

THE 100 YEAR DISCOVERY OF X-RAYS AND W.C. RÖNTGEN'S 150 BIRTHDAY

Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen (1845-1923) – Discoverer of “X-rays”

Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen was born in Lennep on March 1845. He was just 3 years old when the family Röntgen emigrated to the Netherlands. After his teenage years and his schooling, Wilhelm Conrad attended a technical private school in Utrecht. At the age of 20, he began to study at the newly established "Eidgenössisches Polytechnikum" (Swiss Polytechnic) in Zurich. In 1868 he concluded his studies with a degree in mechanical engineering. Initially, Röntgen was not quite sure as to what sort of career he should pursue.

Prof August Kundt (Ph. D.) an experimental physicist in Zurich, ended the period of uncertainty by saying, "First try it out with physics." Röntgen accepted the advice and gained his Ph. D. at the university of Zurich one year later, on account of a thesis based on purely physical phenomenon. He remained loyal to this type of work for the rest of his life. As an experimental physicist he taught at, and had an influence on several universities. He published the results of his most important scientific work in 60 theses, of which three were concerned with the discovery of the "Röntgen rays" (Röntgen called them X-rays), discovered for the first time in Würzburg on 8 November 1895.

For the discovery of the sensational "new types of rays," Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen was awarded the Nobel Prize for physics in 1901 the first time that the Nobel Prize was awarded. On the 10 February 1923 Röntgen died in Munich. He was buried at the old cemetery in Giessen.

Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen and his native town of Lennep

The citizens of the old Bergisch town of Lennep have carefully traced the steps of their famous son. It was as early as 1896 (shortly after the discovery) that he was awarded honorary citizenship rights from the "Stadtverordneten-Collegium" (Town Council).

The town of Lennep, that is today almost 800 years old, is a town that has maintained its charm; a circular Middle-Age centre, that is seldom found



Old town of Lennep

nowadays in such entirety. The narrow, picturesquely crooked streets attract time and again artists and photographers. Among the diverse collection of slate and timber-framed houses, there is the birthplace of Röntgen at Gänsemarkt 1 – only a few steps away from the museum. The house was carefully restored and today accommodates the library of the Deutsches Röntgen Museum. The commemorative plaque on the facade is a memorial to the discoverer of X-rays.



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Opening times:

Tuesday to Friday 10:00 - 16:00

Saturday and Sunday 11:00 - 17:00;

Guided tours for groups are possible if sufficient advance notice is given.

Deutsches Röntgen-Museum (German Röntgen Museum)

The Deutsches Röntgen-Museum shows a unique collection of apparatus for the generation and application of X-rays. The historical part-the memorial with many personal objects from Röntgen's estate-is accommodated in a wonderfully old Bergisch-style mansion. It is here that one is first confronted with Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen and his work. The subsequent section lead systematically to the significance of the discoveries made by Röntgen. The "Glaserne Frau" (Glass Lady) is the start into the world of X-ray medicine and diagnosis. Well prepared step-by-step representations make it simple for the visitor to appreciate the properties and effects of X-rays. The museum explains the diverse fields of application of X-ray technology: X-ray astronomy, X-ray archeology, age and authenticity tests in works of art, non-destructive material testing. The perpetual crackling of a Geiger counter draws attention to the level of X-ray emission and ray protection. On show, there is also other research work from Röntgen, which is of importance for the science of physics as well as for environmental technology.

The Deutsches Röntgen Museum is a scientific-technical museum. It is informative and provides insight into areas that are not exactly everyday. The well-structured diagrams/pictures as well as the many exhibits, which can be set in motion by the visitors, are not only of interest for experts. Additionally, the museum has an experimental laboratory for physics, which offers youngsters, in particular a lot of practical fun in the field of science and technology. For school classes, there are special experimental projects in the fields of "radioactivity" and "X-ray." We are also well equipped for wheelchairs and for visits from handicapped persons. The Deutsches Röntgen Museum was established in 1930 and in 1995 the 65th anniversary will be celebrated. In the same year-Röntgen's jubilee year 1995 - W. C. Röntgen's 150 birthday as well as the 100 year discovery of X-rays will be celebrated.

Note: This article has been reproduced from a booklet available at the Deutsches Röntgen Museum by courtesy of Dr. U. Hennig, its director.