

# News, Notes, and Queries

## Medical Archives and Manuscripts News, 1994

The Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) now annually sends to certain journals in a number of subjects, a digest of the major accessions to repositories which have been made during the year. Not all of these accessions are available for research, and enquiries should be addressed to the relevant repository whose address will be found in *Record repositories in Great Britain* (HMSO, 1992) and *British archives: a guide to archive resources in the UK* (Macmillan, 1989, 3rd edition due out summer 1995).

*Medical History* intends to carry an annual round up on archives and manuscript collections which incorporates some of the more important news on accessions to repositories. A digest prepared by the HMC for publication by specialist journals is less satisfactory in many ways than the annual publication *Accessions to repositories* which it supersedes. This gave scholars the opportunity to discover relevant information in their specialist subject area for themselves. Until this information is also available via Internet and Janet, a visit to the HMC's National Register of Archives to consult the thousands of lists and database indexes is an alternative for those who can get to Chancery Lane. For medical historians the Wellcome Institute's Medical Archives and Manuscripts Survey may have covered the repository in question, and the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre maintains a register of information about twentieth-century archives.

Also at the CMAC is the Hospital Records Project, run jointly with the Public Record Office. This database currently holds information on approximately 1,500 hospitals in the UK and is a useful first step to locating records of a particular hospital. There is considerable concern amongst the medical historical community about the fate of hospital records, especially now that so many hospitals are closing or becoming trusts. Both the

administrative and clinical records are at risk; in addition there are implications of confidentiality, access and care of patient records if privatisation of patient records takes place. Since not all clinical records can be kept because their bulk would overwhelm, it is essential to debate issues surrounding their selection. The Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine in Glasgow, together with the Greater Glasgow Health Board have studied the problem as it relates to GGHB hospital records, and their conclusions were published in *Selecting clinical records for long-term preservation: problems and procedures* (Glasgow, Wellcome Unit, 1993, Publication No. 5). Some of the recommendations apply only to Scotland, and a further booklet *Hospital clinical records: a guide to their retention and disposal*, currently being drafted by the Health Authority Archivists Group, aims to give more general and practical guidance on this issue: it is planned for publication in the summer of 1995.

It would be wrong however to ignore the constant move of hospital records into repositories, and this can be noted by checking the HMC's digest of major accessions to repositories for 1993. Entries of general medical interest for 1993 total c. 120 distinct collections, of which 67 are in local authority offices (usually County Record Offices or local history libraries). It is worth commenting that in many cases it is hospital rather than other records which have been deposited. These include case records 1833–1948 of the **Royal Buckinghamshire Hospital**, Aylesbury (Buckinghamshire Record Office); patient notes, registers, indexes, photographs and plans 1842–70 of the **Countess of Chester Hospital** (Chester City Record Office); administrative and patient records 1841–1975 of **Brentford Hospital** (Greater London Record Office); and records from the sixteenth to the twentieth century of the **Beamsley**

**Hospital**, Skipton (West Yorkshire Archive Service). Some universities have also accepted hospital records of note: Dundee University Library for example has records relating to the **Baldovan Institute** 1863–1950, subsequently the Starthmartine (Mental) Hospital.

Case registers and accounts of physicians, surgeons, midwives, as well as records of a dental practice (**Tait & Tait**, Tenterden, Kent, 1893–1958 at the Centre for Kentish Studies) and dispensary (**Birmingham General Dispensary**, 1764–1985 at Birmingham Central Library) also feature in local authority repositories. Lichfield Joint Record Office holds the commonplace book 1734–83 of **Richard Green**, antiquary and surgeon, and the record book of the **Essex CAT Cancer Scanner Fund** 1979–83 at Essex Record Office may make interesting reading alongside the NHS financial records of this health authority which will presumably survive in the DHSS records, eventually at the Public Record Office.

Accessions into national and specialist repositories not surprisingly include more of national significance. The Wellcome Institute has received many important additions to its Western Manuscript and Contemporary Medical Archives Departments. These include records and photographs, 1821–1990 of the **St Alban's Medical Club**, a dining club of physicians, surgeons and apothecaries, so called because they met at the St Alban's Tavern, Pall Mall. Two archives, of the **Health Visitors Association** dating from 1902, and of the **Medical Women's Federation** 1910–80, reveal the movement for women to create a professional status within the medical profession. Minutes of other professional groups such as the **Cardiothoracic Society** and the **London Society of Thoracic Surgeons** are with the Royal College of Surgeons.

For the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries historians will now be able to consult manuscripts relating to horse medicine and horsecraft in Germany and Italy, **Thomas Bateman's** commonplace book 1799–1816 (all in the WIHM), the medical diary 1654–60

of **George Bate** (1608–69), physician to Oliver Cromwell (Royal College of Physicians) and the medical lectures and midwifery case book 1791–1800 of **Thomas Jones** of Henley-in-Arden (Warwickshire County Record Office).

Military medicine is reflected in the Crimea War diary of **Asst Surgeon John James Scott** (National Army Museum), **L W Lauste's** registers of operations performed in POW camps in Germany during the Second World War (Royal College of Surgeons), **Capt MacPherson Knowles'** letters as regimental medical officer serving in Italy, Austria and Palestine 1944–47, and papers of the psychologist **Denys Wyatt Harding**, relating to research for the Ministry of Information 1941–44 (the latter two both at the Imperial War Museum).

The papers of individuals, as with other collections mentioned here, may not be available for research until they have been catalogued, and in some cases there may be closure for reasons of sensitivity. This is the case with **Sir Donald Acheson's** diaries 1984–91 when he was Chief Medical Officer of Health, now at Churchill College, Cambridge. Trinity College, Cambridge, has acquired papers of the physiologist, **Lord Adrian** (1889–1977) and Cambridge University Library letters and papers of the physician **Joseph Frank Payne** (1840–1910), who was Harveian Librarian at the Royal College of Physicians and an Oxford graduate. The Royal College of Surgeons has the casebook and commonplace book of **Henry Bird** (1811–92), a surgeon. The CMAC, WIHM has papers of **Leonard Colebrook** (1883–1967) and **Dr Cicely Williams** (1896–1973), paediatrician and nutritionist.

It is pleasing to note the variety and number of accessions for all periods. Supervisors looking for research topics for their students or feeling jaded with their own lectures could do worse than be reminded of the wealth of fresh research material waiting to be explored in so many institutions.

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