

Fiftieth anniversary of the Dunn School of Pathology



- 1 The Sir William Dunn School of Pathology
- 2 Dr Jean Medawar, Dr Anne Beloff-Chain, Lady Florey, Sir Peter Medawar, Sir Ernst Chain, Professor A. D. Gardner
- 3 Dr George Mackaness
- 4 Professor Dorothy Hodgkin, Professor D. Whitteridge
- 5 Professor Henry Harris



WHEN the trustees of Sir William Dunn's bequest offered to support the founding of a new pathology building in Oxford they stipulated that it should be fronted by flower beds. On 20 April, the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, only the reminiscences of the plentiful past members of the School were more colourful and varied than the flowers outside. The celebrations were launched, in a style unequalled by later speakers, by Emeritus Professor A. D. Gardner. An Oxford graduate of 1907, Gardner recalled how Sir William Dunn's money, earmarked primarily to aid the destitute and the orphaned, came to be used for funding medical research. The School's first director was Professor Georges Dreyer whose strength, said Gardner, lay in his thorough statistical approach to research which was centred on the development of tuberculosis vaccines. His weakness lay in his belief that he was infallible—a vice, Gardner emphasised, that was unique neither to the man nor the era.

After Dreyer, in 1935, came Professor Howard Florey who was remembered in his pre-war days by Sir Peter Medawar for being exhilaratingly energetic and exasperatingly anti-intellectual. The war-time saga of the isolation and first therapeutic trials of penicillin by Florey's team was narrated by Dr Norman Heatley who emphasised the contributions of novel hardware (bed-pans, biscuit tins and Russian butter tins) and novel,

hard-wearing female technicians. In 1952 when Henry Harris arrived from Sydney, Florey's direct interests in antibiotics were being wound up in J. L. Gowans' DPhil thesis. Thereafter antibiotic research was carried out under E. P. Abraham who told the story of cephalosporins from their bizarre origins in a Sardinian sewage outlet to the present day.

Florey's interests, ruled as ever according to Professor Harris by the illnesses with which he or members of his family were afflicted, turned to atherosclerosis, gastric secretion and inflammation. A three-pronged attack on inflammation was mounted by Florey through George Mackaness, Gowans and Harris who were to investigate the roles of the macrophage, the lymphocyte and the polymorph, respectively. Only Harris gave up. His decision that the polymorph had been good for a DPhil but would not do for a career brought out the fiercest in Florey. Harris was threatened with deportation to Australia, and communication between the two became confined to letters. Fortunately Harris's colleagues, particularly Abraham, rallied round and persuaded Florey to back down. Henry Harris survived to take over Florey's chair in 1963. We look forward to the 75th anniversary of the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology when tales of Henry Harris can best be told, perhaps under the shade of the ginkgo tree ceremonially planted by his wife on this occasion.

Peter Newmark