

## ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WELLCOME INSTITUTE LIBRARY

### GACHET AND JOHNSTON-SAINT: THE PROVENANCE OF VAN GOGH'S *L'HOMME À LA PIPE*<sup>1</sup>

by

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In 1927, Captain Peter Johnston-Saint (1886–1974) embarked on a European tour on behalf of Henry Solomon Wellcome (1853–1936) to collect material relating to the history of medicine and science for the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in London.<sup>2</sup> As Secretary to the Museum, Johnston-Saint's brief was to gather as much material with as little expenditure as possible.<sup>3</sup> His *modus operandi* was to make contact with individuals eminent in their medical disciplines, learn from them who might be approached to part with original material, and frequent the small "antique" shops,

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I would like to acknowledge The Viscountess Sandon for her generous sharing of reminiscences and manuscripts in her possession; Dr Richard Brettell of the Art Institute of Chicago, for his comments and criticism; my colleagues—in particular, John Symons and William Schupbach at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, and Rosemary Milligan at the Wellcome Foundation—for their help in locating archival material and their detailed commentary on the text; Jeremy Parkes at Christie's for his help in the documentation of print sales; and Libby Howie for her advice and encouragement.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the museum and its collections see H. Turner, *Henry Wellcome: the man, his collection and his legacy*, London, Heinemann Educational Books for the Wellcome Trust, 1980; and *A vision of history: the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine*, exhibition catalogue, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London, 1 September 1986–10 April 1987. In planning the European collecting mission of 1927, Wellcome was particularly concerned with forestalling the efforts of "various wealthy institutions" in America who were "organizing expeditions to ransack Europe and other parts of the world to make collections and to establish museums on the same lines as the W.H.M.M. [Wellcome Historical Medical Museum], or to surpass it"; "Copy of letter from Mr. Wellcome to Mr. Pearson dated 19th August, 1927, re Mr. Johnston-Saint's proposed visit to the Continent" (hereinafter referred to as Wellcome to Pearson, 19 August 1927) Captain Peter Johnston-Saint's *Reports* (hereinafter referred to as *Reports*), 1927, preserved in the Archives, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. George E. Pearson was appointed general manager of the Museum in 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Before being employed as Secretary to the Museum in 1920, Johnston-Saint, a Cambridge graduate, served in the Indian Army and the Royal Flying Corps. His 1927 and 1928 trips in Europe to collect for Wellcome led to his appointment as Foreign Secretary to the Museum in the autumn of 1928, whereupon he devoted his time to assembling material and to the Museum's external relations. Subsequently (1934–37), he was Conservator at the Museum and responsible for arranging exhibits. *A vision of history*, op. cit., note 2 above, p. 15. See also Wellcome to Pearson, 19 August 1927, item #14: "The main object and purpose of the mission is to secure as *free gifts to the Museum all possible relics* and other materials connected or associated with the life work of the great scientific research workers and discoverers in the various fields of science. This applies especially to those associated with medicine, surgery and the allied arts of healing, preserving life, and postponing death"; *Reports*, 1927.

open-air markets, and higher-class book, art and antique dealers.<sup>4</sup> Johnston-Saint was instructed to keep detailed records of activities and expenses,<sup>5</sup> and his reports offer a fascinating account of collecting on a scale and on behalf of a single individual which is almost inconceivable barely sixty years later.<sup>6</sup>

Wellcome, whose fortune had been built on his pharmaceutical business,<sup>7</sup> devoted the last forty years of his life to amassing material, a small portion of which was put on temporary display in 1913, while the rest remained in packing-cases; his vision of a museum of mankind was never realized.<sup>8</sup> Wellcome insisted on being kept informed of the details of potential and actual purchases, and Johnston-Saint's and other agents' accounts, reports, and correspondence in the archives of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine often contain his notes and responses or reveal his underlying concerns.<sup>9</sup>

Wellcome's interest in the instruments, equipment, books, manuscripts, graphic prints, and photographs which he and his agents collected was primarily in their relation to the progressive development of medical and anthropological history and their association with significant individuals in the disciplines.<sup>10</sup> Rarity was desirable<sup>11</sup> but not of paramount importance; it was often difficult to determine just how rare an object or book was, beyond the combined personal experience and recollection of the agent and Wellcome.<sup>12</sup> Aesthetic quality was not necessarily a concern; for a collector whose interest lay in the subject, a damaged or soiled engraved portrait secured for a paltry price, or, still better, a group of prints purchased for the price of a single one by a

<sup>4</sup> Wellcome to Pearson, 19 August 1927, *Reports*, 1927. See also, 'Brief report on my visit to Paris May 17th to 27th', *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>5</sup> Wellcome to Pearson, 19 August 1927, item #7, *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>6</sup> According to G. M. Skinner, "by the early 1930s, Wellcome's collection was five times larger than that of the Louvre and, during the 1920s, its annual expenditure on acquisitions exceeded that of the British Museum." G. M. Skinner, 'Sir Henry Wellcome's museum for the science of history', *Medical History*, 1986, 30: 383–418, p. 383. In the effort to reduce the collection to a manageable size and concentrate its scope, the British Museum in 1949 helped with the dispersal of much of the ethnographic collections, and in the 1970s the Science Museum received the Wellcome historical medical collection on permanent loan; see G. Russell's article in the *Museums Journal*. Vol. 86, Supplement 1986.

<sup>7</sup> In September 1880, Henry S. Wellcome and Silas Burroughs, two Americans, founded the pharmaceutical firm, Burroughs, Wellcome & Co., in London. See R. C. E. Milligan, 'Sir Henry Wellcome', in D. J. Jeremy (editor), *Dictionary of business biography: a biographical dictionary of business leaders active in Britain in the period 1860–1980*, vol. 15, London, Butterworth, 1986, pp. 728–735.

<sup>8</sup> See note 6 and Turner, op. cit., note 2 above.

<sup>9</sup> Preserved in the Archives, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. Wellcome often annotated his agents' reports, making queries, underscoring important points, and noting reminders to himself and his staff.

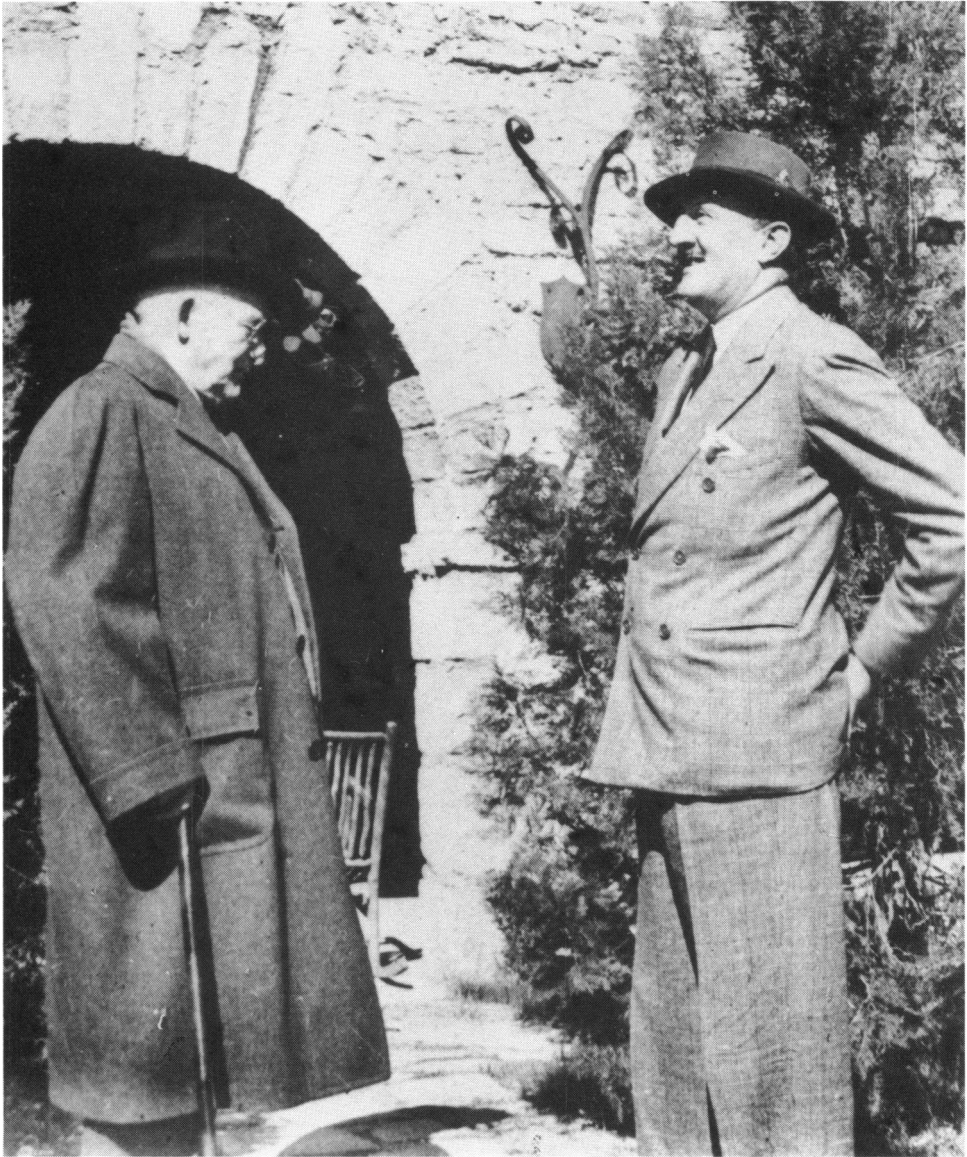
<sup>10</sup> Wellcome to Pearson, item #14, *Reports*, 1927. For an analysis of the purpose and scope of Wellcome's collecting see Skinner, op. cit., note 6 above.

<sup>11</sup> *Reports*, 31 October–6 November 1927, 6–13 November 1927, and 21–26 November 1927. The latter report dealt with a trip to La Turbie where Johnston-Saint saw a portrait of François Rabelais, "one of the distinguished professors of the Montpellier school;" the iconography of the image particularly interested him: "this portrait is interesting as it portrays him wearing his academic robes and is, I think, quite a rare one." He paid 25 francs (4s. 2d.) for the portrait.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* See also Johnston-Saint to Wellcome 26 February 1926, *Reports*, 1926, concerning a manuscript on vellum dated 1730: "I consulted Mr. Hewitt, who said we had nothing quite like it." Johnston-Saint also often took the word of the owners of the objects concerning the comparative rarity of the material: see for example *Reports* 31 October–6 November 1927.



Vincent van Gogh, 'L'Homme à la Pipe (Dr Gachet)', etching, 25 May 1890.



**Sir Henry Wellcome (left) and Captain Johnston-Saint in Florida, 1936.**

major artist, was considered a successful purchase.<sup>13</sup> Wellcome, indeed, forewent the top end of the market, preferring to scour the middle and lower ranges for collectable items.<sup>14</sup>

Often, the specific provenance cannot be established for many of the prints today included in the Iconographic Collections at the Wellcome Institute.<sup>15</sup> For instance, one might conjecture that prints of famous French physicians might have been included in a group purchase made by Johnston-Saint from the print stalls he visited along the Seine in 1927, but definite proof is elusive.<sup>16</sup> However, for one print, and one of remarkable quality in the context of Wellcome's collecting practices, provenance can be determined from the Johnston-Saint reports: Vincent van Gogh's portrait of Dr Paul-Ferdinand Gachet.

In preparation for his 1927 tour of France, Johnston-Saint wrote to Paul-Louis Gachet (1873–1962), a medical practitioner and son of Paul-Ferdinand Gachet (1828–1909).<sup>17</sup> Gachet *père* was a general practitioner and a proponent of vitalism and homoeopathy, whose expertise included the treatment of melancholia.<sup>18</sup> Johnston-Saint first sought to determine what effects still remained which had been associated with Gachet, his practice, and his colleagues.<sup>19</sup> In particular, Wellcome and Johnston-Saint were to be most concerned with items connected with Gachet's work in electrical therapeutics and with the sketch made by Gachet's friend, Amand Gautier d'Agoty (1825–94), which illustrated the cholera epidemic of 1847.<sup>20</sup> Johnston-Saint's

<sup>13</sup> In Johnston-Saint's report of 10 June 1927 from Paris, a collection of prints and portraits purchased for £12 3s. 7d. in the university quarter was compared favourably to the price of a collection (evidently not purchased) of odd prints that came up at Puttick & Simpson's in London "some time ago" for £450. *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>14</sup> In Johnston-Saint's report listing purchases made in Paris in October 1927, he describes the scene along the Seine to Wellcome: "The objects purchased in items 12–16 were purchased from many of the stalls situated on the Seine banks and entailed many hours of search. These stalls are similar to the Caledonian market in England and no receipts are given . . ." *Reports*, 1927. See also Skinner, *op. cit.*, note 6 above, p. 404.

<sup>15</sup> As was the case with much of the material collected by Wellcome, including the anthropological items; see *ibid.*, p. 404. A set of index cards in the Archives at the Wellcome Institute contains references to purchase records and prices for prints; but linking the basic descriptions recorded by staff with individual prints in the collection today often proves difficult.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Johnston-Saint's report from Paris dated 10 June 1927 contained the following general rather than specific information: "In my last letter I meant to give you particulars of a fine collection of prints and portraits of doctors which we have obtained from France. Whilst over there I found in a small shop in the University quarter a collection of 252 portraits we have acquired this collection for the sum of Frs. 1,500 (£12.3.7)." *Reports*, 1927. William Schupbach has just drawn my attention to prints accessioned as PR 1054-1149 that correspond to purchases made from Seine print sellers.

<sup>17</sup> Johnston-Saint, 'Brief report on my visit to Paris May 17th to 27th', *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* See also J. Vinchon, 'Paul Gachet, peintre, graveur et médecin de la Faculté de Montpellier', *Monspeliensis Hippocrates*, 1959, 2: 30–32. Gachet looked after Meryon when he became insane; C. Nordenfalk, *The life and work of Vincent van Gogh*, London, Elek, 1953, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Johnston-Saint, 'Brief report on my visit to Paris May 17th to 27th', *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* See also Henry S. Wellcome 'Comments on Brief Report by Mr. Johnston-Saint re His Visit to Paris May 17th to 27th 1927': "2. Make a very special point of looking out for D'Agoty's pictures of medical, surgical, anatomical and allied subjects. It is very important that we should get the D'Agoty sketches in the possession of Dr. Gachet. 3. When Dr. Gachet sees the W.H.M.M. Handbook, [and] Lister Booklet [exhibition held in 1927] he may be still more glad to have his father's collection and relics placed in our Museum. This matter should be followed up very soon, and efforts made to get all that is possible of this material." See also letter from Johnston-Saint 17 June 1927 (54A Wigmore St. London W1) to Wellcome at The Arlington Hotel, Washington D.C., where Johnston-Saint describes the Gachet material as forming a "very interesting series in the development" of electro-therapeutical treatment. *Reports*, 1927.

approach was dual. An offer to *purchase* significant items was augmented by an appeal to the family's desire to preserve Gachet's name for posterity by offering to preserve *donated* items in the context of a museum devoted to the "history of medicine and allied sciences throughout the world from prehistoric times"; Johnston-Saint was ultimately successful in both approaches.<sup>21</sup>

Amidst the magneto-electrical apparatus, areometers, surgical instruments, and professional effects, such as a stamp for heading prescriptions and a brass door-plate, which were purchased and donated from the collection of the deceased Dr Gachet, was a certain " 'L'Homme à la Pipe' [Dr Gachet] gravée par van Gogh", secured for 700 francs (converted for Wellcome by Johnston-Saint into English currency at £5 16s. 8d.)<sup>22</sup> Given the context of his collecting practices, it is doubtful whether Wellcome appreciated the art-historical significance of the print; it represents van Gogh's only etching, dating from May 1890, which was initially printed on Gachet's private press.<sup>23</sup> Gachet was himself an artist and an enthusiast of etching, and a friend of Camille Pissarro, Jean-Baptiste-Armand Guillaumin, and Paul Cézanne, whose experiments in etching had also been encouraged by Gachet.<sup>24</sup>

Van Gogh had gone to Auvers-sur-Oise, a town north of Paris, in May 1890, following a period in the asylum at Saint-Rémy. Gachet, who had prior experience of treating patients with mental illnesses, had agreed to a request from Theo van Gogh, the artist's brother, to keep an eye on Vincent.<sup>25</sup> It was the artist Pissarro who had initially suggested that Theo van Gogh should contact Gachet.<sup>26</sup>

Gachet's own theory of the treatment of mental cases strongly emphasized the value of occupational therapy as a means of re-integrating patients into society.<sup>27</sup> Putting his theory into practice, Gachet offered himself and his family members as models for Vincent.<sup>28</sup> The painter also had a standing invitation to dine at and come to Gachet's

<sup>21</sup> The Museum letterhead reads "The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum: A Collection illustrating the History of medicine and allied science throughout the world from prehistoric times." For the contents of the initial instalment see 'List of Collection of the late Dr. Gachet. Bought from M. Gachet. 6th October 1927', *Reports*, 1927. After Johnston-Saint's initial meeting with Gachet, he noted "A number of things were presented; the remainder he priced at a figure which was really nominal . . . Dr. Gachet told me that he was very glad that his father's things were coming to this Museum, and that later on he would consider letting us have some pictures, diplomas, decorations and other objects which are connected with his father and his work, and which are at his house in the country. He asked me to come down to see them next time I am in Paris. Dr. Gachet is a man who in all probability will be of extreme use to us in the future, and he was extremely kind to me in every way." 'Brief report on my visit to Paris May 17th to 27th', *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>22</sup> 'List of the Collection of the late Dr. Gachet. Bought from M. Gachet. 6th October 1927', *Reports*, 1927. See also the list of receipts received 30 May 1927; *Reports*, 1927. On this typed receipt list Wellcome queried the English equivalents of the prices which Johnston-Saint quoted in French francs; Johnston-Saint would convert the values in his subsequent reports.

<sup>23</sup> M. Melot, *L'estampe impressioniste*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1974, p. 134.

<sup>24</sup> In the summer of 1873, Gachet made his press available to Pissarro, Cézanne, and Guillaumin. G. S. Shapiro, 'Pissarro as printmaker', exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London, 30 October 1980 to 11 January 1981, pp. 196 and 200. See also Melot, op. cit., note 23 above.

<sup>25</sup> P. Gachet, *Deux amis des impressionistes; le docteur Gachet et Murer*, Paris, Musées Nationaux, 1956, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> L. Trenard, 'Paul Ferdinand Gachet,' *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, Paris, Librairie Letouzey, 1979, vol. 14, p. 1526.

<sup>27</sup> R. Fabbri, 'Dr. Paul-Ferdinand Gachet: Vincent van Gogh's last physician', *Trans. Stud. Coll. Physns Philadelphia*, 1965-66, 33: 202-204.

house at any time. Gachet's interest in art, both as a practising artist and friend of artists, initially encouraged a warm relationship.<sup>29</sup>

Inspired by Gachet to experiment with etching, van Gogh chose to record Gachet himself in his only attempt. In facial characterization the print is similar to the two portraits of Gachet in oil which van Gogh described as "bearing the expression of slight distress characteristic of our time".<sup>30</sup> The print in the Wellcome Library's Inconographic Collections is an impression later pulled by the son,<sup>31</sup> who himself became a painter and sculptor.<sup>32</sup>

For Wellcome, the £5 16s. 8d. price for a single etching represents a rather expensive purchase when considered in the context of the other items bought from Gachet and others during Johnston-Saint's trip through Europe in 1927. For example, Johnston-Saint reported that he had acquired 252 portraits and prints from a small shop in the university quarter of Paris for £12 3s. 7d. in June,<sup>33</sup> an eighteenth-century figure (sculpture?) of "St Barbe" in Belgium for £4 11s. 6d. in September,<sup>34</sup> and a collection of portraits and prints from Paul Proute in Paris for £3 12s. 2d. in October.<sup>35</sup>

It is difficult to determine how Gachet and Johnston-Saint determined and/or agreed on the price for the van Gogh etching. In terms of the contemporary London and Edinburgh markets for Impressionist and post-Impressionist prints by continental artists, the price seems reasonable. For instance, seven Gauguin prints were sold at Sotheby's on 23 March 1926 at prices ranging from £1 15s. to £30.<sup>36</sup> A third state of Edouard Manet's *Le Gamin* sold for £4 at Sotheby's on 1 June 1928,<sup>37</sup> four Camille Pissarro's were sold at various Sotheby's sales in 1929 and 1930 ranging from 15s. to £3,<sup>38</sup> and his portrait of Paul Cézanne (first state) sold there on 22 June 1927 for £10 10s.<sup>39</sup> No impression of van Gogh's *L'Homme à la Pipe* appeared in the listings of *Print prices current* between 1929 and 1936; only on 30 April 1937 did an impression surface for \$75 at the American Art Association's Anderson Galleries in New York<sup>40</sup>—a price, location, and date which shed little light on the French purchase of 1927. The auction listings do, however, provide evidence of the comparative rarity of the print during the period.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206. See also V. Doiteau, 'La curieuse figure du Dr. Gachet: un ami et un amateur de la première heure de Cézanne, Renoir, Pissarro, van Gogh', *Aesculape*, 1923, pp. 250–254 and 278–283.

<sup>29</sup> The relationship was to cool suddenly due to Gachet's not following van Gogh's insistence that an oil painting by Guillaumin should be framed. Fabbri, *op. cit.*, note 27 above, p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> Nordenfalk, *op. cit.*, note 18 above, p. 193; and J-B de La Faille, *Vincent van Gogh*, London, Heinemann, 1939, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Image size with platemark: 17.9 × 15.0 cm, printed on buff laid paper size: 36.8 × 23.7 cm with some plate tone in lower right portion of jacket and background to the right. Gachet collector's stamp (cat's head) printed in red on lower centre margin, recto. Watermark partially visible from left side: lower portion of device ending with two s-curves. Inscribed on verso in Gachet  *fils* ' hand: "L'Homme à la Pipe [Dr. Gachet.] E'au forte unique de Vincent van Gogh Auvers 25 Mai 1890 [signed] Paul Gachet".

<sup>32</sup> Trenard, *op. cit.*, note 26 above, p. 1528.

<sup>33</sup> Johnston-Saint, report, Paris, 20 June 1927. *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>34</sup> Johnston-Saint report, Paris, 2 September 1927, described to Wellcome as patron saint of artillerymen and explosives. *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>35</sup> Johnston-Saint report, purchases October 1927, item #7. *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>36</sup> *Print Prices Current*, 1925–1926, 8: 171.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1927–1928, 10: 220.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1929–1930, 12: 223.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1926–1927, 9: 156.

It is clear that the initial purchases from Gachet on 6 October 1927, which included the van Gogh etching, were considered a first, although significant, instalment.<sup>41</sup> Both Wellcome and Johnston-Saint were extremely eager to acquire a sketch by Amand Gautier d'Agoty, which depicted the cholera epidemic in Paris in 1840; the delay in negotiating purchase was attributed to Gachet's intention to write a book on d'Agoty.<sup>42</sup> Protracted correspondence between Johnston-Saint and Gachet and Johnston-Saint and Wellcome took place, with the sketch eventually finding its way to Wellcome's collection.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, despite Wellcome's stated desire to avoid excessive expenditure and to pursue bargains wherever possible,<sup>44</sup> he apparently agreed to pay a comparatively substantial amount for a single print. He must have done so because the print was associated with the other items of primary interest to his historical medical museum, and because of the subject of the image itself, a respected French medical man, whose visage would be incorporated into the larger corpus of images of eminent medical men which Wellcome was assembling.<sup>45</sup>

A postscript to the purchases of October 1927 emerged later in 1931. Between 1927 and 1931, Paul Gachet and Johnston-Saint had been intermittently in touch, either by post or by meeting in Paris or Auvers-sur-Oise.<sup>46</sup> A warm friendship seems to have emerged,<sup>47</sup> founded on common interest, including art and medicine, and respect, which extended beyond the necessary negotiations for material yet remaining in the family. Their personal friendship was particularly enhanced by their shared enthusiasm for French Impressionist art; an expression of this can be found in Gachet

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1936–1937, 19: 108: "Vincent van Gogh 'l'Homme à la Pipe' etching: inscribed in ink on the margin: Souvenir amical à M. Loys Deltiel pour les deux Van Ryssel [artist pseudonyms of Gachet *père* and *fils*] (signed) Van Ryssel on tan paper in perfect condition." Sold at the American Art Association's Anderson Galleries (New York) 30 April 1937 for \$75. An impression pulled by Gachet *fils* was sold at Christie's (London) 2 December 1982 (lot 78) for £7,560. The previous lot (#77), a pen transfer lithograph entitled "Dans le Verger" (de la Faille 1659) sold for £30,240.

<sup>41</sup> Johnston-Saint, 'Visit to Dr. Gachet', *Reports*, 5–8 October 1927, with Henry Wellcome's comments.

<sup>42</sup> See note 20. See also 'Captain Saint's diary 5th–8th October 1927'. *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>43</sup> Mr. Johnston Saint's diary 18th–24th January 1928', *Reports*, 1928. Acquired with the Amand Gautier d'Agoty scene showing the cholera epidemic in the Jura were letters written by insane persons at the hospital of Saltpêtrière in Paris. The drawing was listed among the purchases in Johnston-Saint's *Reports* for the week ending 14 February 1928 at a sum of 1500 f. (£12).

<sup>44</sup> Wellcome to Pearson, 19 August 1927, *Reports*, 1927.

<sup>45</sup> Wellcome was making a collection of paintings, prints, and photographs of eminent medical and scientific men; for some of the prints acquired during Wellcome's collecting period see R. Burgess, *Portraits of doctors and scientists in the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine*, London, Wellcome Institute, 1973. Wellcome also commissioned copies in oil and purchased original portraits of famous medical men, which were intended to form a portrait gallery at Wigmore Street; at one stage in the 1930s, the Euston Road museum plans also contained a portrait gallery, never realized.

<sup>46</sup> Johnston-Saint, 19 October 1928, *Reports*, 1928. Johnston-Saint to Gachet, 5 May 1928, 12 October 1928 and 16 January 1928, *Correspondence* in the Archives of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine (hereafter referred to as *Correspondence*, 1928).

<sup>47</sup> Johnston-Saint, 19 October 1928, *Reports*, 1928; 5 May 1928, Johnston-Saint to Gachet, *Correspondence*, 1928; Gachet to Johnston-Saint, 6 August 1930, *Correspondence*, 1930. See also correspondence from 1927 and letter dated 30 March 1957 from Gachet to Johnston-Saint in the collection of Viscountess Sandon, Johnston-Saint's daughter. Johnston-Saint seems to have been extremely adept at gaining a potential donor's confidence and at staying in contact, as his other correspondence in the Archives at the Wellcome Institute reveals.



sending Johnston-Saint an etching his father had made after a painting of Sydenham Church by Pissarro.<sup>48</sup>

In 1931, Gachet approached Wellcome in the hope that the museum would publish his illustrated article on his father.<sup>49</sup> This article was to portray Gachet *père* as an etcher, not as a medical man. In contrast to his other letters, written in French with a flourishing hand, Gachet had this letter translated and typed;<sup>50</sup> his intent in departing from his usual practice was to show that his proposed manuscript would be supplied ready for an English-speaking audience and thereby would cause the museum no trouble. Through Johnston-Saint, Wellcome declined the offer, stating that there was no certainty of publishing it in the near future.<sup>51</sup>

At that date, the museum was in no position to be publishing because it was understaffed and the personnel were confronted with large quantities of unsorted material and lack of space, while the collecting of new material continued unabated.<sup>52</sup> The negative response also betrays Wellcome's primary concern with his collection as a museum of mankind and his only secondary interest in the aesthetic value of items.<sup>53</sup> His interest in Gachet lay in the *items* associated with Gachet's medical *practice*,<sup>54</sup> the

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication from Viscountess Sandon. Johnston-Saint owned a copy of R. H. Wilenski's *Modern French painters* (London, Faber & Faber, 1939), into which he placed clippings, postcards, and typed commentary about Impressionist artists. He also included an article from the *Daily Mail* (1952) about Gachet *fil's* donation of Impressionist paintings to the Louvre. The book was inscribed to Jeanette [Viscountess Sandon] who, following his enthusiasm, trained as a painter and has exhibited at the Royal Academy. Gachet *père's* etching after Pissarro is printed on wove paper, 9.8 × 12.9 cm, with the image size of 8.9 × 12.7 cm. It is signed in the plate "P. V. Ryssel" [Gachet *père*] in the lower right corner. The print is inscribed on the reverse: "Eglise de Sydenham (Angleterre) Peinture de C. Pissarro (1871) Eauforte de P. Van Ryssel (Dr. Gachet)" in Gachet *fil's* hand. It is accompanied by a dedication to "mon cher Bibliophile" by "Dr. Gachet" [*père?*] and a card in Johnston-Saint's hand identifying the artist and subject in English.

<sup>49</sup> Gachet to the Director (Wellcome), June 1931, *Correspondence*, 1931:

"Dear Sir. Knowing the interest you have taken in Doctor Gachet and how you have already honoured his memory, I take the liberty of asking you whether you would care to publish an essay which I have written about my father, in a domain in which he was quite well known: the domain of Art.

In France, the review 'Aesculape' has devoted several articles to him, signed by Dr. Doiteau. In Germany, in England, in America and in Japan he is remembered as the friend and often as the doctor of many artists now famous. It is less generally known that he himself was a painter and an etcher; and it is in fact the history of a part of his life as an artist which I wished to describe.

If you are interested in publishing this essay, I will offer it to you *absolutely gratuitously*. The text which I would submit to you is English, as I have had it very carefully translated for this purpose.

Further, as it is essential that a work of this sort should be illustrated, I will have ten photographs taken from his principal etchings, at my own expense. These I would send you, so that you would have only the stereotype plates to make.

If you are able to meet my proposition I shall be very much flattered; if, on the contrary, you prefer not to undertake the work, I trust you will forgive me for any inconvenience I may have caused you."

<sup>50</sup> While many foreign letters were translated for the record by staff members following their reception at the Museum, the presence of Gachet's signature on this typed letter proves that Gachet had the letter translated before sending it to London, where it was received on 1 July 1931. Gachet to the Director, June 1931, *Correspondence*, 1931. Gachet also sent a handwritten version of the same letter to the Director, *Correspondence*, 1931.

<sup>51</sup> Johnston-Saint to Gachet, 27 June 1931, *Correspondence*, 1928. Gachet *fil's* would eventually publish an artistic biography of his father (op. cit., note 25 above).

<sup>52</sup> Turner, op. cit., note 2 above, pp. 51–52.

<sup>53</sup> Skinner, op. cit., note 6 above, p. 404.

<sup>54</sup> In this, Wellcome was pursuing the cult of the eminent physician, assembling memorabilia such as the academic robes of Sir William Osler (1849–1919); see *ibid.*, p. 406.

subsequent emerging fame of Gachet as a printmaker and friend of the impressionists was a chapter tangential to his own grand scheme.

As a fine-art and art-historically important work, the van Gogh etching is an extraordinary item, given the context of Wellcome's collecting practices. Yet its acquisition is consistent with the Wellcome Institute Library's Inconographic Collections' policy of pursuing objects whose significance resided in their iconography and their association with eminent figures in medical history.

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## *News, Notes, and Queries*

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### BLISTS HILL OPEN AIR MUSEUM

The Doctor's Surgery is the newest exhibit at Blists Hill Open Air Museum, one of the sites of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. Blists Hill is a reconstruction of a small industrial village of *c.* 1895, and the Surgery is typical of the many one-man "working-class" practices which could be found in the industrial conurbations and mining areas of Britain. Blists Hill is open from March to October. Further information about the exhibit can be obtained by contacting the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Ironbridge, Telford, Shropshire TF8 7AW.

### ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF LONDON THE FITZPATRICK LECTURE 1987

The Fitzpatrick Lecture 1987, entitled "A History of Asthma", will be delivered by Dr Alex Sakula FRCP, at the Royal College of Physicians, 11 St. Andrew's Place, Regents Park, London, NW1, on Wednesday, 10 June 1987 at 6.00 pm.

### NEW APPOINTMENT

Charles G. Roland, MD, Jason A. Hannah Professor of the History of Medicine at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, has been appointed editor-in-chief of the *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* by the Canadian Society for the History of Medicine. Dr. Roland succeeds the founding editor, Kenneth B. Roberts, PHD, who is the John Clinch Professor of the History of Physiology and Medicine at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland.

### AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE CALL FOR PAPERS 1988 ANNUAL MEETING

The 1988 meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana, from 4 to 7 May 1988. Any subject in the history of medicine is suitable for presentation, but the paper must represent original work not