# Documenting the Demise

**Before effective therapies became available, physicians and ophthalmologists documented disease through art and literature using instruments to measure and record appearances and physical characteristics.**

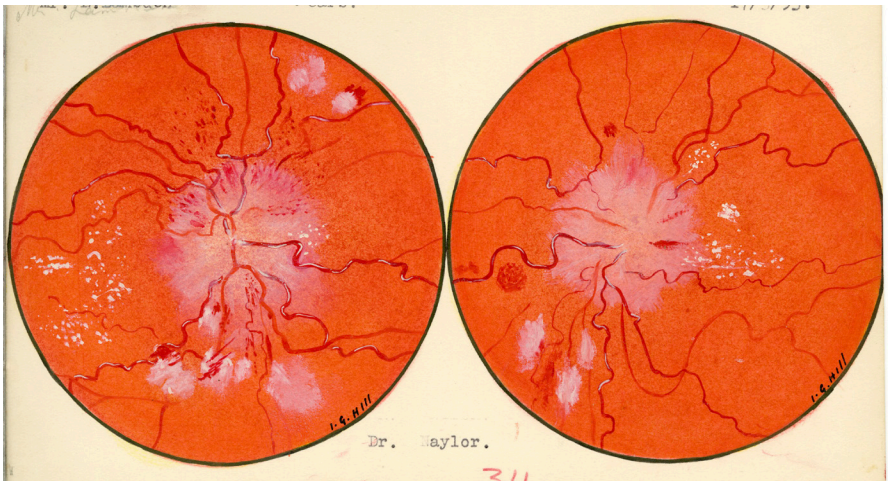
Some remarkable examples of measuring instruments and art can be found in the RANZCO Eye Museum.

After the invention of the first useful ophthalmoscope in 1851 by Helmholz, enthusiastic observers rapidly saw and recorded examples of retinal pathology. This resulted in beautiful atlases that were descriptive, but which largely documented the incurable abnormality.

Although fundus photography was invented in the early 20th century, fundus cameras were used infrequently and only in major centres. An alternative was to employ a medical artist. Terry Tarrant from Moorfields was widely known and a master of the art. In Melbourne, Ilene Hill was trained to use an ophthalmoscope and, in long sessions, used the direct instrument—initially producing sketches which she translated into a finished work of art recording fundus pathology. She charged three guineas (£3.3) for a pair of fundus paintings.

Many fine examples of her work were donated to the museum by the son of Dr Naylor, who practised in Collins Street, Melbourne. One example of renal retinopathy from 1951 predates effective treatment of hypertension and renal disease by a decade.

An ingenious device, the oculo-curvimeter (Bouzendroffer, Paris), c.1880, is available in the Ian McAllister collection. It was used to determine and record corneal curvature by a series of pins impressed on the presumably anaesthetised corneal surface. The position of the pins was then translated to graph paper, producing an impression of corneal deformity. It was probably used to document ectasia and keratoconus many decades before effective corneal transplantation was developed.




*Paintined retinal images*

Measurement of intraocular pressure by palpating through closed lids lasted until the early 20th century. Glaucoma often presented as end-stage disease, with a stony-hard blind eye. Early attempts to measure pressure came via indentation tonometry, long before any effective treatment.

Herman Snellen, the Dutch ophthalmologist, produced several devices from 1872 to measure intraocular pressure. These worked by pressing on the sclera and moving a spring-loaded rod along a ratchet, with pressure read against a scale on the instrument after several readings were taken.

These instruments are all available in the Ian McAllister collection.

***Dr David Kaufman***

*Oculo-curvimeter (Bouzendroffer, Paris).*

*Snellen device measuring intraocular pressure by pressing on the sclera moving a spring-loaded rod along a ratchet.*