

## News, Notes, and Queries

### Medical Archives and Manuscripts News 2008

Historians have long lamented the tendency of hospitals and health authorities to neglect or destroy the historical clinical records for which they are responsible. Archivists have occasionally been tarred with the same brush, not always without justification. If for health authorities the principal impediment to dealing satisfactorily with historical clinical records has been ignorance or carelessness, for archivists the sheer potential bulk of paper has been daunting. All National Health Service records that are earmarked for preservation are ultimately the responsibility of the National Archives, but in view of the quantity of documentation that responsibility is typically devolved to local government repositories. These have their own resource challenges so that this mechanism has rather transferred than solved the problem.

There is however now a keener recognition in most quarters of the potential value of historical clinical records for research purposes, even in the continued absence of agreed mechanisms for ensuring their systematic preservation. Whether this recognition is manifest in the higher proportion of patient records transferred to repositories during 2007 than before, as shown in the annual digest of *Accessions to Repositories* published by the National Archives, is not clear. The digest for the Health and Medicine field (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/accessions/2007/07digests/medic.htm>.) shows that hospital patient records were received by four repositories during the year (Bristol Record Office: Barrow Hospital; Leicestershire Record Office: Carlton Hayes Hospital and Leicester Towers Hospital; Staffordshire Record Office: St George's County Asylum; Worcestershire Record Office: Barnsley Hall Hospital), aside from other types of patient record. Almost all the hospital records notified, whether clinical or otherwise, are of the twentieth century; exceptions include a salaries and wages receipt book, 1888–1890, for Cambridge Pauper Lunatic

Asylum (Cambridgeshire Archives), records of the British Home and Hospital for Incurables, London, from 1861 (Lambeth Archives), statistics and annual report for Rotherham Dispensary, 1806–71 (Rotherham Archives), and case registers of Powick Hospital, Worcester, 1864–1914 (Worcestershire Record Office). Other patient records from outside the hospital sector include patient case papers of the rheumatologist, Dr Anthony K Clarke, 1982–2007 (Bath Record Office), patient files relating to a slate workers silicosis study, 1970–80 (Caernarfon Record Office), and case notes by the Doncaster surgeon apothecary Robert Storrs, 1824–45 (Wellcome Library).

The Wellcome Library, whose entry unsurprisingly dwarfs all others, is the only repository to report any substantial quantity of pre-modern material. This ranges from a fifteenth-century set of calendrical tables via early modern lay medical recipe books to the nineteenth-century case notes mentioned above. Another nineteenth-century Wellcome accession, a letter book of Sir John Hall (1795–1866), sometime Head of Army Medical Services in the Crimea, complements an accession to the National Army Museum, namely correspondence received during the Crimean War by Hall. Both have presumably the same provenance (although it is known that the letter book was purchased as a single lot at Bonham's). Owners and donors of private papers are often tempted to split collections thematically or according to the creator's career and offer the constituent parts to different repositories. In this case though it looks as if the owner merely consigned the letter book to auction because of its likely commercial value. It is arguably less problematic for archival collections to be split in this way than it once was, in view of the information reach provided by the Web. There remains however no good non-commercial reason for the practice, for at the least it obliges

researchers to visit two repositories rather than one.

Other repositories reporting pre-twentieth century accessions include North Yorkshire Record Office (journal of ship's surgeon Thomas Atkinson's voyage to the Davis Straits, 1774), Suffolk Record Office (day books and other records of W G Slutter, surgeon of Wickhambrook, 1846–51), and John Rylands Library Manchester (Boer War diary of civilian surgeon John W Aldred). Tantalizing wartime items are suggested by the diaries and papers of Captain Roland F K Webster, relating to his medical service as a POW in various camps in Germany and Austria (Imperial War Museum). Other figures connected with the war are represented by curious records of their respective medical history: Winston Churchill's correspondence with his doctor Sir Crisp English, 1923–46, together with papers relating to the removal of his appendix in 1922 (Churchill College Cambridge), and the patient case file for Spike Milligan, 1953–1966, from St Luke's Hospital (London Metropolitan Archives). Finally the fate of papers of fellow tillers of the field always interests historians: Bristol University has acquired the papers of the late Dr Derek Zutshi, physician, medical historian and sometime President of the Hunterian Society; the Wellcome Library those of the much-admired historian of anaesthesia, the late Dr Richard Ellis; and the British Library interviews conducted by Dr Lara Marks for her research on the history of the contraceptive pill.

Various new on-line resources of potential interest to medical historians appeared during 2008. In January Harvard's Open Collections Program (OCP) launched its third on-line collection, *Contagion: historical views of diseases and epidemics* ([ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion](http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion)). This resource brings together a virtual collection of more than half a million digitized printed pages and some 10,000 pages of manuscript from several Harvard libraries themed round some of the most important epidemics and pandemics in history, from medieval plague to the great flu pandemic of 1918/19.

Meanwhile two celebrated collections of autograph letters were made available in digital surrogate form. The collection of letters of the Nuremberg physician and natural scientist Christoph Jakob Trew (1695–1769), at the University of Erlangen library, one of the largest such collections in Germany, was published by Harald Fischer Verlag as an electronic database with linked high-quality images of the contents. This contains about 19,000 letters and drafts from 700 authors from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, mainly in the fields of science and medicine. Trew collected not only his own correspondence (the 4800 letters written to him, mainly by other medical men) but that of others. The earliest item is dated 1524 (a letter of Zwingli), the most frequent correspondent is Johannes Crato von Crafftheim (1519–1585), physician to three Habsburg emperors, with no less than 1271 letters; almost as remarkable are the 200 letters of Carolus Clusius aka Charles de l'Ecluse (1526–1609). Although a commercial product, this database can be used free of charge by visitors to the Wellcome Library. The interface and search terms are in English, although they link to more detailed German text imported from an earlier library catalogue, giving overall a rather pantomime-horse impression.

A more thoroughly integrated product is the Waller database produced by the University of Uppsala library (<http://www.ub.uu.se/arv/waller/eindex.cfm>). Erik Waller (1875–1955) was a Swedish surgeon who built up a vast collection of some 40,000 autograph letters, mainly of scientists and medical men, aside from books and manuscript volumes. Waller's books were bequeathed to his old university on his death, but the autograph collection, which was much less well-known, housed in some seventy-nine bulging document boxes, was only purchased in 1960. Not till the turn of the century was a project established to make this material fully accessible, involving full-text imaging of every item (some 87,000 scans), with a brief résumé of contents and a full panoply of fields for searching. All the metadata is in English, notwithstanding that less than 10 per cent of the contents of the original letters are in that language (the major languages represented are French and

German). In addition the collection is being conserved to the highest standards. The Waller project sets the standard for the intellectual and

physical management of historical correspondence, but it is unlikely that many institutions will have the resources to match it.

### *Islamic Calligraphy in the Wellcome Library:* Correction

In 2006, a book based on the calligraphy in the Wellcome Library's Asian collections was published. The book, entitled *Islamic Calligraphy in the Wellcome Library* was edited by Dr Nikolaj Serikoff, the Library's Asian Collections librarian, and was the result of many years collaboration between the Library and scholars, designers and writers from all over the world.

However, in the final stages of production, an error entered the text of the preface and the Library would like to publicly acknowledge and

correct it here. With hindsight, the wording of the preface did not give an appropriate sense of Dr Hormoz Ebrahimnejad's intellectual involvement and contribution. The Library would like to make it clear that the Library and the editor are deeply indebted to Dr Ebrahimnejad, a specialist in Iranian medical history in the Qatar period, for providing translation and transliteration.

**Frances Norton,**  
Head of the Wellcome Library

### Himetop: The History of Medicine Topographical Database

While the four essential cornerstones of the history of medicine or health—the sick, the illness, the physician, the drug—leave no physical traces, the same does not apply to all other material objects. Monuments and memorials, instruments and buildings for clinical teaching, biomedical research or healthcare, can survive and leave important footprints. None the less, these are often difficult to find and recognize because they have undergone radical structural transformations (many important ancient hospitals have been altered architecturally or their original function radically changed) or have suffered from neglect or simply been forgotten. A global project devoted to localizing, monitoring and preserving such historically valuable monuments all over the world, though appealing from a scholarly point of view, would, until now, have been financially prohibitive. Today, however, that same project no longer appears so Utopian, thanks to the new possibilities of the Internet: the Web 2.0.

This has been the starting point for FAST—Istituto di Filosofia dell'Agire Scientifico e

Tecnologico of Università Campus Bio-Medico, Rome. The idea is to exploit the new tools of Web 2.0, in order to locate, describe and promote access to birthplaces, memorials, museums, and buildings related to the ancient and modern history of the health sciences. The result is Himetop—the History of Medicine Topographical Database: <http://himetop.wikidot.com/>, which is still under construction. The main technical instrument of Himetop is a free “wiki” software which allows every registered user to add new contents as well as to improve, correct or integrate the existing ones. The wiki structure can also integrate other Web 2.0 resources: appropriate pictures from photographic social networks such as Flickr, or mapping applications such as Google Maps. Himetop is mainly structured under a geographic logic, but items, if properly tagged, can be organized and searched also by type (e.g. birthplaces or museums), medical specialities, people (e.g. “Edward Jenner” or “Nobel Prize Winners”). At present, Himetop contains items related to eighteen countries and more than 100 people. Items are organized according to the following fourteen

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categories: anatomical theatres, birthplaces, churches, homes, hospitals, laboratories, libraries, medical schools, monuments, museums, operating rooms, people, pictures, and tombs.

Those especially interested in biographical studies can potentially track, through Himetop, the life of a well known person from his/her

birthplace to burial (an example is the section dedicated to the Italian neuroscientist and Nobel Prize winner Camillo Golgi). Himetop aims to become a network of people and institutions interested in medical history and wishing to enrich the project in a specific geographic area. Contact: Dr Luca Borghi [l.borghi@unicampus.it](mailto:l.borghi@unicampus.it).

### *Call for Papers*

#### Cheiron: Annual Conference on 25–28 June 2009

The International Society for the History of Behavioral and Social Sciences holds its annual conference on 25–28 June 2009 at Penn State University (University Park). Proposed papers, posters, symposia and workshops may be

submitted by 12 January 2009. Contact Sarah E Igo, Vanderbilt University, Department of History, at [sarah.igo@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:sarah.igo@vanderbilt.edu) or see the Cheiron website (<http://people.stu.ca/~cheiron/>) for more information.

#### Shryock Medal Essay Contest, 2009

Graduate students in the United States and Canada are invited to enter for this contest. The award is given for an outstanding, unpublished essay by a single author on any topic in the history of medicine. The essay (maximum 9,000 words, including endnotes) must be the result of original research or show an unusual appreciation and understanding of problems in the history of medicine. In particular, the committee will judge

essays on the quality of writing, appropriate use of sources, and ability to address themes of historical significance. For full details see the website of the American Association for the History of Medicine (<http://www.histmed.org/awards.htm>). Essays must be postmarked or submitted electronically via e-mail (the preferred method of submission) no later than 15 January 2009.

#### Bakken Travel Grants

Artists and scholars are invited to apply for travel fellowships and grants, which the Bakken Library and Museum in Minneapolis offers to encourage research in its collection of books, journals, manuscripts, prints, and instruments. The awards are to be used to help defray the expenses of travel, subsistence, and other direct costs of conducting research at the Bakken.

Visiting Research Fellowships are awarded up to a maximum of \$1,500; the minimum period of residence is two weeks, and preference is given to researchers who are interested in collaborating informally for a day or two with Bakken staff

during their research visit. Research Travel Grants are awarded up to a maximum of \$500 (domestic) and \$750 (foreign); the minimum period of residence is one week. The next application deadline for either type of research assistance is 20 February 2009. For more details and application guidelines, please contact: Elizabeth Ihrig, Librarian, The Bakken Library and Museum, 3537 Zenith Avenue So., Minneapolis, MN., 55416, USA; tel 612-926-3878 ext. 227; fax (612) 927-7265; e-mail: [Ihrig@thebakken.org](mailto:Ihrig@thebakken.org); [www.thebakken.org](http://www.thebakken.org)