

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WELLCOME INSTITUTE LIBRARY

THE ARCHIVE OF THE PHYSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY IN THE CONTEMPORARY MEDICAL ARCHIVES CENTRE

by

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The Physiological Society was founded in 1876 in response to the report of a Royal Commission on the use of animals in research, which was expected to lead to legislation. John Bourdon Sanderson invited nineteen physiologists to his house “for the purpose of considering whether any, or what steps ought to be taken with reference to the Recommendations of Lord Cardwell’s Commission”.¹ At the meeting Michael Foster proposed “that an association be formed under the name of ‘The Physiological Society’ for promoting the advancement of physiology and the intercourse of physiologists”.² Early meetings were informal affairs, taking place over dinner, but in December 1880 the modern pattern of events was established by holding a separate afternoon session for the demonstration of experiments and the discussion of scientific work, followed by dinner in the evening. Nowadays the scientific meetings are the focus of the Society’s activities, normally taking place over two or three days.

For over seventy-five years the papers of the Physiological Society had no permanent home, but were passed from each officer to his successor, accumulating as they did so. It was not until March 1954 that Professor William Paton suggested that an “archival depot” should be established at University College London. He had noticed during his term of office that he had not consulted a great number of the files that were passed on to him by his predecessor, David Whitteridge, and believed that these non-current files should form the kernel of the depot. Paton felt that they would need some weeding because there were “interesting letters buried in the dross” and was far-sighted enough to realize that the archive “may involve later expenditure on keeping our records respectable”.³ Initial expenditure amounted to £13—for a metal filing cabinet at UCL.

The core papers remained at UCL, and working papers continued to pass between officers and their successors in a fairly haphazard fashion with no system for depositing material at UCL, until 1972, when R. H. Adrian suggested to the Committee that the archive

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¹ Burdon Sanderson to Edward Schäfer, 28 March 1876, CMAC: SA/PHY/C.1/1.

² CMAC: SA/PHY/C.1/1.

³ W. D. Paton to H. P. Gilding, March 1954, CMAC: SA/PHY/P.1/1.

should be deposited at Churchill College Archive Centre in Cambridge. After negotiation, the Committee agreed to this in November 1973, and the material was then catalogued by a professional archivist. It filled 28 archive boxes, and consisted of minute books 1876–1966, membership nomination material 1882–1956, visitors' books 1902–1946 and a small amount of Secretaries' correspondence 1935–1956, mainly concerning members. In July 1977 the Committee appointed Donald Steven as the Honorary Archivist, and he worked with a part-time assistant to oversee the archive, and to take care of further accessions which continued to come in from officers, both serving and retired, and sub-committee members. In 1990 negotiations were initiated by the Honorary Treasurer, Julian Jack, and by the new Honorary Archivist, Tilli Tansey, which led to the transfer of the archive to the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre (CMAC) at the Wellcome Institute, in 1991, where it was intended that the papers would be fully catalogued and organized to allow for continuing accrual.

On arrival at the CMAC the archive consisted of 271 boxes of material, including papers which were not strictly part of it, i.e. not generated by the Society in the course of its activities, but placed there by members or friends who believed this to be the most suitable home. Seventeen boxes of such material were papers of Professor E. B. Verney, placed in the Physiological Society archive in 1988 by Dr R. H. S. Carpenter of the Cambridge Physiological Laboratory, and formerly housed in the Laboratory's library. With the agreement of Dr Carpenter and the Society, the Verney papers have now been catalogued as a separate personal collection (CMAC: PP/EBV), amalgamating with a small group of Verney papers already held in the CMAC, which were previously listed as a general collection (CMAC: GC/72). Various other memoirs and papers were transferred from the Society's archive and catalogued as a general collection "Physiological Society: additional deposited papers" (CMAC: GC/151).

The papers of the Society were in a state of considerable disarray on arrival at the CMAC. Although the initial deposit at Churchill College had been catalogued by a professional archivist, further accruals were not amalgamated with this, but listed separately as "Sections II and III" and the catalogued group was referred to as "Section I". Sections II and III had no real logic of arrangement, and, although some grouping of similar files did occur, generally material was just listed in order of accession. There was much duplication, since papers were often received from several officers dealing with the same issue, or from several members of the same sub-committee. Duplicate material was especially pronounced in the case of the Education and Information Sub-Committee and of the animal legislation sub-committees where photocopies of correspondence and memoranda abounded. Duplicates could be removed from the archive only after the central set of papers was identified and collated. The archive also contained a great deal of mundane paperwork of no historical value, but no attempt had been made to weed it on its arrival at Churchill College. This material, mostly officers' routine correspondence on such matters as the arrangement of meetings, has now been weeded. Once duplicates and mundane material was removed, and the archive was reboxed, the volume was considerably reduced, by approximately one third.

In cataloguing the papers it was decided to abandon all previous arrangements and dispense with the division into three "Sections". The new catalogue treats the archive as one entity, with an order reflecting the activities of the officers and the Society, and allows

for the continuing accrual of material. The papers are now arranged by function (e.g. Committee business, membership, publication), and each officer's, or sub-committee's, papers form a sub-group under each heading. An index and appendices aid cross-referencing, which is necessary because such papers as accounts and annual reports are to be found bound into different types of minute books at different times.

A large volume of correspondence and papers had survived from after 1945, although the pattern was patchy, reflecting the fact that the Society made use of honorary officers, and until 1991 had no permanent central offices or staff. Each officer served for a few years and created paperwork in a different way from his predecessors and successor, and the material was treated in differing ways on the retirement of the officer. Some passed it all over to their successors, others kept some in their offices, where it might eventually find its way to the archive, and others destroyed large quantities. In an effort to ensure that accession takes place more systematically, a records management schedule was drawn up once the cataloguing of the archive was complete. This survey took place between September and December 1993, and entailed visiting all the serving officers to view their files and discuss the creation of further records. The core records have been identified for final accession to the archive on the retirement of the officer or once they become non-current. This systematic method of accession will avoid duplication, while ensuring that all important documents are preserved.

The archive of the Physiological Society contains material from its foundation to the present day illustrating the continued and ever increasing activities and membership of the Society. Papers from before the end of the Second World War are limited in scope—confined to core documents such as the minute books, membership papers and the visitors' books, which give names of non-members attending the meetings. A little pre-1945 correspondence is extant, including that of Michael Foster with Henry Bowditch proposing the foundation of the *Journal of Physiology* in 1877. The pre-Second World War minute books have some letters bound in with them and these include correspondence about the foundation of the Society and greetings from important members, other scientific bodies, or government departments and officials the Society had contact with over specific issues, such as the use of animals in research or the place of physiology on the medical syllabus. The earlier minutes (CMAC: SA/PHY/C.1/1) for the Society's scientific meetings list the members attending and give some description of demonstrations and communications presented, but the names and details were dropped from the minutes as meetings grew in size and once the *Proceedings* were printed in the *Journal of Physiology* from December 1883. The particulars of scientific meetings given in the minute books vary greatly, depending on the whims of the serving Secretary, but in general they light-heartedly record events, giving examples of jokes delivered at after-dinner speeches or during the scientific session and of gifts presented to members on special occasions. In recent times the menu has been bound with the minutes, showing the importance of the dinner and the Society's recognition of its origins as a dining club; indeed the menu of the first dinner, at the Criterion Restaurant in Piccadilly in March 1876, is bound with the first minute book. This mammoth feast was repeated by the Committee in 1976 as part of the Centenary celebrations (see Figure 1).

The core records of the Society are the Committee papers (CMAC: SA/PHY/B.1–5) and those connected with the scientific meetings (CMAC: SA/PHY/C.1–4). In the early days

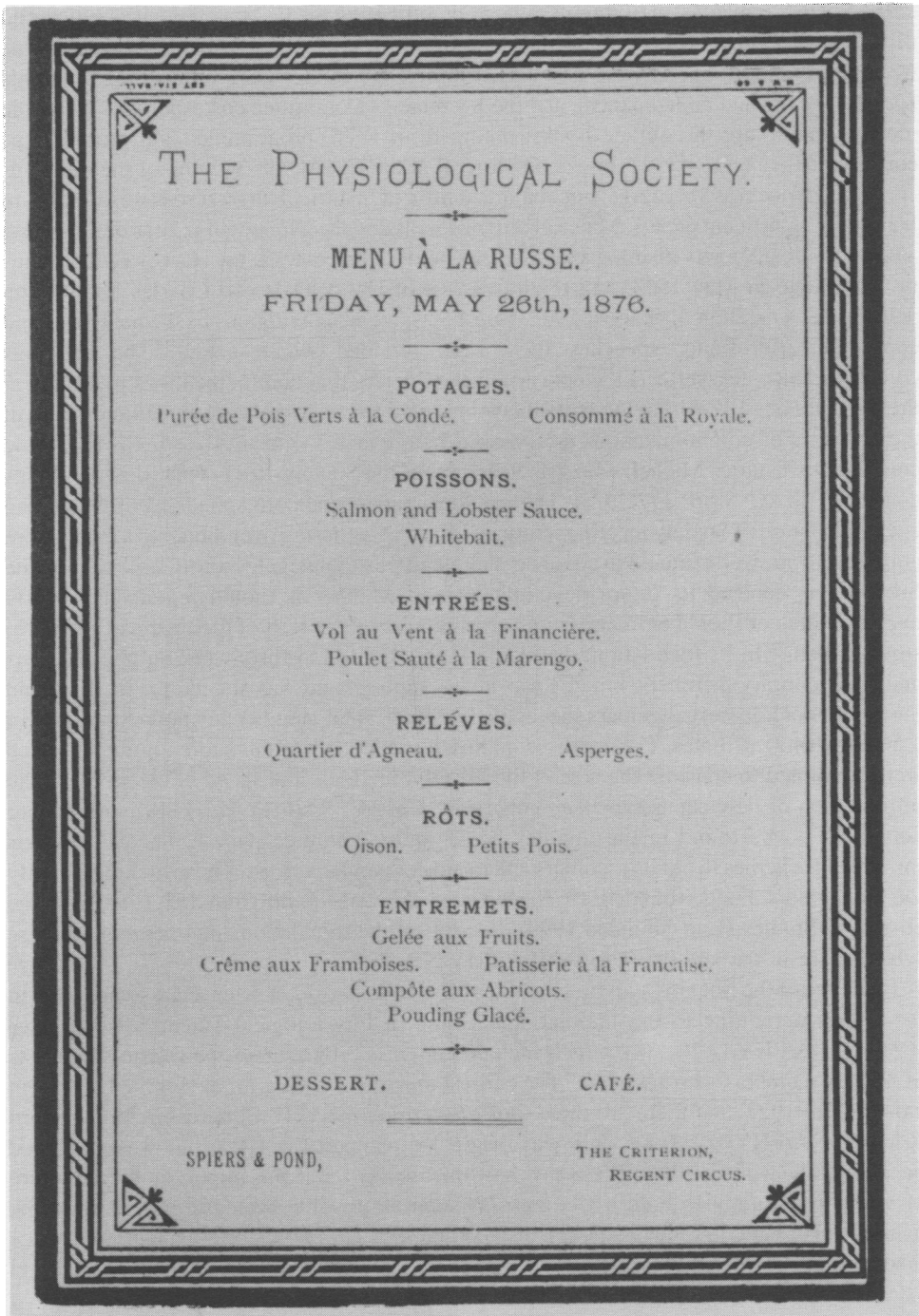


Figure 1: Menu for the first dinner of the Society in 1876, repeated by the Committee in 1976 as part of the Society's centenary celebrations (CMAC: SA/PHY/C.1/1).

of the Society only one set of minutes was kept, reflecting the fact that there was little or no distinction between the meetings of the Committee and those of the wider Society. Separate Committee minute books were not started until 1899. Other Committee papers include agenda, reports and tabled papers, and the Secretary's Committee correspondence. For the meetings there are the minute books, dating from 1876, programmes and proceedings, correspondence and visitors' books. On arrival at the CMAC the volume of the meetings correspondence was very large, but contained little of historical interest so it was weeded to leave only significant papers. Material retained includes acceptances of invitations to attend a Physiological Society meeting and luncheon held for delegates at the Harvey Celebrations in Cambridge in May 1928, and reminiscences of Henry Dale and Charles Sherrington delivered at a meeting in October 1943. Guest lists, menus, invitations to special guests and copies of after-dinner speeches have been retained where extant. The meetings correspondence also reflects the concern of the Society that communications presented at them should be fully within the British law in regard to experiments using animals, and all the abstracts of communications are perused beforehand to ensure that this is so. A file compiled by Charles Michel, who was Secretary of the Society 1980–1981, deals with this concern (CMAC: SA/PHY/C.3/7). The meetings papers and correspondence illustrate the changing nature of Society meetings from an informal gathering over dinner to a much more complex affair, well planned in advance with hundreds of delegates. From time to time the Society has debated its future development and whether it should remain as a fairly exclusive club or should embrace young physiologists at the start of their careers and act to support them. On its foundation, membership was limited to forty working physiologists and five honorary members, but this was never imposed and was abandoned in 1884, and the number of honorary members successively raised. Total membership now stands at over 1,500, with 400 affiliates. The archive contains the papers of various sub-committees which were appointed to consider the size of the Society, methods and speed of election and the introduction of new categories of membership (CMAC: SA/PHY/E.1/1–19), and further details are to be found in the minutes books and Committee papers. The Society has introduced schemes to aid its members and to aid colleagues abroad. These include not only the Benevolent Fund (founded 1976), but also the Dale Fund (founded 1968) and the Historical Studies Fund (founded 1990). Records of the foundation and operation of these schemes are in the archive (CMAC: SA/PHY/N.1–8).

Evidence of the Society's involvement with the wider world of science are to be found in the papers pertaining to the International Union of Physiological Sciences Congresses (CMAC: SA/PHY/Q.2/1–30), which include congress programmes, newsletters and lists of Society members who attended.⁴ The earliest material is a programme for the Edinburgh Congress in 1923, and there are three files concerning the 1947 Congress held in Oxford (CMAC: SA/PHY/Q.2/2–4). This was originally planned for 1941, but was cancelled because of the war, and these files show how the Society felt it was important for the future of world physiology to hold a Congress as soon as possible after the war, despite the misgivings of E. G. T. Liddell who felt the shortage of accommodation and laboratory space made conditions in Oxford too difficult (CMAC: SA/PHY/Q.2/2). Correspondence and

⁴ See also International Physiological Congress papers, collected by K. J. Franklin, relating mainly to the Congresses 1889–1939 (CMAC: GC/71).

notes of meetings record the lengthy debate leading to the decision not to invite German delegates, despite the leading role of German physiology. The final decision was reached in deference to the views of physiologists from countries occupied by the Germans during the war.

The Society has always been closely involved with other British learned bodies, with delegates sitting on their councils or committees and reporting back to the Society's Annual General Meetings. Correspondence details major joint initiatives or periods of co-operation (CMAC: SA/PHY/Q.1/1–19), and includes the minutes and accounts of the *International Abstracts of Biological Sciences*, 1939–1953, and correspondence with the Research Defence Society 1943–1976. Further evidence of co-operation with the R.D.S. can be found in the section of the archive dealing with animal legislation (CMAC: SA/PHY/G.1–3), consisting of material, 1941–1990, created mainly in response to governmental enquiries and the passage of bills, the Society being anxious to ensure that that new legislation should not unduly hinder the research of its members or the progress of physiology. Activity in this area surged in the first half of the 1980s with the passage of three British bills and a draft resolution in the European Parliament, and the Society set up a sub-committee to consider the issues and how to react. Earlier animal legislation material consists of correspondence with the Ministry of Food and the Medical Research Committee concerning the provision of food for research animals during the war, and includes notes of a meeting with officials from the Ministry of Food in 1942 detailing various supply problems.⁵

The other major area of concern for the Society has been government funding for the teaching of physiology and its role in medical and other syllabi (CMAC: SA/PHY/H.1–2). Records date from 1941 when the Society presented a report to the Inter-departmental Committee of Medical Schools, and later records are of the Education and Information Sub-Committee which met on an irregular basis from December 1968, and liaised with central government over the funding and teaching of physiology, as well as organizing courses for teachers, careers booklets and educational films.

Other sections of the archive illustrate the development of the *Journal of Physiology*, the *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Physiology* (now *Experimental Physiology*), and the monographs published by the Society after 1952 (CMAC: SA/PHY/F.1–6). Papers concerning the *Journal of Physiology* cover its foundation in 1878, purchase by the Society in 1926 and its subsequent management by the Editorial Board, and include the minute books of Board meetings, registers of submitted papers and annual accounts.⁶

In August 1993 the Physiological Society photograph collection was moved to the CMAC. Like the rest of the archive it had a chequered history, moving from place to place, but it was never kept with the papers. The collection was started by Dr Harold Lewis, who from 1955 was official photographer for the Society, and he kept it at his laboratory at the National Institute for Medical Research in Mill Hill. At the time of Lewis's death in 1970 it largely consisted of photographs of members taken by Lewis himself, as well as a few photographs which members had given to the Society. The role of keeper of the photograph

⁵ See also the archive of the Research Defence Society CMAC: SA/RDS.

⁶ The papers of Sharpey-Schafer (CMAC: PP/ESS/E.6–7) include material on the management of the *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Physiology*, 1917–1934. The National Library of Scotland holds papers on its foundation and management to 1949. The papers of A. V. Hill at Churchill College Archives Centre include material relating to the management of the *Journal of Physiology* 1926–1949 (AVHL II Section 6).

collection passed in 1973 to F. S. Nashat at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, and in 1982 to Dr Martin Rosenberg at St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College. The photographs moved with Rosenberg to Queen Mary and Westfield College in 1992. He continued to take photographs of members and events, and reprinted some of his own and Lewis's portrait shots in large format to mount for display at meetings. In addition to the photographs taken by the "official" photographers, a large number were sent by members and researchers to Lewis, and Rosenberg, and to Donald Steven (the Honorary Archivist). Many of these are copies of older photographs, and often their provenance was not recorded fully, so is now unknown. The collection was indexed whilst at St Bartholomew's, but was arranged largely by format (e.g. transparencies, black and white prints, colour prints) so that groups of photographs with the same provenance or of the same image were often split up. In re-cataloguing, an attempt was made to recreate such groups, and to unite existing copies of the same image, and the list has been indexed to aid reference.

The photograph collection is a rich resource for portraits of physiologists and of gatherings, mostly after the 1950s, but some from as early as the beginning of the century. Subjects include Sir Henry Dale in 1955, his ninetieth birthday dinner in 1965, and pictures of people leaving his memorial service at Westminster Abbey in 1965; E. H. Starling in 1920; Bernard Katz in 1955 and 1984; and groups of photographs given by A. V. Hill and Michael de Burgh Daly. Hill's photographs include pictures of Otto Meyerhof and Joseph Barcroft, and one of Hill, Seward and Davies visiting Freud in June 1938 on his election as a foreign member of the Royal Society. There are two photographs of Pavlov in Hill's collection: at the International Physiology Congress in Leningrad in 1935 and with a baseball team in 1934. Another five photographs of Pavlov shows him in his laboratory with colleagues (see Plate 2), and with one of his eponymous dogs and an experimental chamber. These five photographs are annotated extensively on the reverse. Unfortunately the date and provenance are not identified, but it is thought they are from around 1935. The collection holds photographs of all members elected after 1985, which they submitted with their candidate form, but many of the prints are of poor quality because they were taken in photo booths. A group of 75 photographs taken by G. N. Myers depicts members of the Society at meetings in Cambridge in 1935–1937, and enjoying themselves at a garden party in the Downing Fellows' garden. Visiting luminaries on these occasions include Professor Liljestrand from Sweden and the German Professors Fraenkel and Huebner.

The Physiological Society has played a vital role in the development of British physiology, and its members have always identified with it very closely, perhaps because, until 1991, there was no central office or staff, but use was made of voluntary officers. Many Nobel Prize winners have been amongst the Society's members and officers, including Sherrington, Dale and Hill, and although the growth and increasing specialization of physiology precludes such a close identification between members and Society today, it seeks to promote the cause of British physiology through the sponsorship of young scientists, and through lecture series. The Society has always served to protect the interests of its members, especially in the ethically and scientifically justified use of animals for research, and government funding for education and research. It has also been important in a wider context—the Biochemical Society was founded in 1911, modelled on the Physiological Society, and pharmacologists used the occasion of a Physiological Society meeting to discuss the formation of the British Pharmacological Society in July 1931. In



Plate 1: Physiological Society at the Franz Hals Museum, Haarlem during its first meeting abroad, 5 April 1925 (CMAC: SA/PHY/Z.4/1/151).



Plate 2: "Dr. Pavlov and some of his workers. It is so cold, all must wear overcoats. I am seated between Dr. Pavlov and his oldest pupil, Prof Savitch." [Note in unknown hand on the reverse of photograph.] (CMAC: SA/PHY/Z.4/8/1).



Plate 3: R. H. T. Edwards and S. J. G. Semple demonstrating "A method for inducing leg exercise electrically in man", at a Physiological Society meeting, Middlesex Hospital Medical School, 1981 (CMAC: SA/PHY/Z.3/2/94 [Copyright Dr M. E. Rosenberg]).

The archive of the Physiological Society

1926 the Physiological Society received greetings on its fiftieth anniversary from physiologists and societies all over the world expressing their admiration for the eminence of British physiology and the Society. The American Physiological Society was founded in 1887 by a pupil of Michael Foster, one of the original members of the British Society eleven years earlier, and it was the British Society that initiated the first International Physiological Congress in 1889, and encouraged post-war recovery by hosting the 1947 Congress in Oxford. A recent Physiological Society initiative awards grants to physiologists from the former Soviet Union.

The Physiological Society has published two histories: *History of the Physiological Society during its first fifty years 1876–1926* by Sir Edward Sharpey-Schafer (Cambridge University Press, 1927),⁷ and 'A short history of the Physiological Society 1926–1976', by W. F. Bynum, *Journal of Physiology* (1976, 263). Both authors consulted the archive in their research, but apart from these histories, and work by the present Honorary Archivist, Dr Tilli Tansey, it has not been extensively exploited. The archive complements others already held by the CMAC, including the Research Defence Society (CMAC: SA/RDS) dating from its foundation in 1908, papers relating to the International Physiological Congresses 1889–1939 (CMAC: GC/71), and papers of eminent physiologists including Sir Henry Dale (CMAC: PP/HHD), Professor Ivan de Burgh Daly (CMAC: PP/DBD), Sir Charles Lovatt Evans (CMAC: PP/CLE), Sir Edward Mellanby (CMAC: PP/MEL) and Sir Edward Sharpey-Schafer (CMAC: PP/ESS). Further details of other relevant collections can be found in the leaflet *Sources in the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, No. 9; Physiology*, which is available in the Library.

A full catalogue of the archive and photograph collection is now available, and material over thirty years old is open to bona fide scholars who have signed a reader's undertaking form, by prior appointment with the Archivist of the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre at the Wellcome Institute. Access to unpublished material less than thirty years old is subject to approval by an officer of the Society.

⁷ Sharpey-Schafer's *History* has recently been re-printed by the Society.