Left—From about the turn of the century, official deputations checked on the general standards of patient care and investigated cases of extreme corruption or violent unrest. **Right**—The patient is likely to be an official's wife; the last female convicts arrived around the year 1900.

Left—A house call? **Right**—Only the wife or mistress of a director could obtain the necessary authorisation for the limited resources to be used on a non-emergency case

On the ground floor, in what could have been a small consulting room, six sketched murals can still be seen above the doors. They are unsigned and reputed to be the work of a convict artist. The attention to detail and presentation of the figures makes it likely that the artist drew from first hand experience of operations.

The hospital functioned for almost 60 years, providing the only medical facility on the islands and also serving the jungle labour camps on the mainland. Medical staff looked after prisoners and also the administrative staff. Many convicts seem to have been admitted solely to die, their corpses subsequently being wrapped in cloth, weighed down with bricks, and buried at sea.

Working in the hospital could be a lucrative occupation. Some of the convicts had made a good income collecting butterflies in the jungle nearby and others

had worked as houseboys for their French masters. To keep their money safe they used "plans," small aluminium cylinders which were kept, given the poor nature of the convicts' clothing, "about the body." Many died in hospital, and it was standard practice to remove the suppository and recover any unspent money.

Much depended on the mercy of the doctor in charge. In 1923 the journalist Albert Londres visited the hospital while touring the colony; he reported favourably on the work of Dr Clement, conscientiously performed under arduous conditions, but damned the whole idea of the penal colony.

Though many voices called for the closure of the colony, it was not disbanded finally until 1946; the last of the old convicts died in 1990. Today French Guiana is an overseas department of France—and Europe's spaceport, home of the Ariane rocket.

Early evidence of scleroderma

Jan Dequeker, Ludo Vanopdenbosch, Antonio Castillo Ojugas

The painting of Archangel Raphael and Bishop Francisco Domonte by Murillo (1680) is in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow (fig 1). The portrait of the bishop in the lower right hand corner shows several characteristic features of scleroderma. The most striking alterations of the skin are the numerous small telangiectases on the face, lips, and hands and the tight skin around the nose, cheeks, and forehead (fig 2). At

the finger the transverse skin plicae of the knuckles are not visible and the fingers are globally swollen; in other words, the distal, proximal, and metacarpophalangeal joint delineations are no longer apparent.

Similar skin alterations on the face can be seen in a patient with systemic sclerosis; in such patients the diagnosis of scleroderma is not based entirely on telangiectases; the features of tight skin and loss of skin

Correspondence to:
Professor Dequeker.

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Arthritis and Metabolic Bone Disease Research Unit, K U Leuven, U Z Pellenberg, B-3212 Pellenberg, Belgium
Jan Dequeker, *professor*
Ludo Vanopdenbosch, *research medical student*

Rheumatology Unit, Hospital "12 de Octubre," Madrid, Spain
Antonia Castillo Ojugas, *professor*

foldes are also important. Telangiectasia commonly represents the effect of the wear and tear of the skin and is found particularly frequently on the skin of older people, on skin exposed to the sun or after trauma or an x ray examination. Osler-Weber-Rendu disease, also called hereditary haemorrhagic telangiectasia, has to be excluded. In this condition, however, there is no tight skin and puffiness associated with small vessel abnormalities.

Francisco Domonte was born in Seville in 1618 and

Fig 1—Murillo's painting of Archangel Raphael and Bishop Francisco Domonte. Reproduced with permission of Pushkin Museum, Moscow

Fig 2—The bishop's face and hands

joined the Orden de la Merced in 1633. He studied in Salamanca in 1638 and 1639. He was known as a great theologian and preacher, professor of arts and superior of the Convent Merced Calzados in Seville. At the age of 50 he was sent to Lima in Peru to reorganise the Mercedaire province of Nueva Espana. He left Spain with three companions in June 1668 in the ship *Neustra Señora de la Victoria*. We have no documents about his activities in Peru. He returned to Spain in 1677. In 1680 he was nominated Bishop of Hipona by Pope Innocent III, but died the next year.

The painting must have been done just after his nomination as bishop in 1680 when he was 62. His dying, a few months after he commissioned the painting, indicates that he was already seriously ill. These facts are in line with the diagnosis of systemic sclerosis, a progressive disease leading to life threatening lung fibrosis or renal hypertension.

The portrayal of scleroderma-like lesions in Murillo's painting suggests that systemic sclerosis was known before it was first described by Carlo Cruzio in 1753.

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Prominent ears: a European perspective

Otoplasty is popular in the United Kingdom to relieve the teasing that prominent ears provoke. "Bat ears," "wing nut," and "Dumbo" are common in the English vernacular. In China, physiognomists consider that prominent ears indicate the need "to draw on inner reserves of strength and ability,"¹ and Hindus find them desirable because of the elephant god Ganesha. Wondering what other Europeans think about prominent ears and whether it is reflected in their languages, we asked colleagues and patients who spoke languages other than English. The results are shown in the table.

The English seem unique in evoking comparison with bats: animals with a sophisticated auditory system and an unjust reputation. It is uncertain when this term first entered usage, but zoologists use it for *Otocyon megalotis* (the "bat eared" fox).

Many languages identify the potential aerodynamic effects of ear prominence, and others prefer the metaphor of the tea service. Russians recall the unusual shape of burdock, the French that of the cabbage. Other languages compare with animals' ears: donkey ears in Hungarian and pigs' ears in Polish.

We were unable to find any terms in Ireland or Wales. This may reflect the high prevalence of prominent ears in these countries or the kind nature of the Celts.—J HAMISH E LAING, *senior registrar in plastic and reconstructive surgery, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust, London WC1N 3JH*; DAVID GAULT, *consultant plastic*

Language	Lay term	Literal translation
Austrian German	Teekanne	Teapot ears
Dutch	Flapoor	Flapping ears
French	L'oreille décollée	Ears that take off
	L'oreille en feuille de chou	Cabbage leaf ears
Gaelic (Ireland)	None	
German	Segelohren	Sail ears
Hungarian	Szamárfulu	Donkey ears
Italian	Orrecchie a sventola	Fan-like ears
Norwegian	Flyveører	Flying ears
Polish	Swinski ucho	Pigs' ears
Portuguese	Orechas espetadas	Spatchcocked ears
Romanian	Urechie clăpăuge	Floppy ears
Russian	Лоточные	Burdock ears
Spanish	Orejas en asa	Cup handle ears
	Orejas soplillo	Windy ears
Turkish	Yelken kulak	Sail ears
	Kepçe kulak	Ladle ears
Welsh	None	

and reconstructive surgeon, Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN

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1 Young L. The ear. In: *Secrets of the face: love, fortune, personality revealed the siang mien way*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983:156.