godlie will to ſchaw vs, be guid ſucces of dew preſcriptioun of nature be quhilk meanis, reaſone preſcryuis preſeruatioun to cõſiſt in twa thingis: firſt to prepair the bodie apte to purgatioun: Secundly to mak it quhilk may offend debile in actione or impreſsioun.

The original copy of the book forms part of our Imprentit exhibition. You can see it in the Science & Technology case.