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ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WELLCOME INSTITUTE LIBRARY

THE ARCHIVE OF THE LISTER INSTITUTE OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

by

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The Lister Institute was founded in 1891, as the British Institute of Preventive Medicine. For more than twenty years, arguably even longer, it was the most important medical research institution in the United Kingdom, ranking internationally with the Institut Pasteur in Paris, the Koch Institute in Germany, and the Rockefeller Institute in the United States. Comparable facilities were not made available in this country until 1914, when the National Institute of Medical Research was established as a government body. In 1966, the Lister Institute celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary, and a history was published in 1971.[1] This work shows the continued and influential contribution of the Lister Institute in diverse fields of medical science, including bacteriology, immunology, biochemistry, biophysics, entomology, protozoology, nutrition, epidemiology, and medical statistics. Besides its important research work and its services in the implementation of public health measures (it was a pioneer in the development and production of many vaccines, sera, and anti-toxins), the Lister Institute was extremely influential in matters of public policy through the appointment of senior members of staff to government committees and commissions on diverse aspects of medicine (human and animal) and health questions.

Attention was drawn to the historical material still preserved by the Lister Institute, and held at their present location in Stanmore, as the result of the first meeting of a Committee for the Preservation of British Archives in the History of Biochemistry, held in December 1983 at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine under the Chairmanship of Dr Robert Olby of Leeds University. Thanks to the post-doctoral fellowship awarded to Dr Morgan for a project on the history structure/function relationships in biochemistry, it was possible to examine these archives *in situ*. With the consent of the Governing Body of the Lister Institute this

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[1] Harriette Chick, Margaret Hume, and Marjorie MacFarlane, *War on disease: a history of the Lister Institute*, London, Deutsch, 1971.

MERCY SPEAKS.

"Don't give money to THAT work, my lord!"

[Lord Iveagh is giving £250,000 to endow a vivisection institute.]

Figure 1. Cartoon in the *Morning Leader,* 24 December 1898; from the scrapbook of press-cuttings on the Vivisection Question, 1889–1899 (CMAC: SA/LIS/F.8).

Figure 2. Muriel Robertson examining leeches at the goldfish pond, Queensbury Lodge, Elstree, in her study of the life-cycle of the trypanosome, *c.* 1910 (CMAC: SA/LIS/R).

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Figure 3. **One of the serum department laboratories at Elstree (CMAC: SA/LIS/R).**

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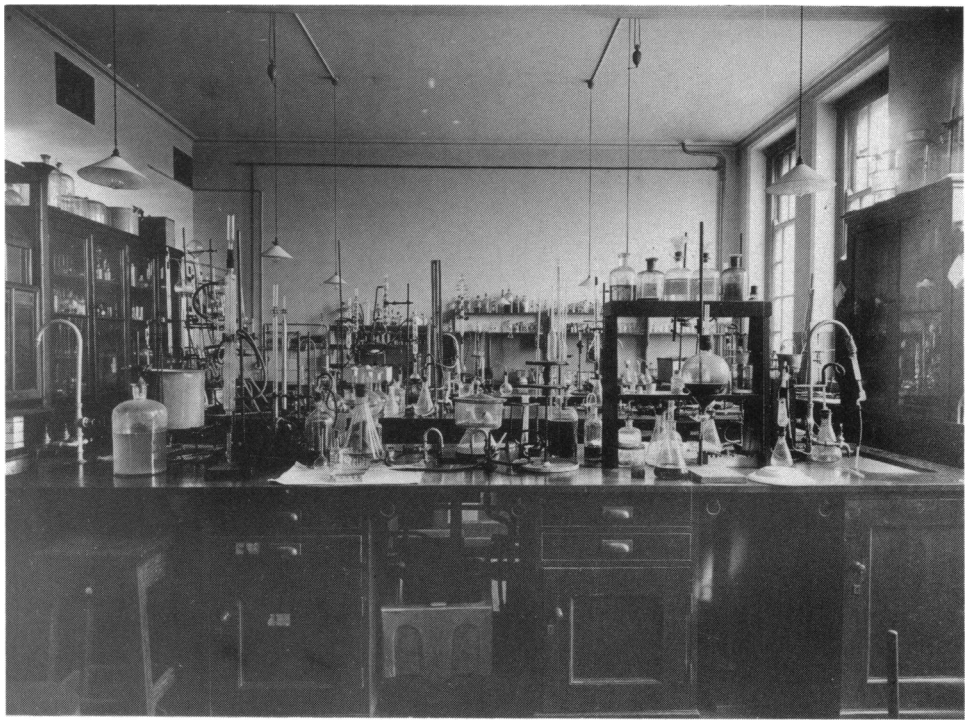

Figure 4. **The Chemistry Laboratory, Chelsea, 1899 (CMAC: SA/LIS/R).**

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material has now been transferred to the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre (CMAC) at the Wellcome Institute.

When received, the archive consisted of eighteen brown paper parcels, five volumes, and one scrapbook of press-cuttings. Minute books and annual reports are at present retained at Stanmore, but several volumes have already been microfilmed by the CMAC for inclusion with the rest of the archives. Much material pertaining to the history of the Lister Institute was lost in the bombing of its Chelsea site during World War II.[2]

Lists prepared by Professor A. Neuberger and Dr Morgan had already revealed the extremely chaotic state of the archives within the parcels. In many cases, documentation of important issues in the Institute's history had survived only because officers of the Institute had taken care that their own correspondence and connected papers should be preserved; for example, J.L. Pattison's correspondence with Lord Curzon and the India Office over the setting up of the Advisory Commission on the Plague in India, and his later correspondence with various interested parties on the proposed amalgamation with the Medical Research Council (MRC). The papers have therefore been sorted into a number of sections which, it is hoped, reflect the Institute's historical development and its work, and also make the papers accessible to the scholar. To further this latter aim, an index to correspondents has been prepared. The collection is now filed in twelve archive boxes; a number of oversize items need specially constructed containers. The physical condition of some of the items is poor: they will not be available to researchers until they have received proper measures of conservation. Historians in a number of different areas will find this collection of interest. A few such cases, discussed below, do not exhaust the potential research value of the archive.

From the first discussion of the possibility of an institute, it was the object of a strong campaign by anti-vivisectionists. There is some very colourful material in the archive on this topic, including a three-hundred-page scrapbook of press-cuttings of vivisection debates from 1889 to 1899 (see fig. 1) and a verbatim transcript of the deputation of Chelsea residents to the Home Secretary to protest against the erection of the buildings for the British Institute of Preventive Medicine in Chelsea Gardens. Of further interest in this connexion, it can be seen from documents relating to the purchase by the Institute of Queensbury Lodge, Elstree, that the negotiations were conducted by J.L. Pattison in his own name, without mentioning that he was acting on behalf of the Institute, or revealing the purpose for which the property was required.

The Institute was, in fact, involved in studying diseases affecting both man and animals, both those transmissible from animal to man (rabies, plague, brucellosis) and those exclusive to animals, but of economic significance, e.g. foot-and-mouth disease, rinderpest. It was also prominent in work on tropical diseases. For example, it was entirely at the urging of the Lister Institute that the Advisory Committee on the Plague was set up by the Secretary of State for India in 1904; this is documented in Pattison's own correspondence and notes, mentioned above. The section of the

[2] Information from Mr G. Roderick, Secretary to the Governing Body of the Lister Institute, December 1985.

archive dealing with plague research includes the reports on C.J. Martin's investigations in India, G.F. Petrie's researches in Egypt, and letters from Sydney Rowland documenting his research work at the Yersin laboratory in Elstree. A sadder note is struck by the memorial plaque to Thomas Carlyle Parkinson, an Australian researcher who died of plague contracted in the Elstree laboratories in 1909. Under the sponsorship of the Colonial Office, a department of protozoology was set up at the Institute, as these diseases had serious implications in many parts of the Empire. Muriel Robertson was first employed by the Lister Institute in this department. She did important groundwork on the life cycle of the trypanosome while at Elstree (with particular reference to the role of the leech in its transmission) (see fig. 2). In 1911, she was appointed by the Colonial Office on a temporary basis to study trypanosomiasis and its transmission by the tsetse fly in Africa, where it was a serious threat to both humans and cattle.

There is also a file of correspondence concerning the celebrated work of David Bruce on Malta Fever (brucellosis), especially about the attempt to gain official government recognition for this work. Letters from the Lister Institute stress to both Lord Tweedmouth at the Admiralty and Lord Haldane at the War Office the established value of preventive medicine, and canvass for greater state support of bacteriological research.

Public health was always a major field of interest for the Lister Institute. In 1893, the British Institute of Preventive Medicine amalgamated with the College of State Medicine, which had been founded seven years previously to train Medical Officers of Health, and was at that time the only place in which these men could receive systematic instruction in the new discipline of bacteriology – the first demonstration in London of Koch's culture technique had taken place only in 1881. Bacteriology continued to be taught in the Institute until the spread of departments of bacteriology in medical schools and universities made it redundant. Teaching continued, however, on a postgraduate level throughout the Institute's history; in 1903, it was recognized as a school of the University of London.

One of the most important aspects of the Institute's work was its development and production of anti-sera and vaccines (see fig. 3). Material in the archives covers the development of diphtheria anti-toxin by the Institute in 1894, including its early hospital trials, and there is considerable material relating to the supply of sera to the government. Provision of Yersin's plague serum to British Colonial territories via the Colonial Office is very fully documented; there are also papers relating to negotiations with the Local Government Board, as well as with pharmaceutical companies for distribution. The sale of these products was one of the means by which the Institute was funded as an independent non-governmental institution; several cash books of the Serum Department survive.

In spite of its close connexions with the government, the Lister Institute remained self-supporting, partly through the sale of sera, as mentioned above, and partly through private endowment. The major benefactor of the Institute was the Earl of Iveagh, who in 1898 proposed to give the Jenner Institute (as it then was) £250,000 (see fig. 1). This gift was subject to certain changes in the constitution of the Institute, which led to the vesting of control in a committee of seven trustees (which came to be

known as the Governing Body). Three of these were to be nominated by Iveagh himself or his representatives, three by the Council of the Institute, and one by the Royal Society. Lord Iveagh's generous donation ensured the future financial stability of the reconstituted Institute.

The twentieth century, however, saw changing attitudes to the role of science in society and the relationship of the state to the funding and direction of scientific research. In 1911, the National Insurance Act recommended the establishment of a national body for medical research, and in 1914, it was proposed that the Lister Institute should form the core of this establishment. The proposal aroused great controversy both generally and within the Institute, involving as it did the clash between different ideals of research – on the one hand, the late Victorian philanthropic ideal under which the Lister had been set up, and on the other, the developing movement in favour of a concept of large-scale centralized efficient research, as embodied by the ideal of a national institute. Letters received by C.J. Martin (mostly from J.L. Pattison) and letters to Pattison himself reflect these conflicts. The correspondence relating to this proposed merger was carefully preserved, along with a number of associated printed items, and memoranda of informal conversations between the Governing Body of the Lister Institute and Lord Moulton, Chairman of the Executive Committee for the National Institute. In spite of support for the idea of the merger by Martin, as Director of the Lister, it was strongly opposed by J. Rose Bradford, who was then Chairman of the Governing Body. A vote by the membership of the Institute ultimately rejected the proposal by a close vote.[3] However, relations between the Lister and the MRC were always cordial and co-operative, and in 1942, Sir Henry Dale, of the National Institute for Medical Research, became Chairman of the Governing Body of the Lister Institute.[4]

The Lister Institute was only the second institution in England to establish a Department of Biochemistry, which it did in 1907 out of the old department of Pathological Chemistry and the Water Laboratory. Although the Institute made great contributions in biochemistry, this subject is rather under-represented in the archives. A certain amount of information can be discovered from the Minutes and the Annual Reports, but, on the whole, little material on research conducted under the auspices of the Institute survives, since workers engaged on the various projects often took their working papers with them.[5] However, a number of photographs of the laboratories of various departments of the Lister Institute still survive (figs. 3 and 4).

There are many other uses for the Lister Institute archives apart from those briefly outlined above. The collection may be consulted, subject to restrictions caused by the need to conserve certain items, by prior appointment with the Archivist, Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP, after completion of a Reader's Application and Undertaking Form.

[3] A forthcoming paper by Neil Morgan locates the controversies over the Lister/MRC merger more fully within the wider debates about scientific autonomy and national efficiency.

[4] There are several files pertaining to Dale and the Lister Institute among his papers in the Library of the Royal Society.

[5] A large collection of Sir Charles Martin's papers was sent to the Australian Academy of Sciences in Canberra.