

# Radiology museums in Europe

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Most people would not include radiology museums on their 'to visit' list when constructing their holiday itineraries. Museums dedicated to the field of radiology or radiotherapy are relatively few and far between but there are a number of museums well worth a visit for those interested in the rich legacy of the pioneers of our profession. We are lucky that in Europe we are blessed with more than our fair share, enough to keep the enthusiast busy in their exploratory endeavours and in this article I will concentrate on these.

I make no apology for starting in Germany – Remscheid-Lennep to be precise, a town 40km east of Dusseldorf in the Bergisches Land of Germany. This is the home of two important places. The first is the house itself where Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen was born on March 27, 1845 and lived until 1848 before moving to Appeldoorn in Holland where he had his early schooling. Röntgen's father, a cloth merchant, bought the house in 1812. This house was previously owned by the Röntgen Museum but has recently been refurbished by the German Röntgen Society and is used to house a library of books and some of Röntgen's furniture, including his desk and sideboard. There is a flat on the top floor where guests can stay and perhaps reflect on the great man's achievements. Today after refurbishment the ground floor houses an exhibition about Röntgen and there are meeting rooms on the first floor. The plaque commemorating Röntgen's honorary citizenship of the town of Lennep can be seen here.

A 200m walk from the house is the Deutsches Röntgen Museum. An idea for a museum had been raised by Albers Schoenberg in 1907 but it was not until 1929 at the behest of Professor Paul Krause (past president of the German Röntgen Society) that a museum was eventually built and opened its doors on June 18, 1932. It is the only museum in the world dedicated to the life and discoveries of Röntgen. The museum has more than 150,000 objects in its collection (less than a quarter on display at any one time). In addition to a vast amount of material pertaining to Röntgen, including his Nobel Prize medal and important manuscripts and photographs, the museum houses equipment and material covering the development of radiology from the time of Röntgen to the present day. There are early x-ray tubes, CT scanners, ultrasound machines as well as baggage scanners, Egyptian mummies and even x-ray telescopes. The museum has a large society of friends who are involved in the awarding of the annual Röntgen medal, presented by the mayor of the city. The venue hosts lectures and meetings, special exhibitions and seminars and tours for schools, among other things. It has recently undergone refurbishment and all radiologists would profit from a visit to this remarkable museum – a true Mecca for the radiological community.

On the theme of Röntgen, the other museum to be visited is the Roentgen-Memorial (opened in 1985) on the Röntgenring in the former Physical Institute of the University of Würzburg, now the University of Applied Sciences. This site consists of the foyer, corridor and two lab rooms including the original laboratory where Röntgen (then a 50-year-old professor of physics) conducted his famous experiments on November 8, 1895 in Würzburg. There is an exhibition about Röntgen in the foyer with several documents, personal belongings and x-ray tubes on display.



**Left: Röntgen Museum in Remscheid-Lennep. Right: Roentgen-Memorial in Würzburg.**



**Left: Siemens Healthineers MedMuseum in Erlangen. Right: Philips Museum in Eindhoven.**



**Top: Queen Astrid Hospital in Brussels. Above: Nobel Prize Museum, Stockholm. Right: statue of Marie Curie in Warsaw.**

Guided tours of the lab are provided. Several luminaries from all walks of life have visited this site, including former USA President Bill Clinton.

Germany is also the home of the Siemens Healthineers MedMuseum in Erlangen, near the city of Nuremberg. The Siemens medical museum opened in 2014 and has an exhibition of 150 years of medical technological developments, much of it pertaining to imaging and radiotherapy as well as cardiac devices such as pacemakers, etc. This year 125 years of x-ray technology is being celebrated. A tour through the exhibits illustrates how equipment has developed through the years with examples of earlier machines on display and, although the emphasis is predominantly on the contributions and developments made by engineers from Siemens, the exhibition nevertheless gives us a good idea of how things progressed in imaging technology through the 20th century. The museum is of manageable size and most exhibits have captions in German and English.

In Holland the Philips Museum in Eindhoven has a lot for the interested imaging professional. In addition to

exhibits on the famous lightbulbs, transistor radios, televisions and other familiar electrical equipment, Philips is a major manufacturer of medical equipment including major contributions in the x-ray equipment field (screening, ultrasound, CT and MRI equipment as well as cardiac devices). The exhibition in Eindhoven is a major tourist attraction listed in the guidebooks. Accompanying the exhibition is a lecture room for meetings and seminars and a café for visitors. There is also a very large warehouse a little outside the town centre where there is a massive archive of old equipment both radiological and electrical – well worth a visit. This has to be pre-booked and is not open to the public.

Brussels is the home of an outstanding Belgian Museum of Radiology housed in the Queen Astrid Military Hospital, apparently built with materials to withstand a nuclear fallout. Here the story of radiology from the earliest days until now is told through exhibits of equipment, posters and displays housed in several connecting rooms. Early Belgian radiology and military radiology are particularly well covered (the latter is a major interest of director/curator Rene Van Tiggelen). There are also interesting exhibits on the role radiology has played in art and popular culture. The museum also houses an excellent radiology history library and its seminar rooms host regular meetings and conferences.

The Maria Sklodowska-Curie Museum was opened in 1967 by the Polish Chemical Society in Warsaw, Poland, and is another fascinating place that should be on all our itineraries. It hosts an excellent exhibition of her remarkable life and work as a double Nobel laureate and discoverer of radium and polonium. The museum is located on Freta Street in the New Town area of Warsaw and housed in the 18th century flat where she was born. Walking around the exhibition rooms on the first floor of the building is a truly humbling but also inspiring experience. A detailed account of her life, work and achievements are displayed as poster or cabinet exhibits. Items on display range from important manuscripts, photographs and even items of clothing. The museum is housed in the flat where Curie was born and has been rebuilt. A large statue of Curie stands a small distance from the museum itself.

For those interested in x-ray tubes the largest collection I have seen is at the Copenhagen Medical Museum located in the neoclassical building of the former Royal Academy of

Surgeons. It is part of the University of Copenhagen. It also houses material regarding Danish scientist Niels Finsen who won the Nobel Prize in 1903 for his work on light therapy, which was used to treat TB before antibiotics.

In Palermo, Sicily, one can visit the Museo della Radiologia housed in the University of Palermo where one can learn about Pietro Cignolini, the founder of the Radiology Institute here. The museum, which opened in 1995, was the brainchild of Professor Adelfio Cardinale who was director of the institute from 1992-2001. It has a large exhibit of scientific and medical equipment from the past.

Finally, one should not forget the Nobel Prize Museum in Stockholm located in Gamla Stan, which has material relevant to Röntgen, Henri Becquerel, Curie, Godfrey Hounsfield, Sir Peter Mansfield and other Nobel Prize winners pertaining to the science of imaging. In addition there are regular rotating exhibits and the museum also houses a comprehensive library of books about the laureates. There is also an interesting café and if you turn the chairs in the café upside down you will see the signatures of the Nobel laureates who have visited. If only intelligence could be transmitted by sitting on these chairs.

This is an expanded version of an article published in the *RCR Newsletter* in March 2020.

### Declaration of interest

Dr Arpan Banerjee has personally visited all the above museums apart from Museo della Radiologia and has lectured or chaired meetings at the Roentgen-Memorial, Siemens Healthineers MedMuseum, Philips Museum and the Belgian Museum of Radiology.

He has been past president of the Radiology Section Royal Society of Medicine, past chair of the British Society for the History of Radiology and is treasurer of the International Society for the History of Radiology (ISHRAD)

### Further reading

- Thomas A M K, Banerjee A K. *The History of Radiology OUP 2013.*  
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Banerjee A K. *Inside art – review of the week. Br Med J 2011;342:d240.*  
Banerjee A K. *Several meeting reports. BSHR website www.bshr.org.uk*