

Friends of the College Archives Newsletter



Issue 2, Winter 2010

Welcome to the second newsletter of the Friends of the College Archives (FOCA).

At the Library and Information Services Committee meeting held on 26 November 2009, it was agreed that e-newsletters will be used as a way of communication between the College archives and members of FOCA. It was also agreed that FOCA would no longer depend on subscriptions.

The newsletter will, however, continue to inform members about current work being undertaken at the Archives, including appeals for assistance with the preservation and the conservation of the archives collection, proposed projects relating to the history of psychiatry, and arrangements for the history sessions at the Annual Meeting. Members are more than welcome to contribute articles concerning their participation in projects and events relating to the history of psychiatry.

Francis Maunze, Archivist

Dr Fiona Subotsky, Honorary Archivist

College archives update

The College archives collection is now housed in a newly completed repository. This is fitted with static steel shelving and environment monitoring equipment, so as to comply with BS4545:2000 for the storage and exhibition of archival documents.

The Archivist, with the assistance of a volunteer, Natasha Wakely, is currently involved in re-packaging and re-labelling the archives according to the recommendations of a preservation audit carried out in 2008.

Unfortunately, our application for the cataloguing, conservation and preservation of the archives, submitted to the Wellcome Trust for a Research Resources in Medical History Award, was not successful. We received, however, positive

comments from the referees who reviewed the application.

There will be another opportunity in 2011 to apply for mental health project support.

By the way ...

Dr William Joseph Seward was a member of the Medico-Psychological Society from 1882, and Superintendent of Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum from 1882 to 1911. This was the location of a tragic fire in 1903, in which 51 patients died.

Dr John Seward was in charge of the large asylum in Purfleet, Essex, which was adjacent to Dracula's abode (*Dracula*, Bram Stoker, 1897).

Looking for obituaries of eminent psychiatrists

Online

- A simple Google search is the first step.
- Many obituaries of Fellows can be found by searching the College journals online. However, there are some surprising omissions.
- Have a look at Thomas Bewley's 'Online archives' section on obituaries (online archive 32; www.rcpsych.ac.uk/publications/books/rcpp/9781904671350/extra9781904671350.aspx) which advises on their location within the journals, and also lists all the psychiatrists in the *Dictionary of National Biography* to 2004.
- *The Times* Digital Archive is available through many library systems.
- The *Dictionary of National Biography* online is also available through some library systems.
- The Royal College of Physicians' Munk's Roll (www.rcplondon.ac.uk/heritage/munksroll/) lists obituaries of all Fellows and licentiates of the College before 1825. Selected entries from the printed volumes and recent obituaries are available to search online. If the obituary is not

online, the Royal College of Physicians can be contacted for a copy.

College library and archives

The library is happy to help with enquiries and may have the location of further obituaries or details on their 'People' database. Printed copies of Munk's Roll are available, and photocopies or scanned copies of entries can be supplied.

Wellcome library

- *The Lancet*, printed and electronic access.
- *BMJ*, printed and electronic access (obituaries are mainly not digitised, so knowing the year of death will help search indexes).
- *Journal of Medical Biography*, printed and electronic access.

De mortuis nil nisi bonum: advice on how to read obituaries[†]

With the passage of 150 years, changes can be seen in the style in which obituaries are written. There is the same desire to write kindly lies about the deceased, but this may be expressed in different ways. I have noted some phrases which draw attention to those redeeming vices which make us more human, and have listed some of these examples of tactful euphemisms.

'At meetings he always gave a very thorough review of the subject under discussion' = he was prolix and tedious.

'Not an innovator, he preferred to abide with the well-tried measures and arrangements upon which his mature experience had taught him to rely' = he was a stick-in-the-mud.

'A man who required knowing' = he was cold, austere and self-satisfied.

'He was a fighter and could bring forward most biting sarcasm and cynical comments, but they were always tinged with a humour which took the sting out of them' = he was offensive but got away with it.

'A traditionalist who was cautious about adopting new procedures' = he was out of date.

'He was extremely well read and could talk with knowledge and in his own delightfully original way on any subject' = but usually at too great length.

'Renowned for his old-fashioned courtesy' = he was pompous.

'He always ensured he thoroughly covered all points' = he was long-winded.

'Fond of the convivial pleasures of life' = he drank too much.

'The ethos of classical Greece' = homosexuality.

'A discerning aesthete and a confirmed bachelor' = presumably gay or homosexual.

'An enthusiastic participator in amateur theatricals' = he was possibly something of a cross-dresser.

'An idiopathic approach to treatment' = it is doubtful if he knew what he was doing.

'He was a clever man but one with a restless spirit' = unreliable.

[†]Taken from Bewley T. *Madness to Mental Illness. A History of the Royal College of Psychiatrists*, online archive 32, Obituaries. RCPsych Publications, 2008.

'Fond of the fair sex' = he was a libertine (serial fornicator).

'He was much loved by the nurses' = probably another serial fornicator.

'The salt of the earth' = it was difficult to think of something to say.

'Never one to be unduly fussy about the finer points of personal hygiene' = seldom washed.

'Not constrained by the nicer points of social etiquette' = I don't know what this means but I fear the worst.

'Solid' = he was dull and stodgy.

'Never one to suffer fools gladly' = he was a boor and a bully.

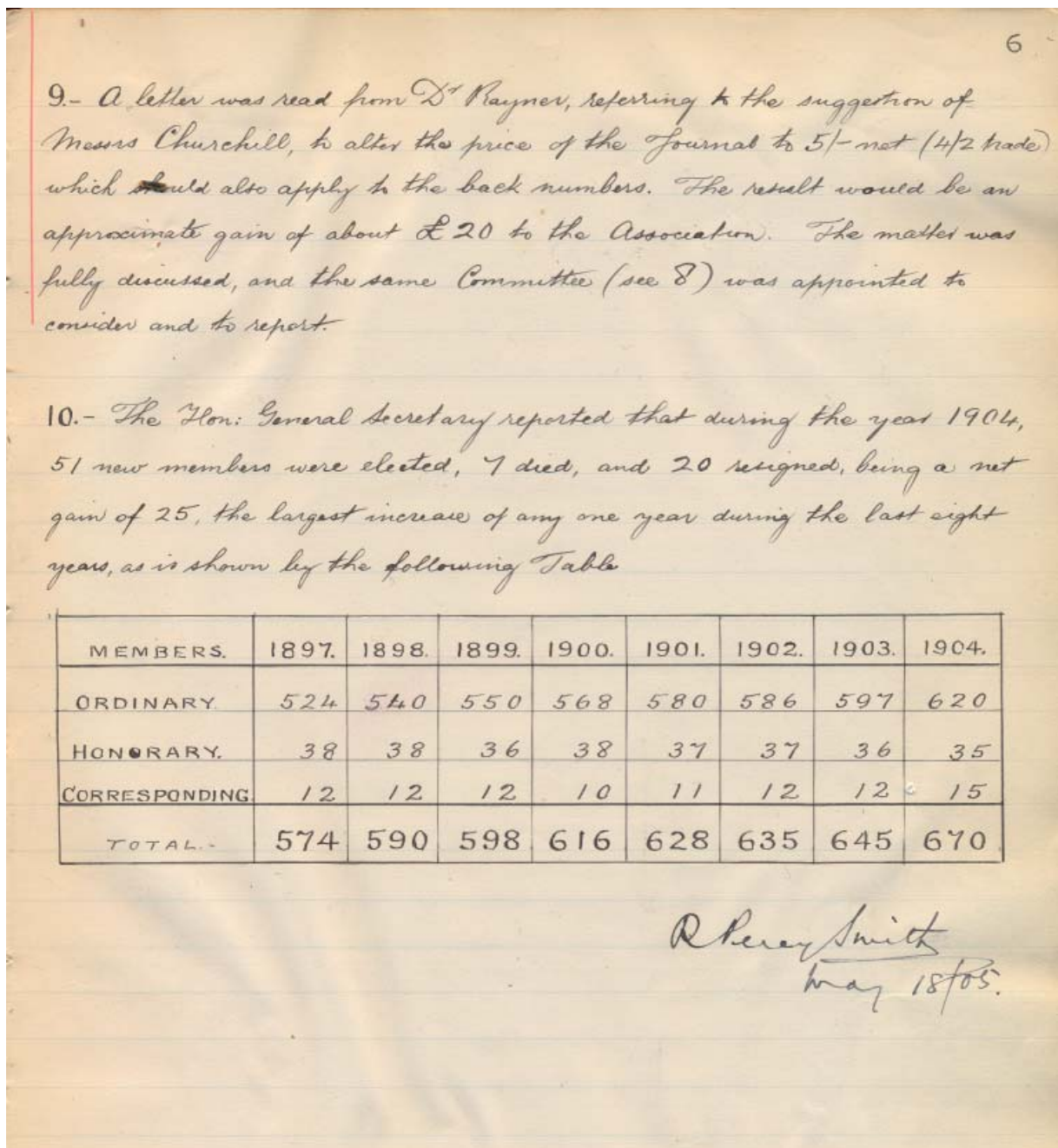
'He was a true Irishman, genial, quick tempered, impulsive, generous to a fault, the soul of hospitality, extremely witty, excellent at repartee' = this must have been written by an Englishman who had attended an Annual General Meeting in Dublin.

Dr Ezra ('The Scribe')

From the archives

Below is an extract from a notebook entitled *MPA Council Minutes 1905-1907*, which is about to be sent for conservation. The first meeting recorded

here was held at the North Riding Asylum, Clifton, near York, on 23 February 1905.



'Mind matters' exhibition

'Mind matters' explores the history of neuroscience and psychiatry, and runs from Tuesday 12 January to Saturday 27 March 2010. The exhibition takes place in the Weston Room, Maughan Library & Information Services Centre, Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1LR, and is open from 09.30 to 17.00, Monday to Saturday.

Drawing on the rich library and archival collections from King's College London (KCL), the exhibition examines aspects of the history of neuroscience and psychiatry from 1800 to 1945, with special reference to the important contributions made by members of the College (including the Institute of Psychiatry) to both disciplines.

The exhibition traces the personal and intellectual development of psychiatrists and psychiatry. The often overlooked role of the neuroscientist Robert Bentley Todd, first Dean of KCL's medical school, in elucidating the nervous system and neurological diseases is also explored using extracts from one of his case books, alongside other important neurologists with connections to KCL such as Charles Scott Sherrington.

If you are coming from outside KCL, you are advised to contact Special Collections staff on 020 7848 1843 or visit their web pages for the latest exhibition news before you travel: www.kcl.ac.uk/iss/spec/exhib/.

News from the 'Time out of mind' conference

On Friday 16 October 2009 the Archivist attended 'Time out of mind', a 1-day international conference on the heritage of mental health held at the Surrey History Centre, Woking, Surrey.

Highlights included a presentation by Claudia Hammond from BBC Radio 4's 'All in the mind' programme. She spoke about her interviews of people's experiences in asylums in the 1950s and 1960s. One of the interviews was a testimony from a patient who became a squatter at Brookwood Hospital after it had closed. The second speaker was Hans Looijen who is the director of Het Dolhuys, the Dutch National Museum of Psychiatry. His presentation was entitled 'Leprosy, Black Death and madness', in which he discussed the

transformation of an asylum from being a place of exclusion to that of inclusion as a museum.

Other presentations were about projects on preserving the past heritage for the future. Julian Pooley, Team Leader of Public Services and former Archivist of the Surrey History Centre, described how the partnership between the Surrey History Centre and Mind in Woking had facilitated the use of Brookwood Asylum archives by former patients, staff and the public. Jocelyn Goddard spoke about her 'Mixed feelings' oral history project, which recorded and preserved the memories of patients, former patients, staff and family members of Littlemore Hospital in Oxford.

Old age psychiatry history

Claire Hilton writes to say that members may be interested in the report of the Guthrie Trust Witness Seminar in old age psychiatry held in Glasgow in

May 2008. The report can be viewed at: www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_107314_en.pdf.