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CONFERENCE REPORT

The Penis in Pre-Modern Western Culture

Massa Marittima, Italy, 1 - 3 September 2006.

The conference was held at the Domus Bernardiniana in the Tuscan hill town of Massa Marittima, and was sponsored by the Warwick-Leicester Programme in the Cultures and Practices of Health (Wellcome Trust) and by the Centre for Tuscan Studies, University of Leicester. Organized by George Ferzoco and David Gentilcore of the University of Leicester, the conference was designed to bring together specialists from a variety of fields and approaches in order to discuss cultural representations and understandings of the penis in western culture before the modern period. It was decided that in order to maximize discussion between participants, only speakers (and interested partners or friends) would be invited to attend (although a local scholar, Dott. Sennuccio Del Bene, attended a paper at the suggestion of the local government of Massa Marittima). This permitted three days of intense discussion and debate that remained steadfastly amicable, enriching and supportive.

Saturday’s first session dealt with the penis and the visual arts. Brendan Cassidy (St Andrew’s) dealt with Trecento Italian art, and opined that several artists (not least Giotto) would portray male genitalia for largely comic effect. Mary Edwards (Pratt Institute, New York) found surprising imagery of the phallus in religious art (even in crucifixion scenes). Sara Matthews-Grieco (Syracuse) provided numerous examples of erotic humour in the visual media of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries.

Textual sources were under examination in the next session. Dyan Elliott (Northwestern University, Chicago) gave a breathtaking survey of theological arguments as to whether or not angels were deemed to possess genitalia. Elizabeth Archibald (Bristol) shed new light on a curious episode in Margery Kempe’s autobiography, in which the devil tries to tempt her via contemplation of penises.

Following visits to the local cathedral and museums, three papers examined the image of the phallus in social and religious practice. Johan Mattelaer (Kortrijk, Belgium), a medical doctor who also is a historian of urology and related topics, looked at post-antique continuations of Priapus and other Graeco-Roman phallic cults. Allen Grieco (Villa I Tatti, Florence) presented and discussed the intentions underlying some unknown and little known images of phallus trees. Malcolm Jones (Sheffield) delighted the conference with his illustrated lecture that...
centered on the seemingly peculiar practice of wearing pilgrim badges in the form of phalluses in the Low Countries during the later Middle Ages. A sumptuous dinner at the Ristorante Il Pungolo followed.

Publication plans include selecting a set of homogenous papers for publication in a book, as well as in the journal of the European Society for the History of Urology; papers may also include contributions by scholars such as Alastair Minnis (Yale), Bert Roest (Netherlands) and William Ramp (Lethbridge) who had hoped to be present in Massa Marittima but who were unable to do so. If funding can be found for the support of future conferences, there is no doubt that much more remains to be discovered and discussed in regard to the role and image of the phallus in pre-modern western culture.

George Ferzoco
University of Leicester
which those who viewed the bust could have drawn for interpretation.

Linda Bryder (Auckland) detailed the significant contribution of two New Zealanders, Graham Liggins and William Liley, to foetal medicine in the 1960s. Liley worked on Rhesus Haemolytic Disease and also played an important role in the adoption of amniocentesis for the diagnosis of disease in the infant during pregnancy. Liggins’ work focused on the triggers of premature labour, utilising as research subjects one of the bountiful resources of New Zealand: sheep.

Session 2 (Discussant: Lindsay Reid, Midwife and Writer)
Anne Cameron (Glasgow) gave a fascinating account of early nineteenth-century advice on care of the foetus during pregnancy. Focussing in particular on the pregnancy of the Honourable Mary Stewart-Mackenzie (1783-1862), Cameron recounted the, often conflicting, advice which Mary’s many correspondents proffered.

Rosemary Elliot (Glasgow) compared the differing attitudes to concerns over smoking and foetal health in Britain and Germany since 1900. Elliot argued that smoking as a symbol of women’s emancipation was set against concerns about negative effects of smoking such as infertility and hereditary disease.

Session 3 (Discussant: Angus Ferguson, Glasgow)
Anne Crowther (Glasgow) presented a relevant aspect of her project documenting the work of the Registrar General Office for Scotland. Her paper (co-authored by Anne Cameron and Gayle Davis) examined the role and increasing importance of the foetus in the vital statistics registration process in Scotland from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

Hilary Marland (Warwick) considered the prominence of motherhood in health advice literature for girls in the period 1890–1930. She argued that an expansion in this literature, itself encompassed a growth in the range of educational, sporting and work related topics which were promoted as being beneficial precursors to motherhood, if not as long-term aims in themselves.

Session 4 (Discussant: Anne Hardy, UCL)
The final session of the first day opened with Tine Van Bortel (Glasgow) presenting a paper on the debates over the benefits of breastfeeding in the Austrian Low Countries and France in the eighteenth-century. While regarding breastfeeding as a biological duty of the mother and one which contributed to improved public health by obviating the need for wet nurses, the texts which Van Bortel analysed also stressed that breastfeeding contained benefits for the health and particularly the beauty of the mother herself.

Lawrence Weaver (Glasgow) brought the first day’s presentations to a close with an historical account of the development of techniques to evaluate the efficacy of artificial feeds on infants. Drawing on the work of Thomas Rotch at Harvard and Gaston Variat in Paris, Weaver’s paper (co-authored by Malcolm Nicolson and Angus Ferguson) argued that the infant welfare clinics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century may be described as having permitted the first “clinical” trials of artificial feeding.

The first day was rounded off with a wine reception in Lilybank House, the Centre’s new location at the University of Glasgow, followed by a lively conference dinner.

Session 5 (Discussant: Andrew Williams, Northampton General Hospital)
The second day opened with a paper by Mark Skippen (Glasgow) on the changing importance of the foetus in the decision-making process of obstetricians faced with difficult deliveries in nineteenth-century Glasgow. Skippen analysed the relative weight of concern for the welfare of...
the mother and for the foetus in deciding which of the various operations available should be attempted on pregnant women with malformed pelvic bones.

Malcolm Nicolson (Glasgow) gave an account of Ian Donald’s early work investigating neonatal respiratory distress syndrome with his colleague, the radiologist Robert Steiner. Drawing on Donald’s experience in London working with the pathologist Albert Claireaux, Nicolson argued that Donald’s interest in diagnostic imaging – which was later to result in the development of obstetric ultrasound – developed out of his experience of attending autopsies of infants who had died from neonatal respiratory stress disorders.

Session 6 (Discussant: Catherine Mills, New South Wales)
The last session of the conference was opened by Wendy Gagen (Exeter and Plymouth) who examined the use of prenatal screening for spina bifida during the 1970s to illustrate the gap between the development of screening technology and the way in which it was used to legitimise the termination of hundreds of spina bifida children. Gagen investigated the way in which medicine categorised and problematised disability and reflected wider economic and political goals.

Debbie Nicholson (Paisley) looked at how the image of the foetus has been used as propaganda by both sides of the abortion debate. From the use of early ultrasound images in protests against the 1967 Abortion Act through to the current use of three and four dimensional ultrasound in the campaign to lower the maximum legal gestation for late termination of pregnancy, Nicholson showed how selective representation and subjective interpretation continues to be presented as medical knowledge by the interweaving of visual data, emotional language and medical authority.

Naomi Pfeffer (London Metropolitan) raised questions about the status of the thousands of foetuses that have been aborted since the 1967 Abortion Act. The absence of a distinction in English law, between the foetus in utero and the woman in which it is implanted, entails that a foetus ex utero, which was not born alive, may be treated like any other residual tissue of the woman following clinical and diagnostic procedures. Pfeffer highlighted the ethical problems involved in this definition of the aborted foetus and its implications for medical research and for respectful disposal.

_Foetal Fortunes_ underlined the range of work that is being done on the history of foetal and infant welfare. Though at times the subject matter was sensitive and challenging, the conference was a lively and sociable forum which succeeded in encouraging interaction between academics and clinicians working in the area.

Angus Ferguson
Centre for the History of Medicine
University of Glasgow

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**CONFERENCE REPORT**

**The Importance of Place in Medical Practice**

Centre for Medical History, University of Exeter, 18 - 19 September 2006.

This two day conference was generously supported by The Wellcome Trust and The Society for the Social History of Medicine.

Jonathan Barry (Exeter) introduced the main themes of the conference and invited Margaret Pelling (Oxford) to chair the first session which dealt with the period 1570 - 1820. This included papers from David Haycock (LSE) on ‘Proprietary medicines and the emerging medical market in London’, Andrea Davies (Exeter) looking at ‘Provincial graduate practitioners’ and Ian Mortimer (Exeter) analysing ‘The rural medical market place in Southern England’.

The second session chaired by John Pickstone (Manchester) looked at slightly more exotic places with papers from Louella McCarthy (Sydney) on ‘Sydney or the Bush? Locating Women’s Medical Practice in New South Wales 1885 - 1939’, Jorge Lossio (Manchester) examining ‘Spatial approaches to health: medical research in the Andes and the emergence of high-altitude disease’, and Ryan Johnson’s work on ‘Tabloids and the tropics: locating popular medical practice in warm climates, 1870 - 1914’.
The day concluded with a session chaired by Jonathan Reinarz (Birmingham) who helpfully drew together the rather disparate themes in his own presentation on day two. Clare Hickman (Bristol) explored ‘The therapeutic role of landscape in relation to the nineteenth - century lunatic asylum’, while from the perspective of a health geographer Nicole Baur (Durham) examined ‘Place as a contributor to health risks – landscapes of under - vaccination in Berlin’. The session concluded with a joint paper from Catherine Mills and Pamela Dale (both Exeter) on ‘Place and the Medical Officer of Health: A model of public health at a local level illustrated by contrasting case studies’.

Jo Melling (Exeter) chaired the nineteenth - century panel with papers from Victoria Blake (Durham), ‘Medical Societies in the North East of England’, Richard Moore (Birmingham), ‘The evolution of medical services in nineteenth - century Shropshire’ and Jonathan Reinarz (Birmingham), ‘Knowing your place: the importance of place in second city medicine’.

Mark Jackson (Exeter) introduced the keynote address by Professor John Pickstone (Manchester) and his fascinating paper ‘Medicine at the Margins: From the Industrial Revolution to the Medical - Industrial Complex’ provoked much discussion that ranged from methodological approaches to contemporary health politics. These themes were picked up in a stimulating round table chaired by Jonathan Barry. Many thanks to all the speakers and delegates and Claire Keyte and Mary Carter (both Centre for Medical History, University of Exeter) who worked tirelessly on the administration.

Pamela Dale and Catherine Mills
Centre for Medical History, University of Exeter

CONFERENCE REPORT

The History of Suicide

McMaster University, Canada, 18-19 August 2006.

Invited to discuss the history of suicide, thirty - miles outside of Toronto, Canada is perhaps not the way everyone wishes to spend two days in the balmy month of August. But for those of us fortunate to attend the History of Suicide Conference, organized by McMaster University’s History of Medicine department, the experience proved most rewarding. And certainly no one was left thinking they ought to challenge academic stereotypes and take a more hands - on approach to their research! I would like to take the opportunity this report provides to thank all the other participants for a stimulating few days; the conference supporters and sponsors, and in particular the Society for the Social History of Medicine which provided me with the funds necessary to make the trip; and above all else, the conference organizers, especially Professor David Wright, whose vision was the inspiration behind the conference.

With participants ranging from senior academics to graduate students, from cultural and intellectual historians, to anthropologists and practicing psychiatrists, and from as far a - field as Japan, Scotland, and South Africa, the conference provided a unique array of perspectives on the topic of suicide. Although it was recognized at the outset that suicide - or the action of knowingly taking one’s own life - has a history that dates back to antiquity, all the papers focused on the phenomenon in the post - Enlightenment world. This helped to give our sessions clarity, and allowed the emphasis to fall more heavily on the ‘international’ dimension of the program’s title. And in the volume of essays that will ultimately emerge from this session it is clear that this international, and comparative perspective will provide a keen point of emphasis.

The keynote address on the post - Second World War history of assisted suicide that Ian Dowbiggin provided was exemplary of the best type of scholarship we can hope for from such comparisons. Beyond simply giving a bunch of separate accounts of individual countries’ histories, Dowbiggin’s model allowed all of us who followed him to see how ‘internationalism’ might instead mean tracing the history of interaction between countries, and nationally - situated lobby groups. Including a keynote address that focused so attentively on medical communities’ responses to the idea of taking patients’ lives was indicative of the capacious way in which participants dissected this subject. Dowbiggin’s paper also helped set the tone for the emergence of the conference’s main theme:
the increasing medicalization of the subject; the way in which knowledge about suicide has increasingly become tethered to professional communities like physicians, psychiatrists, and sociologists; and the ramifications this shift in who controls the discourse has for questions of what suicide means to society more broadly.

Other participants frequently took up these issues, pondering in particular whether a society’s greater willingness to discuss suicide was a symbol of more liberal, secular ideals. Alternatively, others among us argued that to have such a well-established discourse on a topic - a discourse from which certain groups were excluded, which limited participants to say certain things, which defined and placed certain subtle “interdictions” within it - actually naturalized the act of suicide, stripping those who commit it of any agency. In many ways, though, it struck me that this was a debate fundamentally similar to the one Michel Foucault (whose name, interestingly, I don’t think was mentioned in our discussions) offers in the introductory volume of his multi-volume History of Sexuality, in which he suggests that simply because a discourse - in his case sexuality, in ours suicide - about a topic becomes more frequently spoken about, ought not to be taken as a reflection of society’s growing freedoms.

Questions about medicalization of suicide were especially noticeable in the early-modernists’ papers, and in subsequent discussions, when speakers tried to explain what was at stake for families when coroners pronounced their kin had committed suicide. Kevin Siena’s paper on suicide in early-modern London particularly brought this theme out, as he described how those said to have committed suicide were classed as *felo de se*, or “felons against the self”, whose wealth and estate could be seized as a result. Placed alongside Jeffrey Merrick’s paper, which described accounts of suicides in eighteenth-century Paris, it became clear that the ramifications of being known as a suicide were the single greatest factor in deciding who got registered as a suicide. In conversations that arose later about this topic, it was interesting to note that most participants approached the subject of suicide not so much as medical historians as historians interested in tracing the arteries of power within particular contexts. Looking at how individuals and particular groups have wrestled with defining and giving meaning to certain acts - whether suicide was caused by biological or psychological factors, whether it was an expression of ‘possession’, or whether it was the thinking, and intended act of its perpetrator - is perhaps one of the most attractive features of this subject.

Beyond comparisons between countries a number of other interesting points of convergence and commonality emerged between papers. With so many participants working at the intersection of intellectual and cultural history, and less within the history of medicine (I don’t think any participant solely described themselves as an historian of medicine), the way in which knowledge about suicide has come into existence was a theme frequently raised. Statistics, and the use of mathematical modelling, emerged as perhaps the most prominent feature in the framework of analysis. Kenneth Pinnow, in his fascinating paper on the discussion of suicide in the Soviet Union in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, described the rise of the Department of Moral Statistics, an institution which carried out extensive surveying of suicide in post-Revolution Russia. As well as providing an outline of the personnel affiliated with the Bureau, Pinnow’s paper also looked at the apparatus employed by such figures - in particular their “questionnaire on suicides,” and the results they generated. Along with a number of other participants, he showed the recursive relationship that came about between the categories statisticians used in the design of their questionnaires, the type of data they sought to generate, and the arguments they ultimately fashioned.

Numbers and the importance attached to statistical data by those interested in suicide, was stressed in other papers too. John Weaver provided a detailed examination of the information gathered in turn-of-the-century Queensland, Australia, arguing that, as was typical of most such nineteenth-century surveys, the emphasis was on the aggregate - in essence, this was Adolphe Quetelet’s *homme moyen* writ large. Presenting data from the Queensland surveys, Weaver was able to show how by using certain types of rigid categories - man and woman - or, in keeping with the survey, occupational descriptions - mechanic, laborer, etc. - researchers constructed particular types of
arguments, contingent on the very building blocks of data they used. Following on from this Andrew Fearnley examined the turn away from this trend, looking at the rise of the ‘variable’ in the post-war period. By looking at examples of modelling known as regressive analysis, which marked the post-war shift from the type of method Weaver had described, Fearnley insisted that a different form of popular knowledge arose about suicide, in which more specific groups were described - thus the constituency formerly recognized as ‘Negro’, became filleted by age, sex, and class, thus creating categories like ‘poor, young, black men’.

With questions of agency, and individual intention floating so freely around the room, Paulo Drinot’s paper - on the battle that took place over trends in suicide in late nineteenth-century Lima, between advocates for the church and other elements of the city’s bourgeoisie - was remarkable for the use it was able to make of suicide notes, and personal testimony. Unlike most papers, Drinot’s was able to exploit successfully a rich vein of personal material left by those who had chosen to take their own lives, and the reasons they gave for this. As others attested, this was quite an usual body of archival material. Still it provided the substance for further conversations that took place in our free-time, as participants split between the majority who held that a suicide note was the person’s last chance to stamp their own intentions on their act, and the few Foucaultians among our rank who insisted that by providing an account of their act those who committed suicide confined subsequent speculation on their actions to a few, particular reasons.

The classic trinity of factors around which modern cultural studies is often positioned - class, gender, and race - received mention in the broad sweep of papers, too. Julie Parle, a scholar based at the University of Natal, provided a masterful account of how the structural impact of race, rather than the supposed natural essence contemporaries of inter-war Natal believed the concept to have, effected statistics collected about the phenomenon. As Parle explained, in the colonial province of Natal, officials believed that Indian indentured workers in colonial Natal had one of the highest rates of suicide in the British Empire. Authorities failed to investigate this ‘painful subject’, however, instead drawing on racial beliefs that the ‘character of the Indian’ was at fault - a classic argument that other paper’s showed to crop up in other contexts. Andrew Fearnley, for example, in his paper on ‘Race and Suicide’ in the post-1945 United States, similarly showed that assumptions about race were central to beliefs about the phenomenon of suicide, at the same time that such discourses also helped to produce what ‘race’ was. Following in the same vein as Parle’s contentions, Fearnley insisted that as long as people in the modern world had been thinking about suicide, they have been declaring that black people seldom engage in such acts. This has remained constant across countries, and since at least the mid-eighteenth century. In creating this ‘discourse of denial’ - either popular or ‘medical’ - authorities have created another means of denying agency of black people, Fearnley concluded. As Fearnley pointed out by focusing on Herbert Hendin’s seminal Black Suicide [1969] though, in the 1960s, buffeted by the periods political and social upheavals, American society underwent a radical transformation in the beliefs it held about the rate at which people committed suicide - such that since that point it is generally held that ‘young, black men’ commit suicide at greater rates than their white counterparts. Still as even a cursory glance through the pages of any psychiatric journal attests, the type of suicide black people are said to commit is not the introspective, and thought-out type said to be characteristic of white people, but a more violent form, resulting from frustration rather than thought. What suicide is believed to signify thus still remains heavily inscribed with racialized patterns.

With the exception of Drinot and Merrick’s papers - and John Weaver’s paper which picked up the slack for those of us who neglected the issue of class - it was really left to the distinguished sociologist Rosemary Gartner to lead the way in describing how factors of gender have affected knowledge about contemporary suicide trends. Drawing on an exhaustive four-year research project, which Gartner has been undertaking with colleagues at the University of Toronto, familial relationships were plotted between those who commit suicide and their partners, as well as comparative statistics on the sex of those who commit homicide and then kill themselves suicide.
In discussing a subject like suicide, it is often hard to know what terms to use when describing such a phenomena appropriately, for it is through such characterizations that we - as academics, as researchers, as writers - construct ideas about what suicide is, and the role it assumes in our society. Is suicide, for instance, a ‘behavior’, ‘a course of action’, or an ‘impulse’? And of those who are said to commit suicide, how ought we to characterize them: as ‘victims’, ‘felons,’ even, or as ‘agents’? It is a mark of the expansiveness of this topic that few of us got the chance to consider these questions, though I am sure that any of our resulting work will address these more critically.

Like previous conferences organized by faculty at the University of McMaster’s History of Medicine department, participants found the program stimulating, and the setting most congenial. In addition to the opening night’s reception at the City’s splendid art gallery, other features - such as the Conference dinner - provided ample and opulent opportunities for getting to know other contributors, and extend intellectual conversations begun in the seminar room. With a generous subvention from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, it is expected that a collection of the conference papers will be issued in the not - too - distant future. Having heard the papers, and met the contributors, I have no doubt that such a project would be a welcome addition to the otherwise myopic literature on this fascinating subject.

Andrew Fearnley
University of Cambridge

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**CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Environmental Health and History**

European Association for the History of Medicine and Health

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,


Keynote Speakers:
Professor Chris Hamlin, Notre Dame University, Indiana.
Professor Dieter Schott, Darmstadt University of Technology, Germany.
Professor Chris Sellers, State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Increasingly historians of medicine and of science have begun to seek common ground with geographers and with environmental historians studying the material, cultural and social relations embedded in place. A lively dialogue between different methodologies and approaches is under way.

This conference seeks papers on a wide range of topics across all time periods and disciplines, with national, cross national and international dimensions. It is hoped through such exchange to discuss and develop ways of approaching the interface between environment and health in ways which are sensitive to the past but also speak to present day concerns.

http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/history/EAHMcallforpapers.html

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**CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT**

Re-Imagining Paediatrics: Writing the History of Paediatrics

Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, University of Manchester, 18-19 May 2007

This meeting is jointly held with the British Society for the History of Child Health and Paediatrics. The workshop aims to bring together the different constituencies that study the history of children’s health, who are rarely afforded opportunities to share meaningful dialogue: sociologists, historians and practicing pediatricians. It is our intention to provide a valuable forum through which concepts,
methods and ideas can be exchanged, discussed and debated.

The first day of the workshop will explore aspects in the history of pediatric medicine in British culture. On the second day we will host a witness seminar that will bring together key individuals to discuss the creation of the Royal College of Paediatrics. This event will provide a unique insight into a historical event, and discussions will be transcribed, annotated and published.

Speakers include: Hilary Marland (The University of Warwick) and Mary Dixon-Woods (The University of Leicester)

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NEWS FROM THE CENTRE FOR HISTORY IN PUBLIC HEALTH, LSHTM

A new series of seminars began in September. The series, which explores the international dimensions of public health, includes talks on the role of the Rockefeller Foundation and of the WHO. Details of the programme are available from the Centre’s seminars webpage: http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/history/historyinpublichealth.html.

The annual Public Health History Lecture was given in November by Dorothy Porter, Professor of the History of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco. Dorothy’s lecture “The social contract of health in the 20th and 21st century: individuals, corporations and the state”, was followed by a launch for the latest books from the Centre: Martin Gorsky and Sally Sheard (eds.), Financing Medicine: The British Experience since 1750 (Routledge, 2006) and Virginia Berridge (ed.) Making Health Policy: Networks in Research and Policy after 1945 (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2005).

An afternoon workshop on voluntarism and health was held in November. Organized by Alex Mold and Virginia Berridge, the workshop explored both historical and contemporary perspectives on voluntary organizations operating in the health arena. Speakers included Professor Judith Allsop (University of Lincoln), Dr James McKay (University of Birmingham); Professor Jude Howell (LSE), and Centre members Martin Gorsky, Virginia Berridge and Alex Mold. A report of the workshop will be available soon.

The history walks led by Ros Stanwell-Smith have resumed. Ros, who is a trained blue badge guide as well as a public health physician, has taken a group from the School down to Soho in the steps of John Snow, to learn more about the mysterious history of the area and about the cholera outbreak made famous by Snow’s work. Another walk through the London of Charles Dickens, Captain Coram and abandoned babies is scheduled for 13th December. Details of the walks are available from http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/history/historywalk.html.

In September the School opened its doors to the public as part of Open House London. The School’s participation has been made possible through the Wellcome Trust Enhancement Award to the Centre. Library staff and members of the History Group provided tours around the building every hour from 10am to 4pm. Additional tours were offered because of the large number of visitors on the day. The tour took in the library, the foyer and the new North Courtyard building. Visitors were also able to view a special exhibition of historical photographs and documents in the foyer of Keppel St and pick up various leaflets and publications relating to the School’s history as well as to its current work.

One PhD and two MSc studentships were awarded in the summer. The studentships are funded by the Wellcome Trust’s Enhancement Award. The MSc studentships will enable the students to take a “history pathway” through the MSc in Public Health.

Ornella Moscucci
Centre for the History of Public Health, LSHTM
St Bartholomew’s Hospital Archives is part of the Archives & Museums of Barts and The London NHS Trust. Together with The Royal London Hospital Archives, we manage the archives of 29 hospitals; art collections incorporating works by Hogarth and Millais; objects including sculpture, surgical instruments and uniforms; and other significant historical material.

In March 2005, we were awarded £26,300 by The Pilgrim Trust/Esmée Fairbairn Foundation Cataloguing Grants Programme. This money was part of £200,000 distributed by The National Archives on behalf of the two funding trusts to tackle cataloguing backlogs in Scotland, London and the North West.

The award has enabled the recruitment of a professionally qualified and experienced Archivist to catalogue the uncatalogued records from the City & Hackney hospitals (Hackney, Mothers’, Metropolitan, German and Eastern) and the Alexandra Hospital (the records of St Leonard’s Hospital having already been completed); improve and convert to Calm cataloguing software the current catalogue of records from these hospitals; and increase awareness of these records.

The records, which date from 1714-1986, consist of staff and patient, administrative, financial, estate, school and dispensary records; published material; medical and non-medical photographs; and ephemera. Many were salvaged as the individual hospitals closed in the 1980s.

Whilst much was catalogued, the quantity and timescale involved meant that only brief series level descriptions were produced for some records, while others remained uncatalogued. The original catalogues were produced on index cards and later versions used word processing software. These formats have obvious limitations in the extent to which they can be searched, and researchers have therefore relied heavily upon staff knowledge of the collections. As well as converting the catalogues to the more accessible Calm software, the project aims to create full descriptions of the scope and content of the records, either by expanding existing catalogue descriptions or creating new ones.

The focus of the project has so far been on the Mothers’ Hospital and the German Hospital. The benefits of the expansion of catalogue descriptions are illustrated by the work done on descriptions of the annual reports of the Mothers’ Hospital. These have proved to be more than brief summaries of the work of the Hospital over the course of a year. They highlight the circumstances and treatment of specific patients and contain testimonies from staff, photographs, appeals for contributions and figures relating to fundraising targets, all of which is now recorded in the catalogue.

The expansion of existing catalogue descriptions also means that it is now possible to search for information about bequests made by individuals to the German Hospital. Previously, files concerning these bequests were grouped together as a single record which gave no indication of who the individuals were. Each bequest file now has its own catalogue entry named after the individual making the bequest.

Enquiries about the City & Hackney and Alexandra hospitals form a significant proportion of the total enquiries received by St Bartholomew’s Hospital Archives (approximately 20% in 2005). However, of these enquiries over half were about the Mothers’ Hospital. As well as improving the efficiency with which we deal with these enquiries, the project therefore also aims to raise awareness of the records relating to the other hospitals, in turn increasing the use made of them by researchers.

One unexpected result of the project has been the revelation of new potential research uses for the records, including some relating to unique events in these hospitals’ histories. For example, a volume from the German Hospital, previously catalogued as a ‘Staff Passports Register’, was found to contain information relating to the internment of German born members of staff during the Second World War. A file of papers from the same hospital, catalogued as ‘Administrative Correspondence’, was in fact found to contain correspondence relating to the inclusion of the German Hospital in the National
Health Service in 1948. As well as reflecting the particular history of the Hospital, such material may be of interest to researchers studying German nationals in Britain during the Second World War, or to those studying the formation of the National Health Service.

The focus of the project is now moving to the other hospitals, such as the Alexandra Hospital for Children with Hip Disease and the Eastern Hospital, a former fever hospital. It is hoped that the realised aim of improved and expanded catalogues will encourage people, including members of the Society for the Social History of Medicine, to build their research around these collections.

For more information, contact: Samantha Farhall, Trust Archivist, Tel: 020 7601 8152 barts.archives@bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk

Samantha Farhall and Neil Hargreaves
St. Bartholomew's Hospital Archives

ROY PORTER STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION

The Society for the Social History of Medicine (SSHM) invites submissions to its 2006 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 post-graduate 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 December 31, 2006. Further details and entry forms can be downloaded from the SSHM's website: http://www.sshm.org

Or contact:
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Please visit the SSHM Website at http://www.sshm.org

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