

The Brucellosis Museum in Valletta

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The booklet *Sir Temi Zammit's laboratory*¹ celebrated the opening of the restored laboratory in the Department of Health building in Valletta. It was published by the Maltese Government and is no longer available although an occasional copy has been offered on e-bay. This booklet and its companion about the transmission of brucellosis² have no ISBN code and may not even be covered by copyright. It would be a fitting memorial to Dr. Paul Cassar for them to be reprinted – if published as a supplement to the *Malta Medical Journal*, they would be available again. The museum in the Castellania Palace in Valletta commemorates the work of the Mediterranean Fever Commission (MFC) and Sir Temi Zammit in particular. As suggested by Paul Cassar,² it should be visited by all medical and nursing students, to hear a talk about the work of Zammit, Malta's most famous doctor. Public access to the museum is difficult, but might be arranged for small groups on announced days and times..

Zammit's laboratory was actually on the floor below, converted many years ago into offices and now obscured by partitions. The photograph of Zammit in his laboratory shows that it led into a second room.² The restored laboratory is a single room which no longer has the speaking tube to Zammit's laboratory on the floor beneath.²

In both booklets, Cassar included the 1906 photograph of the MFC. Horrocks who was the senior investigator, was absent in 1906. The original members, photographed in June 1904, were Bruce, Horrocks, Shaw, Zammit and Johnson, with Kennedy who became a full member in January 1905. These were the members who made the original research in 1904 and 1905 which led to the discovery of the transmission of brucellosis. Majors McNaught, McCulloch and Weir, Staff Surgeon Clayton and Dr. Eyre came to Malta in 1906 to finish the work of the others. Surprisingly, the initials of McNaught and Weir are different in the two booklets.

When the members of the MFC assembled in Malta in May 1904, three were already working in their own laboratories. Zammit used his own laboratory and Kennedy probably used the old Bruce laboratory in the Station Hospital at the northern end of Valletta. Shaw continued in isolation in the Royal Naval Hospital across Grand Harbour at Bighi. Johnson would have worked in the cool rooms of the Palace rather than the 'stifling' laboratory. The MFC room was used by Horrocks and by Zammit and Kennedy for their work with the monkeys kept on the roof. I have been told

that Zammit kept his two goats on the first floor landing, outside his laboratory before moving them and the kid to the Lazaretto in May 1905.

In spite of the complete disappearance of the disease from the British armed forces in Malta with the banning of goats' milk and its replacement with tinned or condensed milk, there was opposition by some Maltese to the idea that goats were implicated. Following an article in a British magazine, Dr Hadwen came to Malta to make his case that the goats' milk theory was an illusion. While there he and his daughter drank goats' milk freely with no ill results.

Hadwen was the Secretary and later the President of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection. Renamed the Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research, it is still a leading charity. He was a prominent vegetarian and anti-vaccinationist, admired by George Bernard Shaw. He came again to Malta in 1914, but by 1916 the controversy had fizzled out. Recently Dr Hadwen was featured in an article in the *British Medical Journal* which discussed his trial in Britain on a charge of the manslaughter of a patient.³ He was acquitted.

The Palace also houses historic documents locked in a cupboard in the Minister's office. When in 2008 I enquired about them, no-one knew of their existence until I spoke to the minister's secretary who holds the key. There is no record of the documents and the original gold-medal MD thesis by Captain J. Crawford Kennedy R.A.M.C. (presented to Malta by his daughter some years ago) is missing. The minutes of the Malta Branch of the British Medical Association, quoted by Cassar² have also disappeared from the Branch archives. A more suitable home for the remaining documents and slides would be the Melitensis Collection of the University of Malta Library, which contains Zammit documents. Papers about Zammit, brucellosis, and a PowerPoint presentation with commentary, may be downloaded from: <http://sites.google.com/site/vivianwyatt/>

References

1. Anon. *Sir Temi Zammit's laboratory*. Department of Health and Environment, Malta 1980.
2. Cassar P. *Sir Themistocles Zammit and the controversy on the goat's role in the transmission of Brucellosis (Mediterranean Fever) 1909-1916*. Information Division-Kastilja, Valletta, Malta 1981.
3. Dalrymple T. One of the awkward squad. *BMJ* 2008; 336: 1381 (June 14).