Today we take note-taking for granted and treat it casually; in earlier times a different attitude prevailed. The habit of noting choice passages from classical authors was instilled by Renaissance humanists as a method of study; it trained the memory and provided an armoury of material for rhetorical composition. The virtuosi of the Scientific Revolution were sometimes critical of this practice, but following their mentor, Francis Bacon, they adapted some of its techniques. But the sheer volume and diversity of empirical information demanded by the sciences required a new rationale for note-taking. I suggest that part of this was found in Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician, who suggested the need for notes whose value might only be realized in the distant future, well beyond the short lives of the individuals who made them. I discuss the notebooks of some of the leading English figures of seventeenth-century science, such as Robert Boyle, John Locke, and Robert Hooke.

Richard Yeo is a Research Professor in the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research, Griffith University, Brisbane and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. He has held Visiting Fellowships at Edinburgh University, MIT, and All Souls College, Oxford. His books include Defining Science: William Whewell, Natural Knowledge and Public Debate in Early Victorian Britain (Cambridge, 1993; reprint 2003), and Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture (Cambridge, 2001; reprint 2010). He has edited (with Ann Blair) a special issue of Intellectual History Review 3(2010) on ‘Note-taking in early-modern Europe’.

When: Monday 21 November 2011 5:30pm to 7pm
Where: Village Roadshow Theatre,
State Library of Victoria,
Entry 3 LaTrobe Street Melbourne
RSVP: Bookings Essential, All welcome to attend
Email: kerrie.alexander@monash.edu

The Louis Green Lecture Series
An annual lecture on intellectual and social history, in honour of the late Professor Louis Green, endowed by Professor Wallace Kirsop.

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