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'Spinal chord'

For many years I have been interested in the history of neurology. I bought a book which was surplus to their requirements from the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh. I had it rebound, and when it returned from the binders found that there was, I thought, a mistake and they called had it "The Structure of the Brain and Spinal Chord in Man". When I came to study the book I

discovered to my surprise that the spelling was correct. The Wellcome Institute kindly consulted their database, and found 114 articles and books with titles which included the words 'spinal cord'. Out of these only one other had the spelling 'chord':

Gower WR The diagnosis of diseases of the spinal chord. Translated into French and published in Paris, in 1882.

Both books were from the nineteenth century.

The explanation appears to be that 'chord' is an alternative spelling that went out about 1600. Why it should have gone out of fashion is puzzling since it has persisted in other medical terms such as chorda tympani, chordoma, chorda tendinae, presumably from the same root.

I thought that the readers of the International Journal of the Spinal Cord would be interested in this unusual spelling and the origins of the word.

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