

# *News, Notes, and Queries*

## Eric Freeman's retirement

The retirement of Eric Freeman on 7 March, 1997, brings to an end an era in the life of the Wellcome Institute and Library. After a degree in English at King's College London and national service (in the War Office), he came in 1961, straight from Library School at University College, as an Assistant Librarian, primarily to succeed Richard Durling as early printed books cataloguer. Dr Underwood was still Director, and Dr Poynter Librarian: the Reading Room was dominated by massive wooden stacks filling the main floor; and staff trod noisily on dark lino. There was no space for the new boy in the offices on either side of the staircase, so Eric was assigned to work at a table in the Gallery. Readers were few, and junior librarians might be assigned to assist in the composition of a historical lecture by a notable medical man. Thirty-six years later, the Library, carpeted, computerized, and occasionally crowded, stands at the very centre of the world of medical history.

All these developments have been observed, if not also directed, by Eric Freeman, first when Sub-Librarian under Eric Gaskell from 1964–1973, and then since 1973 as Librarian. In his time, the Library has more than doubled in size. Its holdings have been increased by the addition of the older books from the Medical Society of London and still more by the expansion of the Modern Medicine Collection. There have been new departments, notably the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, new reading rooms, and even new employers, for until 1981 it was the Wellcome Foundation, not the Trust, who paid the Institute staff. Computerization has changed the face of library cataloguing, and the Wellcome was among the first British academic libraries to transfer all its book records from cards to computer file, a procedure which required a massive human input as well as immense patience with unreliable nodes in Thornton Heath. Any one of these changes would have daunted many a Librarian, but on top of all this Eric has presided over two moves by the main library, first in

1990 out of the Wellcome Building and then back again in 1992, and several others of material to and from the Enfield store. In the 1970s, there also took place the massive transfer of the Museum items to the Science Museum, as well as the reorganization of the basement stacks when structural work was found to be necessary. That so much has been achieved with remarkably little disruption to Library users is a feat in itself, although Eric would be the first to acknowledge the assistance of his long-term deputy Robin Price and other members of his staff, and, more generally, of his secretary Anne Van der Spelt.

A dedicated book-man—his Friday forays to the second-hand section of Dillons with Arthur Greenbaum as his minder were, like Kant's walks, both regular and productive—, he became equally valued by the Wellcome Trust for his administrative expertise. Edwin Clarke as Director delegated far more to the Librarian than Poynter had done, and it was no surprise when in 1980 Eric served for nine months as acting Head of the Institute after Edwin's retirement. Under Rupert Hall, Sir William Paton, and Peter Williams, he formed an administrative troika with Bill Bynum and Gordon Wilson (later Steve Emberton), being officially Deputy Director. After 1988, though still remaining Librarian, he became the Director of the Trust's programme in the History of Medicine. In this role he was both the Trustees' main adviser on the subject, and, equally important, a member of the Trust's Board of Management, the body responsible for the whole day-to-day running of the Trust, its buildings and its staff. How much is owed to his advocacy he is too modest to tell, but undoubtedly the respect in which he has been regarded by successive Trustees and Governors has promoted the advancement of the discipline both within and without the walls of the Wellcome Building.

Other organizations too have gained from his advice. He has served on the Library Committee

of the Royal College of Nursing, and the Royal Society's sub-committee on contemporary scientific archives, to name but two. He has a particularly soft spot for Canadian libraries, having worked closely with the Hannah Institute in its plans for expanding the history of medicine from 1978 onwards. In 1996 he was chosen to deliver the first Bishop and Lefanu Memorial Lecture to the Library Association Health and Libraries Group.

He has managed to do so much largely through effective delegation, and through the friendly word of advice rather than the big stick. His legendary tact and shrewd eye for first securing what is possible before attempting the risky have enabled him to keep all parts of the Institute together despite occasional suggestions that one or other of them might move to allegedly more attractive homes. His apparent conservatism has often been belied by some extremely radical ideas, whether on the future of libraries and books or on proposed developments within the Trust, and by his willingness to listen to others' ideas and to implement them quickly, when he judged them right. Few can have managed more important changes with so little disturbance among all those involved.

Nor should his more academic talents be forgotten. Although his diploma thesis, an

analytical bibliography of the works of Sir Thomas Elyot never appeared in print, and although a possible PhD thesis on the Middle English Guy de Chauliac had to be put aside, he lectured for many years on medieval medicine to the Apothecaries Course, where his exposition of the Seven Corporate Works of Mercy always found admirers. His published articles on medical bibliography are few, hardly reflecting the range of his specialist knowledge, but his lectures have always been a delight. The same can be said for his official farewell speeches to departing staff, which told at least as much about his own humane sympathies as about the individual concerned.

He has succeeded in keeping his private life distinct from work, and few will have known of his early appearances in the chorus line of Gilbert and Sullivan, or his engagement with the domestic habits of the axolotl. A devoted father and grandfather, he is planning to break with the tradition of a lifetime, and move West, away from his native South London, to be closer to his children. We wish both him and his wife Diane a long and happy retirement in which he can fully indulge his passion for books and John Wayne movies.

**Vivian Nutton, W F Bynum**

### Edward Jenner's Schooling

In the July 1996 issue we published a note by Sholem Glaser in which he suggested that new evidence showed that Edward Jenner left Cirencester Grammar School when he was 16, later than originally thought. However, it is now apparent from the apprenticeship books (IR

1/55) in the Public Record Office, Kew, that Jenner was apprenticed to "Geo. Hardwich of Chipping Sodbury. Glou. Apothecary" on 28 August 1764, not in August 1765 as has been assumed.