

# The world of Samuel Hahnemann

A trip round the Institut für Geschichte der Medizin's Exhibition on the History of Homoeopathy. By **Anneliese Emmans Dean BA Hons (Cantab) MIL**



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At the end of a narrow street in a quiet residential suburb of Stuttgart, south Germany, is a white stucco villa with views out across the city to the vineyards on the hills beyond. Once the home of Margret Bosch, widow of industrialist and philanthropist Robert Bosch, this building now houses the Robert Bosch Foundation's Institute for the History of Medicine (Institut für Geschichte der Medizin – IGM). Last year my husband, Mike, won the Institute's first Hans Walz Prize for a work on the history of homeopathy, and he and I were invited over there for the prize-giving.

As our taxi drove up to the Institute we were expecting to meet some of the staff, attend the award ceremony, then go on to a reception. What we didn't expect, on that chilly October afternoon, was a journey back to the very beginnings of homeopathy and into the world of Samuel Hahnemann.

This Institute, it transpired, owns a priceless collection of books, papers and artefacts that belonged to Hahnemann. The artefacts are on show in the Institute's Exhibition on the History of Homoeopathy. Professor Martin Dinges, the archivist, curator and deputy director, took us on a tour. We began in a ground-floor room lined on one side with cabinets displaying an array of exhibits, which Professor Dinges talked us through.

There was a beaded tobacco pouch made for Hahnemann by his first wife, Johanna; a pocket watch inscribed with Hahnemann's initials; two stethoscopes – new inventions at the time – that belonged to Hahnemann; and a lock of hair

– yes, Samuel Hahnemann's own hair. Then on to photos of his second wife Mélanie; a lorgnette, which she's wearing on a chain in the photos; a silver inkstand, cup and plate that belonged to her; and a fob – attached to another of Hahnemann's pocket watches – braided from her own hair.

Standing in front of these objects was an extraordinary experience – taking me into the life of a man who, up till then, had been a distant figure in books. Most compelling of all the exhibits, for me, were the remedy kits. There was an early kit in a blue cardboard box lined with a small piece of silk. In it were 60 small glass vials of remedies, each stoppered with a cork bung, some of them still containing tiny white hand-made globules – remedies used by Hahnemann himself as he began developing his new system of medicine. Who had taken doses from these vials? What effect had they had? What had Hahnemann learnt from each prescription?

And on to another remedy kit, a chest embossed in gold, with the words *Similia Similibus Curantur* on the lid. This chest contained 197 small vials, like miniature test tubes, again many full of tiny globules, and stoppered with cork bungs labelled in Hahnemann's own hand.

The largest kits on display, from the 1840s, were housed in beautiful wooden chests – one containing 600 remedy bottles. How the materia medica had grown from the earliest kit to this. And what an air of confidence there was about these later chests. One has Hahnemann's initials inlaid on

the lid in the centre of an eight-point star, radiating confidence, affluence, achievement. What a journey of commitment, experimentation and vision had led from the earliest remedy kit to this one. Here was the development of homeopathy before my very eyes.

My favourite remedy kit was a small folding leather *étui* with numbered red leather loops to hold in place 24 vials of remedies. Except these vials were not like all the others. No, glass was too fragile for a travelling kit, it would have shattered too easily. These test tube-shaped vials were in fact goose quills – incredibly, most of them still intact. The quills contained, among other remedies, *Arnica*, *Arsenicum*, *Belladonna*, *Bryonia*, *Carbo vegetabilis*, *Ignatia*, *Ipecacuanha*, *Nux vomica*, *Phosphorus*, *Pulsatilla*, *Rhus toxicodendron*, *Sulphur* and *Symphytum*.

Mike was particularly taken by a painting of Hahnemann, thought to be by Mélanie, from around 1835. It's a loving portrait of a gently smiling man – more flattering, it has to be said, than the adjacent daguerrotype taken not long afterwards, in which the ravages of time (Hahnemann was in his eighties by then) are all too apparent.

Professor Dinges then took us down into the basement, where the Institute's precious archives are stored under lock and key. He led us through stack upon stack of books and papers in a series of windowless rooms with controlled humidity and temperature. We stopped at a collection of volumes at the far end of a row, and Professor Dinges pulled out an ornate



leather-bound volume, which he opened. We were looking at Hahnemann's original, handwritten *Organon*. I was overwhelmed.

Intercalated between the pages were pieces of paper with further handwritten notes. These were Hahnemann's amendments to this, his first edition of the *Organon* (published in 1810), which were subsequently incorporated into the second edition (published in 1819). As Professor Dinges leafed through the pages, with these little notes scattered here and there, it felt as if we were witnessing Hahnemann's mind at work.

Next Professor Dinges pulled out a much larger leather-bound volume, in which each crisp cream page was divided vertically in two. Stuck, mostly on the left side of the pages, were thousands of strips of paper. This was Hahnemann's *Repertory* – homeopathy being discovered and recorded, each strip containing a handwritten symptom. I don't know if I was more amazed at the longevity of the glue used to stick these bits of paper down nearly 200 years ago – not a single one seemed to be peeling – or by the fact that I was looking again at Hahnemann's own handwriting.

The writing in both the *Organon* and the *Repertory* was

in black ink, in a neat, flowing hand, but it was virtually indecipherable to my eyes. I asked Professor Dinges if it was legible to a German eye, and he started reading passages out to us. Mike and I followed and we began to be able to pick out the names of remedies for ourselves – *Rhus tox.*, *Bryonia* and *China*.

I could have stayed gazing at these two books for hours! But there was just time to see some of the 5,400 letters in the archive, written to Hahnemann by his patients. Scholars at the Institute are working on these letters, and on other works by Hahnemann in the archive. For example, there is an ongoing programme to publish critical editions of Hahnemann's 54

**The original handwritten Repertory, and a travel kit of Hahnemann's with remedies stored in goose quills**

*Krankenjournalen*, his case books. To date eight volumes have been published, and several others are in the pipeline.

So how did such a remarkable collection of artefacts, books and papers end up in this house in Stuttgart? The story goes back to the German homeopath Dr Richard Haehl (1873–1932), who spent many years collecting anything of Hahnemann's he could find. From 1921 to 1931 he exhibited the items he had accumulated in his house. Judging by Haehl's Visitors' Book from the time, this seems to have become something of a place of pilgrimage for homeopaths from around the world.

After Haehl's death the collection, now owned by the industrialist and philanthropist Robert Bosch, was housed in the homeopathic hospital in Stuttgart. Tragically, despite being moved for safe-keeping during the Second World War, some of the larger objects were destroyed in a bombing raid in 1942.

Thankfully the written material was being stored elsewhere – in a

## FURTHER DETAILS

The Institute for the History of Medicine (IGM) is an invaluable resource for all those interested in the past, present and future of homeopathy. For more information, visit their website: [www.igm-bosch.de/english](http://www.igm-bosch.de/english).

To arrange a visit, contact the archivist, Professor Martin Dinges: [martin.dinges@igm-bosch.de](mailto:martin.dinges@igm-bosch.de).

Tel. 00 49 711 46 08 41 71 (office).

Tel. 00 49 711 46 08 41 67.

To enquire about the library facilities, contact the librarian: [bibliothek@igm-bosch.de](mailto:bibliothek@igm-bosch.de). The Institute is located at: Straussweg 17 D-70184 Stuttgart Germany.

The Hans Walz Prize for a work on the history of

homeopathy will next be awarded in 2005. For details of how to enter the competition, contact Professor Martin Dinges.

Copies of Mike Emmans Dean's 2003 prize-winning work, *The Trials of Homeopathy* (ISBN 3-933351-40-5), are available from the Karl and Veronica Carstens Stiftung: [www.kvc-verlag.de](http://www.kvc-verlag.de) [m.fruehwald@cartens-stiftung.de](mailto:m.fruehwald@cartens-stiftung.de). Tel. 00 49 201 56305 12.

## FEATURE

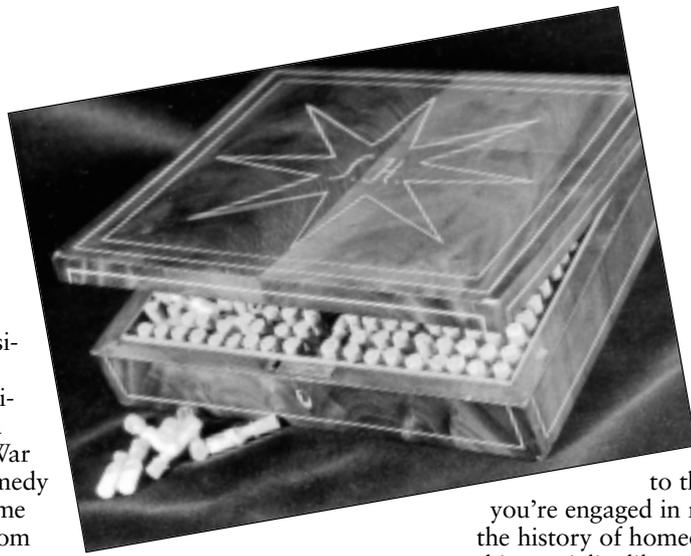
salt mine – and so was saved from bomb damage.

The surviving items have been here, at the Robert Bosch Foundation's Institute for the History of Medicine, since the early 1980s. The Institute has a policy of extending the collection, and has acquired more of Hahnemann's belongings as they have come on the market. It is believed that the collection now includes most of the objects belonging to Hahnemann known to be in existence.

But it's not just objects and papers belonging to Hahnemann that are included. The Institute's aim is to present an ongoing history of homeopathy. So the archive also contains original manuscripts and papers from both Clemens and Friedrich von Bönninghausen (including 150 patient journals), as well as papers from many other homeopaths, homeopathic associations and patient groups. Indeed, it's thought to be the world's most important collection of sources relating to the

history of homeopathy. Recent acquisitions for the present exhibition include a First World War battlefield remedy kit, and a home remedy kit from the former East Germany. They are always on the look-out for new acquisitions, so if you know of anything that might be of interest to them – let them know!

If you're interested in viewing the exhibition yourself, it's open to the public by appointment, Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm (*see box, page 29*). I thoroughly recommend a visit. For those unable to get there, the Institute's website ([www.igm-bosch.de/english](http://www.igm-bosch.de/english)) provides an excellent alternative. It includes pictures of a selection of the artefacts in the exhibition, as well as details of the works held in the archive.



**A remedy chest belonging to Hahnemann, dating from the 1840s**

The website also includes information about the Institute's library, which lends

to the public. If you're engaged in research on the history of homeopathy, then this specialist library, with some 5,000 volumes, may have something of interest to you. You can borrow items via the inter-library loan system – or use the library in person (by prior arrangement).

As part of the Hans Walz prize, my husband Mike is entitled to come back to the Institute to carry out some more research. I am very much looking forward to a return visit with him. There was much too much to take in on a single short tour.

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