

## **The Wellcome Historical Medical Library : September 1962.**

### **Contributors**

Wellcome Historical Medical Library.

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# The Wellcome Historical Medical Library

SEPTEMBER 1962

WELLCOME COLL.

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Wellcome Library  
for the History  
and Understanding  
of Medicine



THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
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## SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The Wellcome Historical Medical Library was founded by the late Sir Henry Wellcome (1853-1936) and is now the property of The Wellcome Trust, which is a registered public charity. Housed on the second and third floors of the Wellcome Building, it was first opened to the public in December 1949, and its rich historical and reference collections have been freely available to students and research workers in all branches of learning and from all countries. The Library is devoted entirely to the history of medicine and the related sciences and has been built up over the past seventy years by purchase at public and private sales throughout the world, supplemented by gifts and bequests. As envisaged by its founder it was to be developed on a scale comparable to that of the great national collections. Within its own special field this aim has been accomplished, for every landmark in the history of medicine is represented by original texts.

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It is estimated that the Library contains approximately 250,000 printed books, pamphlets and journals; 10,000 manuscripts (of which half are in Oriental languages); 100,000 autograph letters of medical and scientific interest; as well as other documents such as diplomas, certificates and proclamations. The Library also contains a fine collection of medical and scientific periodicals going back to the seventeenth century. Collections of such range and size make the Wellcome Library one of the most comprehensive special libraries anywhere in the world and it has rapidly taken its place as an international centre of study and research in the history of medicine and science. This subject is now becoming of increasing importance as one which provides a bridge between science and the humanities. In studying the history of his subject the scientist must needs trace back the path of its development to the point where men shared a common knowledge, where the philosopher discussed





the problems of the physician, where the Fathers of the Church discoursed as learnedly as any modern psychiatrist on the waywardness of human personality, and where the artist lighted the way for the anatomist.

### *Printed Books*

A reflection of this historical unity of knowledge may be seen in the works listed in the catalogue of the Library's incunabula (books printed before 1500) which was published by the Oxford University Press in 1954. This collection of mediæval and classical texts (to which additions have been made since 1954) is one of the largest of its kind in any medical library and includes books from many famous private collections of earlier centuries. Many bear the signatures of their former owners, which include Thomas Linacre, who in 1518 secured from Henry VIII the charter for the foundation of the Royal College of Physicians, and Philip Melanchthon, the celebrated Renaissance humanist.

Work has been going on for many years in the preparation of a published catalogue of all the books in the Library printed before 1851. This will, when completed, be a monumental catalogue in many volumes, and the first of them, containing descriptions of 7,000 books printed before 1641, was published in 1962. This section of the Library comprises many works of the highest importance as well as many bibliographical rarities, including some unique items.

Among the great medical landmarks are all the editions of Vesalius; the first, and subsequent editions of Harvey's *De motu cordis* (1628, etc.); and one of the largest collections of the writings of Paracelsus to be found anywhere. The foundations of modern science which were laid in that period are represented by first editions of Bacon, Galileo, Kepler, and Descartes.

The many hundreds of early English books include many great rarities, including a splendid copy of the first edition of Andrew Boorde's *Breviary of Health* (1547); all three editions of the celebrated anatomical books of Thomas Geminus (1545-59);



John Caius on the Sweating Sickness (1552), the first original description of a disease in the English language; Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholy* (1586), which some Shakespearean scholars associated with *Hamlet*; the first (suppressed) issue of the London Pharmacopoeia (1618); and Stephen Bradwell's *Helps for Suddain Accidents* (1633), the earliest book on first aid.

Later volumes of the catalogue will provide a guide to the original texts marking important advances in medicine and the sciences from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, including those of Lower, Mayow, Sydenham, Willis, Boyle, Newton, Leeuwenhoek, Linnaeus, Hunter, and Jenner. Although, for the present, the published catalogue is planned to end at the year 1850, this limit was set only to make the compilation of the catalogue and its publication a practical possibility. Since Wellcome's death in 1936, the Library's collections have been greatly expanded to complete representation of the revolutionary advances made in the last century, and they range from Lister, Pasteur, Roentgen and Marie Curie to Fleming's first paper on penicillin, Waksman on streptomycin, and Sabin on poliomyelitis vaccine.

### *Manuscripts*

The collection of original manuscripts in the Wellcome Library is also of great interest. It comprises more than 5000 in Western languages, dating from the eleventh century onwards, and about the same number in Oriental languages. The great mediæval Arabic period of medicine is well represented by early manuscripts of works by Rhazes and Avicenna; among the Chinese manuscripts is a fine copy of the famous Chinese "Great Herbal"; among the Japanese is a sixteenth-century manuscript with many fascinating anatomical illustrations in full colour; the Persian collection includes fine illustrated herbals, and among the numerous Sanskrit manuscripts are early copies of the famous Indian classics of medicine, the *Charaka Samhita* and the *Susruta Samhita*.



Catalogues of all these are gradually being prepared, but the first volume of the *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts on Medicine and Science* has already appeared, and contains detailed descriptions of some 1500 works written before 1650. Notable among these is one written in Anglo-Saxon during the reign of King Canute; a splendid herbal written on vellum in the thirteenth century with numerous fine coloured illustrations; an original work in the hand of Dr. John Dee, mathematician and astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I; as well as many others in Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and even Welsh and Provençal.

### *Letters*

The very large collections of original letters from famous doctors and scientists is of remarkable range. There are over 500 letters from Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing; over 100 by Louis Pasteur, in one of which he writes about the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 in Churchillian terms; there is also one of his original laboratory notebooks, as there is of Marie Curie; letters from Hunter, Jenner and Lister are of the greatest scientific importance, but there are others by great historic figures such as George Washington and Lord Nelson.

### EXHIBITS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

On 25th September, 1962, the Library was formerly re-opened to the public by Lord Brain, D.M., F.R.C.P., after being closed for a brief period during which extensive improvements were made to the Library's premises. These greatly enlarged the facilities available to the public and provide specially designed accommodation, with controlled temperature and humidity, for the Library's great stock of manuscripts and early printed books.

### *Entrance Corridor*

The entrance to the Library is on the third floor of the Wellcome Building, and the Reference Library is approached by a corridor with display cases on both walls. Here may be seen a selection of rare books, manuscripts and documents which record the mile-



stones in the progress of the medical sciences. Exhibition cases throughout the Library are fitted with guide-lecture equipment which makes available to visitors a recorded commentary on the exhibits.

### *The Oriental Room*

Some of the Library's special collections are housed in rooms leading off the entrance corridor. The first of these is the Oriental Room, containing manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, and other Oriental languages. A reader's table is provided, and some fine manuscripts are on view in a special exhibition-case inside the room. Inset in the door of this room is a large coloured transparency reproducing a medical scene depicted on the Persian lacquer binding of a seventeenth-century manuscript in the collection.

### *The American Room*

The adjoining American Room is similarly identified by a coloured transparency in the door reproducing an early map of North and South America. In this room is housed the Library's very rich collection of early medical Americana. To the collection formed by the late Dr. Nicolas Leon and purchased by Wellcome nearly forty years ago has recently been added that of Dr. Francisco Guerra, whose learning and discrimination in this special field are widely known. Some of the very important and very rare items thus added to the Library are on show inside the room. Among them are the first book on medicine and science printed in the New World, the *Phisica Speculatio* by Veracruz (Mexico, 1557); the first edition of Peter Martyr's *Decadas* (Seville, 1511) with the earliest description of American medicines; the first clinical case-history written in America (the original MS); an original document signed by the Count of Chinchon, whose name was given by Linnaeus to cinchona, from which quinine was later isolated; the first medical and veterinary books printed in the British colonies of North America,



and many others of the greatest historical interest.

The Wellcome Trustees have made arrangements for Dr. Guerra to prepare for publication a complete catalogue of this collection, which is destined to become an important centre for American studies.

#### THE RECORDING ROOM

Another room leading off the main corridor is the Recording Room, where the voices of distinguished contemporaries who have been responsible for medical and scientific advances are recorded and preserved for posterity, giving accounts of the circumstances in which they carried out their own work and discussing contemporary problems. In this way, a library of 'living history' is being established which will be invaluable to future historians of science and medicine.

#### THE READING ROOM

*The Reference Library* is housed in the main Reading Room and is probably the most comprehensive to be found anywhere on the history of medicine. It includes everything of value which has been written on the subject, in any language, reinforced by a complete range of periodicals, congress proceedings and other serial publications, and supported by a wide selection of modern bibliographical and reference works. This part of the Library is classified by subject and is on open access to the reader, extending to both floors of the Reading Room. A Subject-Index to the contents of the Reference Library and to the articles in serial publications is to be found in the card cabinets on the upper floor. On the lower floor is housed the Author Catalogue of the main library, part of which is in course of publication. Here also is the Service and Inquiry Desk for Visitors, where general information may be obtained and where the Library's official publications may be inspected. Applications for all types of photocopy, from microfilm of text to colour-slides for lectures, should be made at this desk on the forms provided.



*Exhibits* The exhibition cases on this floor display some of the Library's treasures of more general interest, such as illuminated and illustrated manuscripts, fine bindings, etc., the contents being changed periodically. In the case on the platform at the north end is shown the celebrated Apocalypse Manuscript, written and painted in the early 15th century and containing a section on anatomy and medicine.

*Mural* The screen at the rear of this platform is composed of life-size enlargements photographed direct on formica, of the six muscle-men in the famous work of Vesalius 'on the structure of the human body', printed at Basle in 1543. The illustrations in this epoch-making book were drawn in the studio of Titian, most of them by Jan Calcar, a Flemish pupil of Titian. The scenic background to these dramatically posed figures represents the environs of Padua, where the young Vesalius was professor of anatomy. Another interesting feature of the Reading Room are the names of the 'masters of medicine' painted in gold on the illuminated frieze.

## **LIBRARY FACILITIES**

The Library is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday throughout the year, except on the usual public holidays.

The facilities of the Wellcome Library are freely available to members of the medical profession and to the general public at the discretion of the Librarian, from whom application forms for Readers' Tickets may be obtained. Casual visitors may obtain temporary day-tickets from the commissionaire in the vestibule of the Wellcome Building. The Library is for reference and study only and no book, periodical, or manuscript may be taken from the Library.

Readers visiting the Library for the first time are advised to seek the assistance of the supervisor at the Inquiry Desk. There is ample accommodation for readers on both floors, and micro-



film readers, tape-recorders, and slide-projectors are available (for use only on the premises) if required. Books and journals on open shelves may be consulted without formality. Applications for books from the stacks, to which readers are not admitted, must be made on the special call-slip provided and handed to the supervisor. These books must be returned to the supervisor when finished with and the slips reclaimed. Readers are held responsible for the books as long as the slips remain unclaimed. If they are required for further use they may be reserved for one week by leaving a reservation slip with the books when they are handed to the supervisor.

Readers are not allowed to use ink or ball-point pens for work with rare books or manuscripts and should always use special care in handling such material. In no circumstances is tracing permitted. Readers can be supplied at cost, so far as the law of copyright allows, with photographic reproductions of illustrations or text by making application on the special Photographic Service form.

All readers, and particularly specialists in the history of medicine or science who are normally resident outside the United Kingdom, who wish to use the facilities of the Wellcome Library for a definite period may apply in advance to reserve a reader's table and may at the same time submit any bibliographical enquiries concerning the object of their study, thus avoiding delay on their arrival. Specific enquiries, addressed to the Librarian, may be made in writing at any time. Brief information is supplied by telephone, but inquirers are urged to send their queries by letter if it is not possible for them to visit the Library.

Conducted visits for special parties from medical and nursing schools, students' clubs and societies and similar bodies can be made by arrangement with the Librarian.



## OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

General Editor: F. N. L. Poynter, PH.D.

### CURRENT WORK IN THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

The Wellcome Library aims to serve the needs of scholars everywhere in the world who are engaged in study, teaching and research in the history of medicine and the sciences. Not all of these are able to visit the Library and in 1954, in order to extend its bibliographical and information services as widely as possible, a quarterly publication was begun. This is *Current Work in the History of Medicine: An International Bibliography*, which arranges under subject-headings all the articles on the history of medicine which are published anywhere in the world during each quarter, as well as all new books, in all languages, as they are published. As a complete and up-to-date guide to the literature, giving complete details of some 4000 articles and 800 books each year, this index is greatly appreciated and is now distributed in over 60 countries. It is supplied free, on request only, to universities, libraries, research institutions, and individuals. The fact that it lists the addresses of the authors of all articles included has helped to link workers in many different countries who share a similar interest.

### CATALOGUE SERIES

Volumes of this series may be obtained direct from the Library, or ordered from your usual bookseller.

1. *A Catalogue of Printed Books in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library*. Volume I. Books printed before 1641. £10. 10. 0. (July 1962).
2. *A Catalogue of Western Manuscripts on Medicine and Science in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library*. Volume I. MSS written before 1650. By S. A. J. Moorat. £10. 10. 0. (October 1962).



## HISTORICAL MONOGRAPHS

No. 1. Dr. Timothie Bright, 1550-1615. A Survey of his Life with a Bibliography of his Writings, by Geoffrey Keynes, KT., M.A., M.D., D.LITT., LL.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G.

21s. od. (June 1962).

Other works are in press. Please ask for latest list.

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