

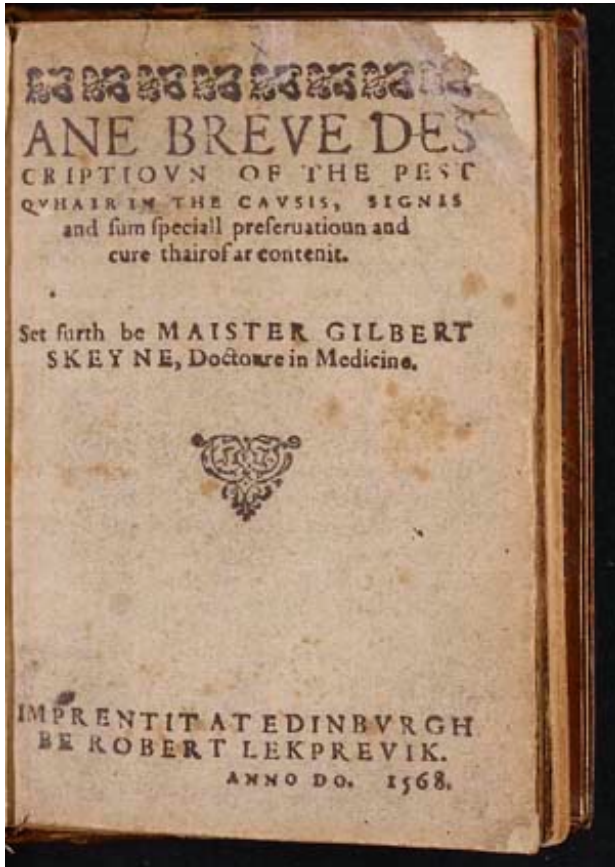
500 years of medical printing

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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:



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.

TH E 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 pacifio his wrathe aganis vs takand away sic punischeme: and as he hes saist 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 pleisid his Godlie will to schaw vs, be guid succes of de^v prescription of nature be quhilk meanis, reasone preseryuis preseruatioun to consist in twa thingis: first to prepar the bodie apte to purgatioun: Secundly to mak it quhilk may offend debile in actioun or impresioun.

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