

## News, Notes, and Queries

### Nigel Allan An Appreciation

The retirement of Dr Nigel Allan from the Wellcome Library after twenty-six years as Curator of the Oriental Collections marks the end of an era.

In 2004, a very successful exhibition of Asian treasures from the Wellcome Library's collections, entitled 'Asia: Body, Mind, Spirit', was curated by Nigel Allan and a small team of assistants from other major London institutions including Asia House and London University. It was complemented by *Pearls of the Orient: Asian Treasures from the Wellcome Library*, a volume edited by Allan. These are but two in a succession of professional achievements through which he has brought the Wellcome Library's Asian collections from a position of obscurity to one of international recognition.

Allan's family roots lie in the west of Scotland. He studied for his first degree at Trinity College Dublin under the distinguished Hebraist, Professor Jacob Weingreen. He was awarded the Jack Morrison B'nai Brith in 1966, elected a Foundation Scholar of the College in 1967 (with a first class degree the following year), and awarded the Moderatorship Prize as the most outstanding undergraduate in the School of Hebrew and Semitic Languages. Following these awards, Allan moved to Glasgow where he took up an advanced study scholarship in the Faculty of Divinity at Glasgow University. This led to the award of the Hincks Memorial Prize in 1972 for his research on the Levitical priesthood in ancient Israel, the subject of his thesis for which he was awarded his doctorate in 1973. Other distinctions included the Lord Fraser of Allandar Bursary (1974) and the Diploma of Library and Information from University College London (1975). He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1981.

Extensive research work in libraries meant, for Allan, that librarianship was a natural choice of career. He worked initially in the library of Trinity College Dublin, after which he moved to the School of Oriental & African Studies in London. In 1975 he was appointed Assistant Librarian at Wye College, the agricultural faculty of London University. He describes his years at Wye as years sent out to grass, but they gave him useful experience in a science library that stood him in good stead for his next appointment. In 1978 Allan took up the post of Curator of the Oriental Collections at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, on the retirement of Marianne Winder.

Over the next twenty-six years, under Allan's care the Wellcome Library's Oriental Collections became recognized worldwide as one of the major collections in the West. A series of learned publications, including catalogues, unequalled by any other library during the period, resulted from Allan's encouragement of the eminent scholars who prepared them. He enthusiastically embraced new technologies and the challenge of representing Oriental scripts in electronic formats, although he stoutly maintained the primacy for scholarship of the hard-copy catalogue.

A keen advocate of exhibitions, Allan curated two major exhibitions in the Wellcome Institute, 'Islamic Science: Crossroad of Cultures' in 1986 and 'Ever the Twain Shall Meet' in 1993. The latter charted the exchange of scientific knowledge between West and East, and had such impact that it was subsequently mounted again at London's Science Museum. As noted above, he masterminded the 'Asia: Body, Mind, Spirit' exhibition, persuading the Wellcome Trust to fund it, the School of Oriental & African Studies to provide its Brunei Gallery

exhibition space, and Asia House to present and promote the exhibition.

Allan demonstrated his abilities as a scholar in his many publications. Among the most important of these were his 'Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts in the Wellcome Institute, London' and his 'Catalogue of Hebrew Printed Books (1491–1900) in the Wellcome Institute, London', both published in the *Journal of Semitic Languages* in 1981 and 1994 respectively. His research on the extremely rare 1505 Hebrew Pentateuch, which he rescued from a box of rubbish, appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1991. At the suggestion of the present writers, Allan organized and edited the volume *Pearls of the Orient: Asian Treasures from the Wellcome Library* (2003), which brings together the work of scholars from Germany, Russia, South-East Asia and the UK, including a substantial chapter by Allan himself. A major showcase for the Wellcome Library's Asian holdings, it demonstrates how the study of its manuscript treasures can lead to advances in knowledge.

During his career, Allan played an active role in a number of professional bodies. From 1985 to 1988 he was honorary secretary of the South Asia Library Group, and its chairman 1988–91. For many years he served on the committee of the National Council for Orientalist Library Resources serving as its chairman from 1995 to 1997. It was with some reluctance he undertook the honorary secretaryship of the Friends of the Wellcome Institute (later the Friends of the Wellcome Library and Centre). Allan soon found himself steering the Friends through difficult waters with skill and success. He built up a great rapport with many of the members and contributed much to the organization, and was greatly saddened when it was finally disbanded.

Impatient with corporate policies, Allan was a strong believer in teamwork, the building of consensus through direct communication, and

the importance of involving everyone in an enterprise whatever their role. Always eager to promote younger colleagues, it was a source of great pleasure and pride that so many who had contributed to the work of the Wellcome Library's Oriental Department should subsequently be successful in their own careers, and attain senior positions in universities and libraries in Britain, Continental Europe, America and Australia.

Though often working long hours at the Library, Allan firmly believed in the importance of life outside the workplace. Friends and colleagues will recall the annual garden parties given in the beautiful home he shared with his mother near Canterbury, hospitality that continued to be generously dispensed after her death and his move to Beckenham. In earlier days he took a keen interest in his mother's kennels and himself successfully bred and exhibited his King Charles spaniels. Allan has always been an active member of the Church of England. He served on the East Bridge Deanery Synod of the Canterbury Diocese, convening its Social Responsibility Committee where he addressed such difficult problems as the remarriage of divorced persons and the Gloucester Report on obscenity and pornography. His many interests include music, gardening and the outdoor life, all of which he will have time to enjoy when he returns to his beloved Scotland later this year. Allan was, perhaps above all, loyal to his friends. He never allowed the memory of his predecessor and friend, the late Marianne Winder, to pass out of the mind of the Wellcome Library. Nor will his memory fade from the institution to which he dedicated a quarter of a century of his best work. We, and all his friends, join in wishing him many years of continued happiness and fulfilment.

**Dominik Wujastyk  
and Nikolaj Serikoff**

*Call for papers*

Twenty-Seventh Annual Samuel J Zakon Award in the  
History of Dermatology

The Samuel J Zakon Award in the History of Dermatology is open to historians and dermatologists in practice or training. Manuscripts should be submitted to Mark C Valentine, MD, Chairman, Samuel J

Zakon Award Committee, 3327 Colby Avenue, Everett, WA 98201, USA, by 1 November 2005. Essays may relate to any aspect of the history of dermatology not heretofore published.

Society for the Social History of Medicine  
2005 Roy Porter Student Essay Prize Competition

The Society for the Social History of Medicine (SSHM) invites submissions to its 2005 Roy Porter Student Essay Prize Competition. This prize will be awarded to the best original, unpublished essay in the social history of medicine submitted to the competition as judged by the SSHM's assessment panel. It is named in honour of the late Professor Roy Porter, a great teacher and a generous scholar.

The competition is open to undergraduate and postgraduate students in full- or part-time education. The winner will be awarded £500.00,

and his or her entry may also be published in the journal, *Social History of Medicine*. The deadline for entries is: 31 December 2005. Further details and entry forms can be down-loaded from the SSHM's website: <http://www.sshm.org>

Alternatively, please contact: David Cantor, Division of Cancer Prevention, National Cancer Institute, Executive Plaza North, Suite 2025, 6130 Executive Boulevard, Bethesda MD 20892-7309, USA; Email: [competition@sshm.org](mailto:competition@sshm.org)