RANZCO Eye Museum

Fig 1. Figure taken from a journal: Prevsner J. Leonardo da Vinci's contributions to neuroscience. Trends Neurosci. 2002;25:217-20.

Da Vinci (1452-1519)

His genius and misinterpretations

Leonardo da Vinci used his experience in the field of anatomy to hypothesise that the soul was located in the optic chiasm near the third ventricle of the brain.

His views were supported by observations of change in perception following disturbances to that particular area of the brain and were in keeping with thoughts at the time.

Although a keen anatomist, he was initially denied access to human dissection as interfering with a human corpse was expressly forbidden by the church at that time. Finally, in 1510, he undertook detailed studies on 13 corpses including ocular and neuroanatomy. He likened the meninges and skull to layers of an onion but depicted the ventricles as ovoid. Later, the brain anatomy was revised after injecting the brain ventricles with hot wax to define their correct shape.

Da Vinci determined the role of the optic nerves and chiasm, although it would be in the early 20th century that the precise anatomy of the chiasm was determined.

Why does the Mona Lisa lack eyelashes and brows when other da Vinci drawings accurately show these features? Much discussion revolves around whether the oil and pigment used faded over time or whether

Fig 2. Why does the Mona Lisa lack eyelashes and brows when other da Vinci drawings accurately show these features?

Fig 3. The repeated cleaning of the varnish of the Mona Lisa may have removed the fine details.

the fine pigment blended with the undercoat. The most likely answer is that repeated cleaning of the varnish removed the fine details.

Recorded history of New Zealand ophthalmologists can be heard on the Eye Museum website

The Ophthalmological Society of New Zealand commissioned oral recordings from seven senior ophthalmologists between approximately 1991 and 2001. Each was professionally interviewed by Anna Cottrell (wife of Dr Paul Herrick, ophthalmologist of Wellington), on behalf of the Alexander Turnbull Library, a division of the National Library of New Zealand.

The ophthalmologists interviewed were Sir Randal Elliott of Wellington, Dr Roy Holmes of Christchurch, Prof John Parr of Dunedin and Drs Dorothy Potter CBE of Masterton, Calvin Ring of Auckland, Arthur Talbot of New Plymouth and Graeme Talbot OBE of Auckland.

They are first-hand accounts of aspects of New Zealand ophthalmology through most of the 20th century. There are many insights into the education, training, the Otago Medical School and the post-graduate ophthalmic training in their times, as well as practising the specialty in that era. In some cases, their war service is of special interest. The interview which probably holds the most general interest is that given by Sir Randal Elliott, while the interview with Prof John Parr gives the most information about education and the Otago Medical School.

Watch the recordings here.

Ian McAllister Collection Update

Superb items from the Ian McAllister collection have arrived for secure storage and will be featured on the Eye Museum website on the EXHIBBIT format. Stay tuned for this!

Dr David Kaufman
Curator, RANZCO Eye Museum

Mondays in the Eye Museum

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