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Medical Anniversary

RENÉ LAENNEC, 17 February 1781

René Théophile Hyacinthe Laennec (1781-1826) was born at Quimper, Finistère, France, son of a barrister and nephew of the medical Rector of the University of Nantes. He studied medicine in Nantes for five years throughout the Revolution and thereafter in Paris with Corvisart and Dupuytren. He held appointments at the Necker and La Charité hospitals. In 1822 he attained professorial status, produced his monumental book on breath sounds, was elected a member of the Academy of Medicine (1823), and in 1824 he was married and awarded the Legion d'Honneur. One of his early stethoscopes was a cardboard tube but later he selected a wooden cylinder a quarter of an inch in diameter and about 12 inches long. In his book *de l'Auscultation Mediate* (Sir William Hale-White, published by Bale, Sons and Danielsson 1923) he describes both normal and diseased lungs, mostly due to tuberculosis, from which he died far too young. — *D G James*