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Insights into the history of X-rays: the Deutsches Röntgen-Museum in Remscheid

Kai Schreiber[1], Anna Kätker[1], Uwe Busch[1], Eva Stanik[2], Thorsten Döhring[2]

[1] Deutsches Röntgen Museum, D-42897 Remscheid, Germany

[2] TH Aschaffenburg – University of Applied Sciences, D-63743 Aschaffenburg, Germany

Summary: In 1895, Professor Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen detected a new kind of radiation that was able to penetrate solid materials, which he called x-rays. In 1901 Röntgen received the first Nobel Prize in physics in honour of this ground breaking discovery. The Deutsches Röntgen-Museum in Remscheid in Germany is the institution that uniquely and comprehensively explores and documents the life and work of W. C. Röntgen and the impact of his discovery. The museum's location in Remscheid is not coincidental, with Röntgen's birthplace only a short walk away from its exhibits. Every visit to the museum amounts to a unique expedition through the worlds of medicine, science, and technology. The museum's emphasis on the diversity of Röntgen's invention by a multilingual, multi-medial approach enables all visitors to make their own personal discoveries. The Deutsches Röntgen-Museum in Remscheid is a must-see for x-ray scientists from anywhere in the world. This contribution provides an insight into the history of x-rays and offers a guided tour of the Deutsches Röntgen-Museum and its exhibits.

The Röntgens were a well established family of weavers in Remscheid-Lennep when their only son Wilhelm Conrad was born in this house in 1845. Today the house is owned by the Deutsche Röntgengesellschaft and serves as a public exhibition as well as a meeting space.

A few metres away the Deutsches Röntgen-Museum on more than 2000 m² presents a collection of radiographic devices, as well as the personal history of the scientist who first noticed strange emissions from his cathode-ray-tubes and documented every aspect of them.

Röntgen‘s discovery found immediate attention around the world. This created a frenzy of research and public interest. But for every fruitful development such as x-ray astronomy there exists a dead-end curiosity like the high-energy x-ray machines used in shoe stores to verify a good fit.

An entire large section of the museum is dedicated to the history of x-ray-technology and the display of a wide variety of x-ray devices. Several info panels present the application of x-rays in various fields, such as art history, archaeology, medicine or astrophysics.

Röntgen stated „I‘m only really happy when I‘m doing experiments“. The student lab RöLab with its range of workshops in the fields of medical technology, ionizing radiation and non-destructive testing aims to arouse enthusiasm for experimentation in visitors of all ages.

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