

When the first part of Prof Philip Tobias's autobiography 'Into the Past: a Memoir' was recently launched in Cape Town we were fortunate enough to secure a copy autographed by arguably one of South Africa's most illustrious and popular scientists. The book invites the reader not only into his personal history, but the intriguing world of fossils and human evolution evident in the numerous local sites of early hominid activity. Biological anatomy, human evolution, anthropological evolution, evolutionary genetics, evolutionary medicine, epidemiology... a rose by any other name... its all about the study of humankind, disease processes, our physical and social responses to disease and illness and ultimately our ability to control and eradicate the same. Highly pertinent when one considers the number of epidemics and pandemics present and looming with which contemporary society has to deal. Hopefully someday the devastation caused by conditions such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and avian flu might yet be contained.

**NOTE:** Prof Philip Valentine Tobias who recently celebrated his eightieth birthday is Professor Emeritus of Anatomy and Human Biology at the University of Witwatersrand where he worked for 48 years (1945 - 1993). He holds several honorary titles associated with the Sterkfontein Caves in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, which includes the newly opened Philip Tobias Orientation Centre, so named in recognition of his 60 years of scientific research on fossils at the Caves.

That the Spanish 'Flu of 1918 owes its origins to avian flu is a generally accepted assumption. There is a theory that the source was an outbreak of the virus amongst the poultry retained by British troops during the Great War of 1914 in the over crowded transit camp in Etambles, Northern France. The symptoms were horrendous the victim either surviving or dying a violent death within three days. The current avian flu epidemics in various parts of the East are a cause of immense concern, and although implementing measures of control are extremely scientific, the spread of disease would most probably be that much more dramatic in a shrinking global environment. There is much speculation with regard to the reasons for, and control of what could become a world wide pandemic. It seems to me that some considered thought around the question of ethics and the commodification of living creatures might throw some light on the matter. The study of genetics and evolution are pivotal tools in dealing with this virus as a recent article in Die Burger (26.11.05) states. Medical researchers in the US have managed to research the 1918 virus and decipher its genome, and it is hoped that this knowledge will enable scientists to develop antibodies to counter a repetition of this catastrophe. The virus has already crossed the boundary between birds and humans, but has not yet mutated so far that it is able to be transmitted from human to human. If the Spanish flu killed tens of millions of people how many more would be lost today. Lets hope for the best in this race against time.

Sadly Philip Isaacs, celebrated in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest practicing pharmacist died earlier this year. We were delighted to have been given the opportunity to interview him in 2001 which featured in our newsletter of the same year. Philip Isaacs was a true professional of the old order and right up to his retirement a few short years ago from the landmark Camp's Bay Pharmacy, went to work in waistcoat and tie. The beachfront property – shop and apartment - which he occupied for 75 years fell under the auctioneers hammer on Nov 10 this year signifying the end an era.

## **MUSEUM MATTERS**

- It is heartening to report that visitor numbers continue to grow over the years. We took over 76 school bookings this year involving around 5000 learners. Well done to our unofficial educational officer Mrs. Theresa Cay and Ms Annette Cewu, our third staff member who assists.
- A guided tour given by Prof Howard Phillips, Dept of Historical Studies, UCT of the old Somerset Hospital was most interesting. Prof Phillips' annual pilgrimage to the Museum with seemingly increasing numbers of students of medical history is much appreciated.
- Several new and revamped displays have been completed and are now fully trilingual – in the three official languages of the Province.

## **THANKS**

Many thanks to

- South African Medical Association for the annual cash donation to the Friends Society, and special acknowledgement to Dr John Steer for his on-going interest in and support of the Museum.
- Prof J C de Villiers for his many gifts of old instruments and documents
- Dr A Michalovsky for the use of his wonderful collection of postcards of old hospitals in the Cape and beyond
- Dr. H R Sanders for bringing new members to the Society.

## **FRIENDS ACTIVITIES**

- The Friends' AGM which took place in May was well attended and a great success. Dr Saville Furman's talk 'Health Care, Who Cares?' peppered with much humour raised many questions and lively discussion, in fact the meeting which started just after 18h00 ended at 21h00!
- A recent visit to the Masonic Lodge proved to be most fascinating. Intriguing architecture – imagine a building with a star-spangled deep blue ceiling, icons and symbols in stained glass, carved wood, marble floors - in the grounds a superb old fountain and all this adjoining the Houses of Parliament in the heart of the city. Mr. Marcus' talk on 'The da Vinci Code' provoked animated debate within minutes of commencement. A most extraordinary outing!

**OBITUARY**

Sadly, Ms Patricia McMagh a founder member of the Friends' Society, with whom we had contact over the years took leave of this life earlier in the year. Condolences are extended to her family and friends.

**WELCOME**

We greet all past members of the Committee and welcome new committee member Mrs Millie Pimstone, and new members Dr Winnie Charles van der Ross and Dr M Silbert. Also welcome Prof Sean Sellars and his wife home after a long sojourn in Ireland.

Best wishes to Prof A J Brink –artist and vintner in his wine making venture.

With thanks and best wishes on behalf of your committee which at present consists of: Mr K Marcus (chairman), Dr M de Kock (deputy chairman and treasurer), Mrs. Millie Pimstone, Prof J P van Niekerk,

Please accept this invitation to visit the Museum and restful garden graced by hadidahs, feline friends and sundry other creatures.

**GO WELL IN HEALTH AND ABUNDANCE**

\* \* \* \* \*