

Jewish Scientist's Claim to Discover Aspirin Denied by Nazis

The true discoverer of aspirin was denied recognition because he was a German Jew whose authority was undermined when the Nazis came to power, Dr Walter Sneader of Strathclyde University will claim at the Royal Society of Chemistry's Annual Conference today. In this centenary year of aspirin's launch, Dr Sneader, who is an expert on the history of drug discovery, will detail his detective work that, he says, shows the currently accepted story is not the whole truth. Dr Sneader will address the conference at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh.

Aspirin was launched by the Germany company Bayer in 1899 as an effective treatment for rheumatic pain and headache. Since then it is estimated that people have consumed one million million aspirin tablets. The only effective drug for rheumatism before aspirin was exceptionally bitter to the taste and often caused nausea and vomiting. Bayer searched for a more palatable alternative. Felix Hoffmann, a chemist who worked for Bayer, has long been acknowledged as the discover of aspirin, but Dr Sneader claims it was actually Hoffmann's supervisor, Arthur Eichengrun, who deserves the credit.

In 1996, Dr Sneader was asked to give a lecture on the discovery of aspirin. It was while doing research for this talk that he became suspicious of the accepted story. Although there is no doubt that it was Hoffmann who synthesised pure aspirin in 1897, it was not until 1934 that Hoffmann claimed the work as all his own initiative. Eichengrun did not publish his version of events until 1949, in which he stated that Hoffmann had synthesised aspirin under his direction. Intrigued by the difference in these stories, Dr Sneader asked Bayer to let him examine pages of Hoffmann's laboratory notebooks. In these, he discovered evidence that chimed with Eichengrun's version of events. Eichengrun had previously developed methods to make another drug more tolerable. From the laboratory notes, it can be seen that Hoffmann was methodically adapting Eichengrun's scheme to other poorly tolerated drugs, one of which turned out to be aspirin. "There's a clear pattern emerging that substantiates Eichengrun's story," says Sneader.

more...

How then, was Eichengrun' s role overlooked? In 1933, the Nazi's came to power in Germany, and Eichengrun, by then a successful owner of his own chemical company, found his business under great threat of being forcibly removed from him. He had no time to refute Hoffmann's 1934 claim to aspirin. Eichengrun survived 14 months of the war interned in a concentration camp. It was not until 1949 that he published his own claim to the discovery, but he died the same month.

Dr Sneader states that he has documentary evidence for all his claims. "My hope is that the man who was truly responsible for the discovery of aspirin receives the full credit he deserves," he says.

Ends

Notes

1. The RSC Annual Conference will be held at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh from 6-10 September 1999.
2. The Royal Society of Chemistry is the Learned Society for chemistry and Professional Body for chemists in the UK with 46,000 members worldwide. It can trace its history back to The Chemical Society founded in 1841. The Society is a major publisher of chemical information, supports the teaching of chemistry at all levels, organises hundreds of chemistry meetings a year and is a leader in communicating science to the public.
3. Dr Walter Sneader Tel: 0141 548 2155 e-mail: w.e.sneader@strath.ac.uk

Contact for more information:

Tracey Wells, Information Officer, Royal Society of Chemistry, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0BN

Tel +44 (0) 171 440 3317, Fax +44 (0) 171 437 8883, Email wellst@rsc.org

Congress web site address: www.rsc.org/lap/confs/annconf1999.htm

FROM MONDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER TO FRIDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER

Please contact the Congress Press Office Tel: 0131 451 3177 Fax: 0131 451 3126