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NEUROLOGICAL STAMP

Wilhelm Conrad Von Röntgen (1845–1923)

Röntgen's parents, a German father and Dutch mother, were cousins. He was born in Lennep in Germany, but his family moved to Holland when he was 3 years old.

At the age of 17 he was enrolled as a student in the Technical School in Utrecht. He was expelled through no fault of his own without matriculating. Because of this he was unable to sit university examinations. One of his classmates is said to have drawn a caricature of a teacher and failed to own up. Röntgen seems to have been a troublemaker in class and probably the obvious person for the teacher to blame. All his school reports showed excellent marks, although, ironically, with the exception of physics.

Röntgen qualified at the age of 23 as a mechanical engineer from the Polytechnikum in Zurich. His experimental attitude and unusual qualities were noticed by August Kundt, Professor of Physics in Zurich, who gave him a

place in his laboratory. In 1869 he received his PhD. In 1870 Kundt became Professor of Physics in Würzburg in Bavaria. He wanted Röntgen, who was his assistant, to become a member of the faculty but the university refused because he lacked the requisite training in classical languages. In 1888 Röntgen became Professor of Physics at Würzburg. Before that there were professorships in other institutions. It is for discovery of *x* rays that he is most remembered and for which he received several honours including the first ever Nobel Prize for physics in 1901. He submitted his manuscript *Eine neue Art von Strahlen*—A new kind of ray (*Vorläufige Mittheilung*)—(preliminary communication) by von Dr W Röntgen to the Würzburg Physical Medical Society for publication in *Sitzungsberichte der Physikalisch-Medizinischen Gesellschaft* (Proceedings of the Society for Physical Medicine) on 28 December 1895. It was of great satisfaction to the Swedish Academy of Science that such an eminent achievement could be rewarded at the first distribution. The announcement to the world of one of the most dramatic events in the history of science, made on 6 January 1896, was greeted with universal enthusiasm. The first *x* ray photograph was of his wife's hand. In the same year that he received the Nobel Prize Röntgen was appointed Professor of Physics in Munich. He continued to work at the University until 1920. After his wife died he lived in solitude and poverty amid the general economic collapse of Germany after the first world war.

There were many stamps issued in honour of Röntgen in 1995, a century after the discovery of *x* rays. Reproduced is a stamp from Belgium commemorating the event. This shows Wilhelm Röntgen and the hand of his wife Bertha. Her ring can be seen on the ring finger (Stanley Gibbons 3279, Scott B1124).

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