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A note on the work of Clarke of Clarke's column

Of the many names perpetuated by eponymous titles in that rich era of descriptive neurology, the 19th century, those from France and Germany seem to predominate. Jackson, Ferrier and Gowers were of course colossi whose reputations bestrode international boundaries. There were many others of great distinction but of less fame.

Born in London, educated in France until the age of 13, Jacob Augustus Lockhart Clarke followed his grandfather and brother into medicine, studying at Guy's and St. Thomas' hospitals.

Whilst living with his mother in Pimlico he was engaged in general practice and it was here that he undertook his meticulous anatomical studies of the spinal cord and brain. He used spirits of wine and turpentine as fixatives. He distinguished the lateral from the medial cuneate (or "restiform") nucleus, and identified for the first time the nucleus intermediolateralis and the "posterior vesicular column" now known as Clarke's column.¹⁻³ He experimented with techniques for preserving histological sections and devised the trick of mounting them in balsam.¹

After Olliviers d'Angers and Gull he provided an early account of syringomyelia. His researches were

chronicled in many papers in the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society and other distinguished journals. His titles included: "The intimate structure of the brain human and comparative: on the structure of the medulla oblongata"; "the development of striped muscle in Man, Mammalia, and Birds"; "On the nervous system of Lumbricus terrestris"; "On the structure of the optic lobes of the Cuttle-fish"; "On locomotor ataxy"; and, with Hughlings Jackson "On a case of muscular atrophy with disease of the spinal cord and medulla oblongata".

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