

# News, Notes and Queries

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## BICENTENARY OF LAENNEC'S BIRTH CELEBRATED IN PARIS

The 200th anniversary of the birth of the great French physician, René Théophile Hyacinthe Laennec, inventor of the stethoscope (1816), was recently celebrated in Paris. Laennec was born on 17 February 1781, and died on 13 August 1826. French medicine had previously honoured him in 1919, the centenary of the publication of his immortal treatise *De l'auscultation mediate* (1819); and also in 1926, the centenary of his death. On that occasion, a special twelve-franc postage stamp, featuring a portrait of Laennec, was issued.

The bicentenary of Laennec's birth provided the occasion for an outstanding week of events, in which the French nation and medical profession paid homage to one of their greatest sons. The celebrations were held under the patronage of the President of the French Republic, M. Valéry Giscard D'Estaing, and the Committee of Honour was composed of distinguished members of every branch of French national, academic, and medical life, as well as representatives from Quimper, where Laennec was born, and Nantes, where he spent his early years. Many members of the Laennec family also participated.

The programme of events was arranged by the Société Française d'Histoire de la Médecine (President: Jean-Pierre Kerneis; Secretary-General: Michel Valentin). On 14 February, a commemorative meeting was held by the Société Française de la Tuberculose et des Maladies Respiratoires. On 17 February, the actual birthday of Laennec, the Académie Nationale de Médecine was addressed by the President of the Republic, and by distinguished French physicians and historians. A comprehensive exhibition, "Médecine anatomo-clinique", was opened. It dealt with the scientific aspects of Laennec's work, and was compiled by the library of the Académie de Médecine.

On 18 and 19 February, an international colloquium was staged at the Collège de France, where Laennec had been Regius Professor of Medicine (1822–23). Thirty papers were read, dealing with every aspect of Laennec's life and work, including one by an English physician on "Laennec's influence on British physicians in the nineteenth century". The proceedings of the colloquium will be published in a special number of *La Revue du Palais de la Découverte*.

From 19 February to 19 March a major public exhibition, "Laennec: son temps, ses amis, son oeuvre", was displayed at the Mairie Annexe du VI<sup>e</sup> arrondissement. It was opened by M. Jacques Chirac, Mayor of Paris. The exhibition, containing nearly 500 items, moved to Quimper (25 March to 23 April), and to Nantes (4 May to 5 June), returning to Paris on 15 June, where it remains at the Palais de la Découverte until September. Finally, it may be seen at the Salpêtrière Hospital (Entretiens de Bichat) (25 September to 4 October). This magnificent exhibition should not be missed by anyone interested in Laennec or in nineteenth-century French medicine.

On 20 February, the University of Paris honoured Laennec by a reception at the

Sorbonne; and Prof. Roger Rullière, Chair of History of Medicine at the Paris École de Médecine, arranged a special lecture and panel discussion.

On the evening of 20 February, a Special Mass was celebrated at Saint-Sulpice (the church where, in 1824, Laennec was married), with a moving sermon delivered by Père Riquet on the spiritual aspects of Laennec's life and work.

On 21 February, Professeur Jacques Chrétien (Chair of Respiratory Diseases, at the Laennec Hospital, Paris, and President of the Société Française de la Tuberculose et des Maladies Respiratoires), delivered a public lecture, "Après Laennec, la médecine pulmonaire d'aujourd'hui et de demain", dealing with developments in the technique of diagnosis of diseases of the chest since the time of Laennec. This lecture inaugurated a cycle of lectures on Laennec's work, to be held during the coming months.

On 22 February, a new film, "La Passion de Théophile" (directed by Yves Kovacs), was given its première on French television. An earlier film, "Docteur Laennec", directed by Maurice Cloche (1948), (with Laennec played by Pierre Blanchard), was shown at the Palais de la Découverte in March.

The French take a special pride in their great historical figures, and during the recent "Semaine Laennec", the French nation and medical profession paid tribute to Laennec, whose discoveries not only brought glory to French medicine but also influenced medical thought and practice in Britain and throughout the world.

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#### McGILL UNIVERSITY

#### DEPARTMENT OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE CHANGES ITS NAME

Since its inception in 1966, the Department of the History of Medicine has witnessed major changes in medical education, and, with them, a gradual transformation of its own mandate so that, today, it involves a number of disciplines besides History. The full-time staff of the Department now includes not only two historians, but also a sociologist and an anthropologist. Besides teaching courses through the respective departments in the Arts Faculty in all of these subjects, members of the Department have primary responsibility for several courses in the core curriculum of the medical school – Behaviour, Medical Ethics and Jurisprudence, History of Medicine, and the Social Aspects of Medicine. To help with these various teaching commitments, an associate professor of medical law, an associate professor of religion in medicine, and an associate member with degrees in both philosophy and theology are also attached to the Department. Research in the Department similarly reflects this breadth of subject matter.

In order to reflect these changes, the Board of Governors of the University, on 8 December 1980, approved the new name of *Department of Humanities and Social Studies in Medicine*. It is felt that this name most accurately reflects what the Department is all about.

History is, and will continue to be, a central interest of the Department. This is

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assured not only by the presence of the Osler Library, which is solely devoted to History, but also because of a fully-endowed Chair – The Thomas F. Cotton Chair – of the History of Medicine. Besides, the Department feels that History is of great importance to the other subjects which it helps to integrate in a way which is meaningful to physicians and medical students.

#### **INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DERMATOLOGY**

Lawrence Charles Parish, M.D., has been appointed to the editorship of the *International Journal of Dermatology*. Dr. Parish is head of the Section of Dermatology and a member of the Executive Committee of the Medical Staff at Albert Einstein Medical Center, Philadelphia. He is the author of numerous publications on dermatological topics, including *History of dermatology and syphilology of the nineteenth century*, written in conjunction with Dr. John Thorne Chrisey, to be published later in 1981.

#### **THE HISTORY OF HOSPITALS**

A one-day symposium on this theme will be held at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine on Friday, 2 October 1981. Further details are available from Dr. W. F. Bynum, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP.

#### **THE BETCHWORTH PORTRAITS MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY OF WILLIAM HARVEY**

An exhibition of twelve portraits of members of William Harvey's family, spanning three centuries, opened at the Osler Gallery, Royal College of Physicians of London, 11 St. Andrew's Place, London NW1 4LE, on 4 June 1981. These portraits were in the possession of the most senior remaining descendant of the Harvey family, Major-General Edward Henry Goulbourn, D.S.O., of Betchworth, Surrey, who died in February 1980. Through the courtesy of his heir, the Hon. James Hamilton, this unique collection of Harvey family portraits is displayed to the public for the first time.

Dr. Alex Sakula, M.D., F.R.C.P., who described the portraits in *Medical History*, 1980, **24**: 333–342, has been responsible for arranging the exhibition and for preparing the excellent printed catalogue. The exhibition will remain open until October 1981.