Early history of the different forms of neurofibromatosis from ancient Egypt to the British Empire and beyond: First descriptions, medical curiosities, misconceptions, landmarks, and the persons behind the syndromes.

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The earliest examples of neurofibromatosis (in this case type 1, NF1) can be traced in the Ebers Papyrus (Ancient Egypt, 1,500 B.C.), in a Hellenistic statuette (Smyrna, 323 B.C.), in the coinage of the Parthians kings (247 B.C.) and in some 13th century monks' drawings. These earlier examples are somewhat less well defined as compared to the most recent better defined reports credited as having NF1 including an Inca child mummy (1480-1650 AD), Ulisse Aldrovandi's homuncio ("Monstrorum Historia", 1592 A.D.) with mosaic NF1 or the illustrations seen in the 18th century "Buffon's Histoire Naturelle" and "Cruveilhier's Anatomie Pathologique du Corps Human". The first English language report on NF1 was made by Akenside in 1768 and the first systematic review by Robert William Smith in 1849, while Virchow's pupil, Friedrich Daniel von Recklinghausen, in 1882, was the first to understand the origin of skin tumors and to name them neurofibromas. The touching story of Joseph C. Merrick (the "Elephant man," who had Proteus syndrome and not NF1), in 1884, played an important role in the later misconception of NF1, as did the novel by Victor Hugo on the hunchback Quasimodo. The studies by van der Hoeve (1921), Yakovlev and Guthrie (1931), and Van Bogaert (1935), categorized "von Recklinghausen's" neurofibromatosis among the phakomatoses and the neurocutaneous syndromes. The first known mention of an acoustic neuroma (at autopsy) is attributed to Eduard Sandifort (1777 AD) while John H. Wishart made the earliest autopic description of neurofibromatosis type 2 (NF2), in 1822, in a 21-year-old man with bilateral acoustic neuromas, who manifested signs since his infancy (Wishart subtype NF2). Smith likely described the first case of schwannomatosis in 1849. Older, Virchow, von Recklinghausen, and Verocay first classified "neuromas" and Masson and Penfield first used the word "schwannoma" taking it from Theodore Schwann's works. In 1903 Henneberg and Koch described NF2 in detail. Young, Eldridge, and Gardner, in the late '70, established NF2 as a distinct familial entity (Gardner subtype NF2). Schwannomatosis, the late entry of the different forms of neurofibromatosis, was credited in the middle '90.

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