

A new museum

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A temple where Time seems suspended, the museum procures for today's man those momentary cultural epiphanies in which, since Gide, he has delighted.

The museum age, G. Bazin.¹

Although it is now four years since Dr Annear, medical superintendent of Morgannwg Hospital, Bridgend, founded a museum in his own institution, the idea of such a project had been fermenting in his mind long before that time. A strong believer in combined operations, he very kindly offered me the honorary curatorship which I was proud to accept. From the outset the Royal College of General Practitioners has closely identified itself with the development of the new museum and helped in every way to make the plan viable. The objective was to collect, preserve and display everything of historic and cultural interest concerned with medicine, surgery, psychiatry, nursing, pharmacy and hospital management. To this end all the hospital staff have played their part and thrown themselves with characteristic enthusiasm into the general scheme of things. Gifts and loans have arrived from a variety of sources both within and outside the hospital.

At the outset we knew that we could not possibly attain the high standards of museology and museosophy set by Wellcome,² Daukes,³ Duggan and other specialists⁴ in this field. Nevertheless, we have tried to follow their shining example with the limited means at our disposal. We have no doubts or illusions as to the functions of the small museum especially with regard to the part it has to play in historical, cultural, and educational matters. In his apologia Trett⁵ states that most of the small museums fulfil a mixture of roles and provide the basis for the whole museum system. The first great museums in this country and elsewhere received their nourishment from the smaller collections. He asserts that even the weaknesses of lesser enterprises can be a source of strength.

Resting on one of the display tables the visitor will observe a white porcelain phrenologist's head with the inscription "L. N. Fowler" on the front of the plinth. F. J. Gall (1758-1826),⁶ the founder of phrenology and a student of Van Swieten in Vienna, maintained it was possible to ascertain the mental and moral peculiarities of any person by the inspection or palpation of the head. Phrenology, originally a subject of serious study, was unfortunately exploited by quacks and fell into disrepute. Even so, it is important to remember that the early phrenologists were the first to draw attention to the localization of cerebral function.

The exhibits, some rare and irreplaceable, include several nineteenth-century medical, surgical, and obstetrical instruments. Among the accessions are old amputation sets, trephining instruments, dental forceps, a dental chair, Potain's aspirator, Smith's rectal clamp, a vulsellum with catch, an Auvard's vaginal speculum, a brass scarificator, an early sphygomanometer, a Morton's ophthalmoscope, a wooden foetal stethoscope (14 inches long!), a porcelain male urinal stamped with the Coat of Arms of S. Thomas's, a Gowlands' hinged rectal speculum, a Mathieu's tonsillar guillotine, a tin ear trumpet, a Brunton's auriscope, a simple form of Politzer bag, a Belloc's nasal cannula, a reservoir enema apparatus, a group of wooden splints, and a Luer's pile forceps. Electrical instruments are represented by a vitalator, an induction coil for producing a faradic current, and an evolutionary series of ECT apparatuses. In the collection are two triptych-type mahogany medicine chests which belonged to Dr Annear's grandfather, Dr John Conan. Numerous anatomical and neurological prints, miscellaneous photographs, illustrations by famous and less well-known artists, nurses' qualifying certificates and hospital plans of yesteryear adorn the walls of the museum so as to give the curious plenty of opportunity for instruction and entertainment. What we lack in originals is supplemented by facsimiles and reproductions of the best quality. We attempt to satisfy all tastes.

On show are examples of rough canvas clothing worn by patients in less-enlightened times; also black laceless footwear and gloves provided with ingenious brass locks and keys to prevent their unnecessary removal by disturbed patients. Interesting personalia belonging to former nursing staff include silver and bronze badges presented to them by the Medico-psychological Association of Great Britain and Ireland. The museum also possesses a large silver sports shield—assay mark, Sheffield 1898—for competitive soccer. One of the many Glamorgan County Asylum case-books in our keeping dates back to 1864 and affords a valuable insight into the state of psychiatry at that period. A small collection of clocks, one of them presented by the male attendants to the hospital reading-room in 1887, symbolizes the two notions of time—time which passes and a time which endures. “Man consoles himself for what he is by what he was.”

It is hoped that this short account, though far from exhaustive, will give the reader some measure of the diversity of the material under our care at Bridgend. A novel feature of the museum is that, under supervision, it is visited by all the nursing staff during their training. We believe that museum demonstrations on various aspects of medicine by senior medical and nursing staff act as a sound, ancillary teaching medium and form an important part of a student's hospital curriculum. Despite the fact that we are only provided with five display cases many of the objects lie uncovered on open shelves and tables so that visitors can handle and examine them freely. While every care is taken to protect and preserve items, the great pleasure gained by touching exhibits, as every progressive museum custodian⁷ knows, must not be denied to *bona-fide* museum users. In an attempt to be outward-looking the museum has, from time to time, accepted invitations from local historical societies and other interested bodies to arrange medico-historical displays at their meetings.

The new museum situated on the third floor of the administrative block at Glanrhyd, is part of the Morgannwg Hospital complex. The main display room (30 ft. by 15 ft.), and a smaller gallery (18 ft. by 11 ft.), are reached by a corridor (50 ft. long) which is also used for mural exhibitions.

The whole building has been tastefully redecorated recently so as to impart a pleasing and soothing effect enhanced by good neon-lighting. The museum is the first and only one of its kind in the Principality. It should be encouraging to medical historians in general and museologists in particular to note that the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff has decided to establish a small museum⁸ for the preservation and display of byegones relating to Welsh medical history. Devotees to Cymric medical lore and history have always yearned for a sub-department in the medical school concerning itself exclusively with the study of this subject as a discipline in its own right. The establishment of a medical museum in our capital city may well be the starting point for such a venture. Here is a glorious opportunity which ought not to be missed. We await developments with expectancy. *Musarum templa colamus.*

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