

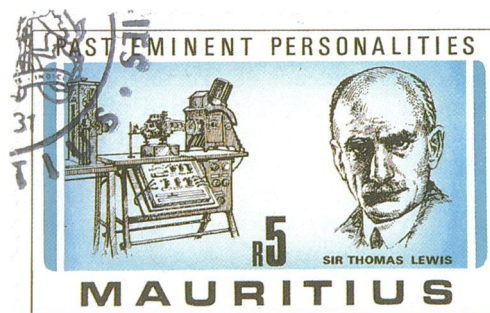
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STAMPS IN CARDIOLOGY

Sir Thomas Lewis (1881–1945)

The only stamp depicting Sir Thomas Lewis was issued by Mauritius on the centenary of his birth. At five rupees it was the highest value stamp in a set featuring past eminent personalities, and the only one devoted to a non-Mauritian. The credit for it goes to the then Prime Minister of Mauritius, the late Dr Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam who had been a pupil of Lewis at University College Hospital London in the 1930s. The suggestion for the stamp came from Dr Arthur Hollman. The design shows the 1911 Cambridge string galvanometer electrocardiograph used by Lewis and his photograph at age 33.

Thomas Lewis was born in Cardiff of Welsh parents. Having written his first scientific paper at the age of 19, he graduated in 1905 from University College Hospital London where he worked for the rest of his life. Einthoven's invention of the string galvanometer in 1901 made clinical electrocardiography a practical proposition and Lewis did more than anyone to establish its value. His 1911 book *The Mechanism of the Heart Beat* was hailed as the bible of electrocardiography, and his electrophysiological work gained him the FRS. He identified atrial fibrillation and proposed that its mechanism was a “circus movement”. In 1909 he founded, with James Mackenzie, the influential journal *Heart* and was its only editor. Although he was a founder member of the Cardiac Club and wrote a widely acclaimed book, *Diseases of the Heart*,



Lewis was more than a heart specialist (he disliked the term cardiologist). His guiding star was experimental medicine, and he eagerly promoted the discipline of clinical science and founded the Medical Research Society. He gave up electrocardiography in 1925 and then had two equally successful periods of research, firstly on the blood vessels of the skin and the triple response to injury, and secondly on pain. Lewis drove himself at high pressure and nothing was allowed to interfere with the work in hand. He was a tough chief, but his co-workers, many of them American, were inspired by his search for the truth and greatly admired him. Away from work his chief love, ever since boyhood, had been in natural history and he was a fine bird photographer and a skilful fisherman. He died after a third myocardial infarction, having had the first at the age of 43.

M K DAVIES
A HOLLMAN