

Illustrations from the Wellcome Institute Library

The Papers of Walter Pagel in the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre

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One of my favourite images of Walter Pagel (1898–1983) is a photograph taken of him in 1978: an old man in his study surrounded by his books, heaps of papers, old envelopes, a pot of glue and trailing electric wires (see Plate 1a).¹ It vividly expresses Pagel's character as I came to know it while cataloguing his papers—a character which showed very strongly compared to those of some other people whose papers I have worked with, where no real sense of the individual could be felt. In the photograph of Pagel in his study, I particularly liked the chaos in the room—similar to the chaos of his papers when I came to catalogue them! The books are arranged on shelves in some order, but are untidy through use, many standing at a slant, with pages flagged with slips of paper, and sheaves of notes heaped on top. Like the books, with their semblance of order, the seven large boxes of Pagel's papers did have some underlying structure, but they were working papers, in the same way that his bookshelves can be seen to be a live and constantly consulted resource.

As an archivist, it is interesting to note the different state of collections of papers when they are deposited and to feel what this says about people concerned and their relationship to their work. Some archives have already been reorganized a fair amount by the individual, with files labelled or put into order, as if the person has finished working and is tying up the loose ends of his or her life. Sometimes, these people come across as rather tedious or full of a sense of their own importance, as if they are sure that their work will be of interest for generations to come. By contrast, those whose papers are disordered, appear to be still working and developing ideas right up to the end of their lives or careers. Although the fundamental principle of archival arrangement is to respect the original order of the papers and not to impose some new, artificial arrangement, in practice a fair amount of reorganization has to take place once the underlying structure of the archive has been felt. This involves such tasks as reuniting pages of letters scattered throughout the boxes, recreating series of correspondence and research files that have become disordered or dispersed, thus, hopefully, revealing the original order more clearly. Another task involves ensuring the preservation of the material by placing it in acid free files, removing steel paper clips, placing photographs in secol sleeves. Although these processes lead to a

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¹ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/34.

well-ordered and physically stable collection, a little of the feel of the creator is inevitably lost. The effect is a rather like visiting the house of a famous deceased, where the furniture and effects have been faithfully preserved, but none of the clutter of everyday living is evident, so has to be imagined or felt. But, of course, it is impossible to preserve the clutter: the sink full of dirty dishes, the heap of clothes in the laundry basket and the ashtray full of cigarette butts. Even after undergoing the tidying up processes, Pagel's papers still give a vivid sense of his character and experience.

Pagel's papers were deposited in the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre (CMAC) at the Wellcome Institute by his son, Professor Bernard Pagel, in 1982. A few additional letters were donated by their recipients after a Pagel Memorial Symposium at the Wellcome Institute in December 1983. On receipt of the collection, some grouping of papers was evident, but it was in a state of considerable disorder. An initial listing was carried out in 1984 by Dr Marianne Winder, the former Curator of Oriental Manuscripts at the Wellcome Institute and a friend of Pagel, which was invaluable in helping to identify many of the letters with illegible signatures and the photographs. Other papers were grouped together in bundles or envelopes with Pagel's annotations about their content and provenance. However, much reorganization and arrangement was still necessary in order to reunite correspondence series which had become scattered throughout the boxes, and to arrange the material in a coherent order. It is a rich collection: reflecting both strands of Pagel's career, as a pathologist and a medical historian, with additional material relating to Pagel's father, Julius (1851–1912), the eminent German medical historian. The range of materials themselves is wide: including correspondence, notes, book manuscripts, published articles, certificates and photographs.

Section A of the archive consists of papers and photographs connected with Pagel's personal and family life, and includes the papers relating to his father. Julius Pagel was appointed as the first professor of medical history at the Friedrich Wilhelms Universität in Berlin in 1898, a post he held until his death in 1912, but, because he was Jewish, the appointment was classed as "Unestablished" and was unpaid. Consequently, he continued to practise as a doctor in Wedding, a working-class district of Berlin, and the overwork may have contributed to his ill health and subsequent untimely death. The group of papers and photographs relating to Julius Pagel is small, but illuminating both of his situation, and of Walter's relationship to him. Household accounts and family correspondence give a sense of his middle-class Jewish background,² and an indication of the demands of his medical practice in Wedding is given by a letter of sickness certification to an insurance company, written for one of his patients in a very shaky handwriting not long before Julius Pagel's death in 1912.³ The collection includes some of Julius's notes and writings: the manuscript draft of his article on 100 years of the Berlin Medical Faculty and notes titled by Walter Pagel as 'Last work. Lecture on medicine and religion'.⁴ One of Walter Pagel's files, containing correspondence between 1946 and 1978 about his father, gives further insights into Julius's character and teaching methods.⁵ Several correspondents reminisce affectionately about Julius's habit of interrogating his students with impossibly hard questions, expecting them to have the same level of understanding as he had after years of study. Another view of this character trait is given by a cartoon, by an unidentified artist,

² CMAC:PP/PAG/A.1/1, A.1/2/1.

³ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.1/2/2.

⁴ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.1/2/3.

⁵ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.1/2/6.



Figure 1: 'Herr Candidat beim Doktorexamen', cartoon by an unidentified artist showing Julius Pagel (third from left) and colleagues questioning a student, c. 1900. (Wellcome Institute Library, London.)

titled 'Herr Candidat beim Doktorexamen' (see Figure 1).⁶ The unfortunate Herr Candidat is depicted laid out as if he were a corpse waiting for a post-mortem examination, while Julius and his colleagues are gathered about the table, gazing at him sternly. The file of correspondence with Walter Pagel is striking in that it demonstrates his almost disinterested admiration of his father's work, which in a sense he can be seen to be carrying on. His admiration is not the blind pride of a son, but a deep appreciation for the pioneering work of a colleague. In 1951 a section of the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* was dedicated to essays to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Julius Pagel. Walter Pagel's was the central essay, for which Henry Sigerist wrote a brief introduction. In a letter to Walter, Sigerist stated that "I always had a great admiration for his manifold achievements",⁷ and in the attached draft of his introduction he wrote that Julius's "*Einführung in die Geschichte der Medizin*, which ever since 1898 had been the textbook of the subject for all German-speaking students. . . . is still a most valuable book. The medical historians of my generation grew up with it, derived inspiration and knowledge from it. I keep it next to my desk."⁸ In his own paper Pagel writes that Julius was "the foremost exponent of what may be called the second generation of medical historians".⁹

⁶ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/1/7. Another cartoon of Julius Pagel appears on the cover of this issue.

⁷ H E Sigerist to Walter Pagel, 5 May 1950. CMAC:PP/PAG/A.1/2/6.

⁸ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.1/2/6.

⁹ 'Julius Pagel and the significance of medical history for medicine', *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1951, 25: 207-25.

The bulk of the collection relates to Walter himself, and to his life and work in Germany and subsequently in France and England. In 1933, new legislation forced his dismissal from his post as Assistant to the Department of Pathology in Heidelberg, where he had also lectured in medical history. The collection includes several photographs of Walter with German colleagues between 1926 and 1933, in a variety of settings: formal group photographs in Sommerfeld and Tübingen¹⁰ as well as snapshots of a fancy dress party,¹¹ Walter having his hair cut in a laboratory¹² and an omnibus outing with colleagues.¹³ The last German photograph in the collection is strangely poignant, and depicts Walter with his wife Magda on an “excursion with students and assistants to Amorbach from Heidelberg” in 1932 (see Plate 2).¹⁴ Despite the, presumably, relaxed nature of the event, the couple are shown sitting at a table in the open air with sombre, tense expressions, and behind them a tall wire fence—a chilling image of what was to come. A year after this photograph was taken, Walter was dismissed from his post and forced to find work abroad.

The collection contains much of relevance to his experience as a Jewish emigré, settling briefly in Paris, and subsequently in Cambridge and London. Material relating to Pagel’s search for new employment includes three files of references and testimonials from German, French and British colleagues, 1925–1939,¹⁵ and a file of correspondence with similar colleagues, 1931–1952.¹⁶ Referees, including Alexander Schminke, Richard Siebeck and Ludwig Aschoff, provided Pagel with testimonials in May 1933 to his zeal, diligence and to his “excellent work”, both as a scientist and historian. However, although several letters express regret at Pagel’s dismissal, nobody in Germany was able to help. The testimonials and letters give a clear indication of a life broken in two, with Pagel’s career path set up and then disrupted. But Pagel was sufficiently single-minded, with the subsequent support of English colleagues, such as Joseph Needham and Sir Pendrill Varrier Jones,¹⁷ to carry on in England, undeterred. It is a shame that the papers contain little illustrating Pagel’s and Joseph Needham’s organization of the History of Science Seminars in Cambridge, for which only a scanty file of correspondence and programmes, 1936–1939, is extant.¹⁸ Speakers included Charles Singer on the value of the history of science, Sir Charles Sherrington on the origins of modern psychology, and Pagel himself on Greek medicine and scientific thought.

The effect on Pagel of the trauma of his experience as a Jewish emigré is in some ways hard to determine from his papers. Although correspondence survives with, for example, compilers of an encyclopaedia of Jewish scientists¹⁹ and with the Yad Vashem Archive,²⁰ in some respects his career and productivity seemed unaffected. However, perhaps this makes what little documentary evidence there is of the trauma all the more poignant. For example, there are two letters from friends marooned in Algeria in April 1939 asking for money so they could return to their home in Holland.²¹ The last letter, in April 1939, is from Paris shortly before they departed for Holland, but evidence as to their, presumably

¹⁰ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/1, A.4/2/8.

¹¹ Sommerfeld, 1929, CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/3.

¹² CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/5.

¹³ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/7.

¹⁴ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/12.

¹⁵ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.2/5/1–3.

¹⁶ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.2/6.

¹⁷ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.2/5/2–3.

¹⁸ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.2/8.

¹⁹ *International Biographical Archives and Dictionary of Central European Emigrés, 1933–45*, 1981, CMAC:PP/PAG/B.109.

²⁰ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.2/15.

²¹ Ursula van Beijeren, Algiers and Paris, March and April 1939, CMAC:PP/PAG/A.2/15/3.



Plate 1a: Walter Pagel in his study at Mill Hill, 1978. (Wellcome Institute Library, London.)

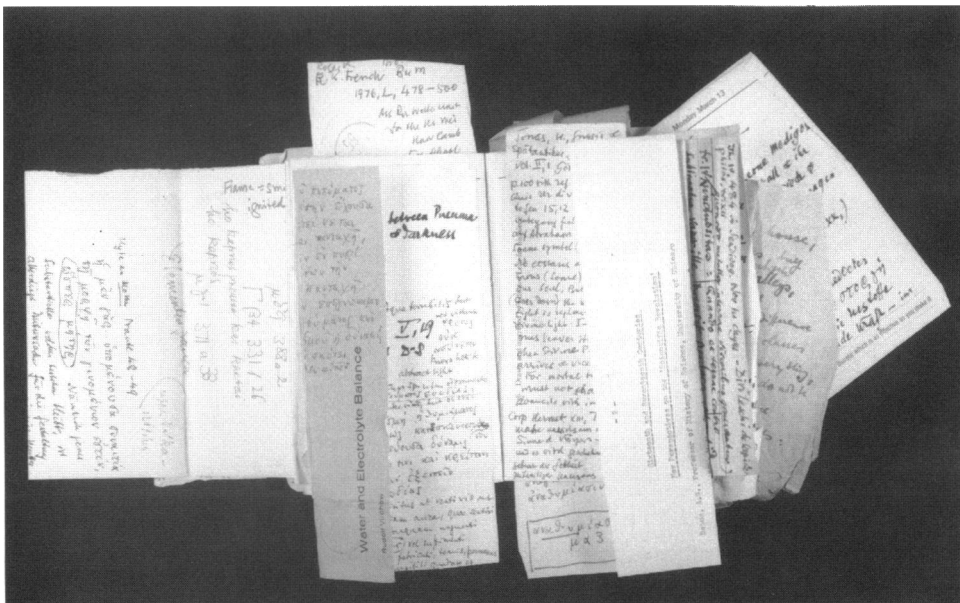


Plate 1b: Walter Pagel's notebook on van Helmont's concepts of elements and the body and the soul, showing how he pasted in extra sheets, scraps of paper, wrote in several languages, and annotated his own notes. (Wellcome Institute Library, London.)



Plate 2: Walter Pagel and his wife, Magda, on 'Excursion with students and assistants to Amorbach from Heidelberg, 1932'. (Wellcome Institute Library, London.)

The Papers of Walter Pagel

bleak, fate is not recorded. A small and faded passport photograph was preserved with the letters.

Another very poignant document is Pagel's dream diary, which he kept, appropriately enough, in a Warner's Calendar of Medical History between approximately 1938 and 1952.²² Recurring themes of the dreams are complicated journeys on London buses, losing or finding valuable books, and conversations with colleagues and historical figures. However, a dream from July 1944 concerns two cats who are playing in a room. One of the cats becomes aware that their owner wishes to kill them, so manages to hide its friend in a wastepaper basket, and "It thereby escaped death". By this time, Pagel was probably aware of the fate of his siblings, many relatives and friends whom he had left behind in Germany, while he himself was able to "escape death"—so this simple dream has great power and clarity. Another dream of 1 February 1943 is recorded simply as "Miss Metzger tells me that *all* Jews have been killed". At some point in 1939 Pagel begins to write down his dreams in English, rather than German—it is always intriguing to muse over which language bilingual people think in.

The core of Pagel's papers are the three boxes of correspondence with colleagues, 1931–1983, largely concerning matters relating to medical history.²³ The 243 correspondents are now arranged alphabetically and run from Abraham, Ackerknecht to Zimmerman, taking in Diepgen, Hannaway, Needham, Stevenson, Temkin . . . The letters were in a state of considerable disorder when cataloguing was begun, so some detective work and patience was required in comparing handwriting, typewriter styles and so on, to reunite runs of correspondence and even pages of the same letter which had become separated and scattered throughout different boxes. After 1967 Pagel's replies, carbon copies typed on the reverse of the original letter, are extant, so both sides of the exchange can be studied. Pagel's range of correspondents is interesting: from people as eminent as Temkin, to students asking for advice or illumination, but to each correspondent Pagel devotes the same careful consideration and gives a measured answer complete with suggestions for further reading and references back to the original texts of Paracelsus, Harvey, van Helmont, Fludd and others. In some groups of correspondence ideas are discussed and elaborated with colleagues over several months or years, with Pagel and his correspondent reporting back on their research or further thoughts: for example Jerry Bylebyl and his research in 1972 into the dating of various anatomical observations of Harvey.²⁴ Many other exchanges centre around the origins and exact meanings of particular words within certain texts.

The correspondence also includes more substantial pieces of writing: including reviews by Pagel and others, draft articles sent to Pagel for comment, research proposals for Pagel to advise upon or referee, and some of Pagel's short contributions to reference works, such as the history of medicine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for an Italian encyclopaedia—which he summarized in half a page.²⁵ The correspondence is a rich source to demonstrate how Pagel kept in touch with colleagues, despite living practically as a hermit in his house in Mill Hill in north London suburbia; in a letter to Pagel, Jerry Bylebyl commented that it took nearly as long to travel to Mill Hill from Piccadilly Circus

²² CMAC:PP/PAG/A.2/16.

²³ CMAC:PP/PAG/B.1–244.

²⁴ CMAC:PP/PAG/B.26.

²⁵ *Edizioni Scientifiche e Tecniche*, 1970, CMAC:PP/PAG/B.58.

as it did to fly from New York to London.²⁶ In some of his letters Pagel talks of his and his wife, Magda's, recurring ill health which confined them to the house, but he also writes of many visits by colleagues and friends to discuss ideas. For such a hermit, not attached to any university department, correspondence was vital in maintaining links with current thinking and disseminating and revising ideas.

The last file in the series of correspondence concerns the dispute in 1963 and 1964 within the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Medizin over the membership of Alexander Berg, in light of his work during the War.²⁷ Pagel's file includes correspondence with Erwin Ackerknecht, Lloyd Stevenson, and Owsei Temkin which records their disapproval of the decisions of the Gesellschaft. A letter from Temkin of May 1964 tells Pagel of his decision to resign his honorary fellowship, but unfortunately, apart from one letter, there are none of Pagel's replies, so his full response can only be surmised from his correspondents' letters as being one of sorrow at the Gesellschaft's actions.

Apart from the correspondence series, other material relating to Pagel's historical studies includes notes, reviews and typescripts of books. There is one box of notebooks²⁸ and two boxes of files of loose notes.²⁹ These three boxes were the most difficult part of the collection to catalogue, because there was often no indication of what the notes were about or what purpose they served. Many of the notebooks contained extra pieces of paper—parts of envelopes, birthday cards, scraps of paper—glued or stapled in, and notes made in English, German, Greek, Latin, Hebrew . . . However, in their state of rather chaotic and disorganized pages, they give a vivid sense of Pagel's excitement while reading and analysing texts, and his ongoing generation of new ideas and fresh recognition of significant points. Subjects covered in the notebooks, surmised from things written on the covers and at the tops of pages, include: Kozak and cosmic salinity (notes written in a 1975 pocket diary³⁰) Galen on the stomach and the heart (notes written in a 1971 pocket diary³¹) and van Helmont's concepts of elements and the body and the soul (notes written in a 1973 pocket diary, Plate 1b³²).

The loose notes³³ were generally gathered together in envelopes titled by Pagel, and are more focused than the notebooks. Subjects here include alchemy, mythology, symbolism and psychology,³⁴ Hildegard of Bingen,³⁵ and Paracelsus and the Jews.³⁶ Like the notebooks, the pages of these loose notes are often made up of odd scraps of paper with extra pieces attached with staples, glue and clips, so reading them in systematic fashion can pose problems. But, despite these challenges, and the difficulties and impossibilities of dating or properly understanding the full purpose of these notes, they do give an illuminating insight into Pagel's working methods and his close analysis of texts.

One of the notebooks makes use of a school exercise book of Pagel's son, Bernard, in which the twelve-year-old Bernard had written a play.³⁷ It is a family drama which is wonderfully absurd, and perhaps gives a view of goings on in the Pagel household. In one

²⁶ Jerry Bylebyl, 1976, CMAC:PP/PAG/B.26.

²⁷ CMAC:PP/PAG/B.244.

²⁸ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/1–20.

²⁹ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/21–58.

³⁰ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/18.

³¹ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/16.

³² CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/17.

³³ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.121–58.

³⁴ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/21.

³⁵ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/47.

³⁶ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/35.

³⁷ CMAC:PP/PAG/D.1/4.

scene the exasperated father shouts at the lazy son for not knowing the meaning and origins of the word “homogenised”: “you idiot, after 6 years of studying science!”—which sounds a bit like Julius putting his students on the spot. However, Bernard Pagel was presumably no science idiot, as he is now an eminent astronomer.

Papers relating to Pagel’s work as a pathologist and an expert on tuberculosis are more limited in size and scope than those generated during his historical work, and fill just one box.³⁸ They include reprints of his articles, 1922–1971, in both German and English journals including *Virchow’s Archiv*, and the specialist British journal *Tubercle*.³⁹ There is also correspondence, notes and illustrations for the 1964 edition of *Pulmonary tuberculosis*, the Oxford University Press standard textbook on the subject, first published in 1939.⁴⁰ A small file labelled by Pagel ‘Letters by famous men, 1926–1964’, includes correspondence from Hellmut Ulrici, Karl Ranke and Arnold Rich.⁴¹ In addition, many of the photographs of Pagel depict him with colleagues at institutions including Tübingen in 1930,⁴² the Berlin Municipal Tuberculosis Hospital in 1930,⁴³ and the Middlesex Hospital 1940–1954 (ten photographs⁴⁴).

Pagel’s papers are complemented by other collections held in the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre. A number of collections contain material relevant to the study of refugee scientists and organizations involved with their aid and employment. These include the papers of Ernst Chain who was a correspondent of Pagel,⁴⁵ the pioneer of Group-Analytic Psychotherapy Sigmund Foulkes,⁴⁶ and the geneticist Hans Gruneberg.⁴⁷ A leaflet ‘Refugee scientists and medical practitioners: sources in the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre’, gives a brief listing of other relevant collections, and is available on request. Other collections with material relating to the writing of medical history include the papers of Charles Singer.⁴⁸ These papers contain a few letters from Pagel, including one saying he would like to dedicate his 1955 work on van Helmont to Singer. Singer’s papers hold further interesting parallels with Pagel’s, in that Singer was also Jewish and an active supporter of organizations aiding the settlement of Jewish refugees in Britain. For example, there are letters relating to Max Neuburger’s move to Britain in both Pagel’s and Singer’s papers. Another medical historian whose papers are held in the CMAC is Edgar Ashworth Underwood.⁴⁹ On a more amateur level, many collections of personal papers include reminiscences or writings relating to the history of hospitals or the specialization with which the individual was involved. For example, the papers of the occupational health expert Dr Donald Hunter⁵⁰ include materials he gathered together—articles, photographs, reminiscences, notes—as part of his interest in the impoverished East End of London where he worked, and the papers of the haematologist Gwyn Macfarlane⁵¹ include notes and drafts for his biographies of Florey and Fleming.

Full lists of these collections, and of the papers of Walter Pagel are available in the Library, and can be sent to readers on request. The papers themselves are available to bona fide scholars who have signed a reader’s undertaking form, and by prior appointment with the Archivist.

³⁸ CMAC:PP/PAG/C.

³⁹ CMAC:PP/PAG/C.4/1–33.

⁴⁰ CMAC:PP/PAG/C.3.

⁴¹ CMAC:PP/PAG/C.1.

⁴² CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/8.

⁴³ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/4.

⁴⁴ CMAC:PP/PAG/A.4/2/21, 22, 26.

⁴⁵ CMAC:PP/EBC.

⁴⁶ CMAC:PP/SHF.

⁴⁷ CMAC:PP/GRU.

⁴⁸ CMAC:PP/CJS.

⁴⁹ CMAC:PP/EA.

⁵⁰ CMAC:PP/HUN.

⁵¹ CMAC:PP/RGM.