Was real Frankenstein a Scot from Windsor?

Thesis claims mentor of Shelley inspired wife's novel, writes **Celia Hall**

THE real inspiration for Frankenstein – portrayed by Mary Shelley as a southern German and by successive film-makers as a mad scientist with a series of dodgy European accents – was an eccentric Scottish doctor living in Windsor, according to a new theory.

James Lind was the mentor of Percy Bysshe Shelley when the poet was at Eton, and was probably one of the first people in England to demonstrate electro-medical experiments "to make dead frogs jump like living ones".

Lind, a retired physician and natural philosopher born in 1736, had a lively interest in "animal electricity". He was responsible for Shelley's interest in science and remained an important figure in his life.

Now Christopher Goulding, an actor and PhD student, argues in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* that Mary Shelley owed much of her knowledge of science to her husband.

Shelley said of Lind: "I owe that man far – oh! Far more than my own father." And Mary Shelley said her husband only ever spoke of him in "terms of tenderest respect".

Mr Goulding, whose thesis explores the influence of science and philosophy on Shelley's poetry, said the idea of a link between Lind and Frankenstein "just occurred" to him in the course of his studies.

"At the time, science was not taught at Eton and several people were chosen as suitable mentors for boys with an interest in science," Mr Goulding said yesterday.

"It is not my intention to steal any

Mary Shelley: 'silent listener'

of Mary Shelley's thunder because the book is a work of genius."

He argues that Mary Shelley's interest was primarily with the moral and social implications of her story, which was written in 1816-17, and that the details of the science are sketchy.

"Some details of the novel's origins were later to emerge in her introduction to the revised single column edition of 1831, where she describes how she was a 'silent listener' to the long philosophical discussions of her husband with Lord Byron," he writes.

In her own words, Mary Shelley described the germ of her idea in which she saw the "hideous phantasm of a man stretched out and then of the working of some powerful engine shows signs of life and stir with an uneasy half-vital motion".

There is good evidence that Lind – an obscure doctor, who should not be confused with his cousin of the same name, the "father of nautical medicine" – carried out the frog experiments pioneered by the Italian physician and physicist Luigi Galvani.

Mr Goulding reveals that Lind was a member of the court circle at Windsor and demonstrated the experiments to George III and his family. In private correspondence he suggested the use of electric shocks to cure the king's madness.

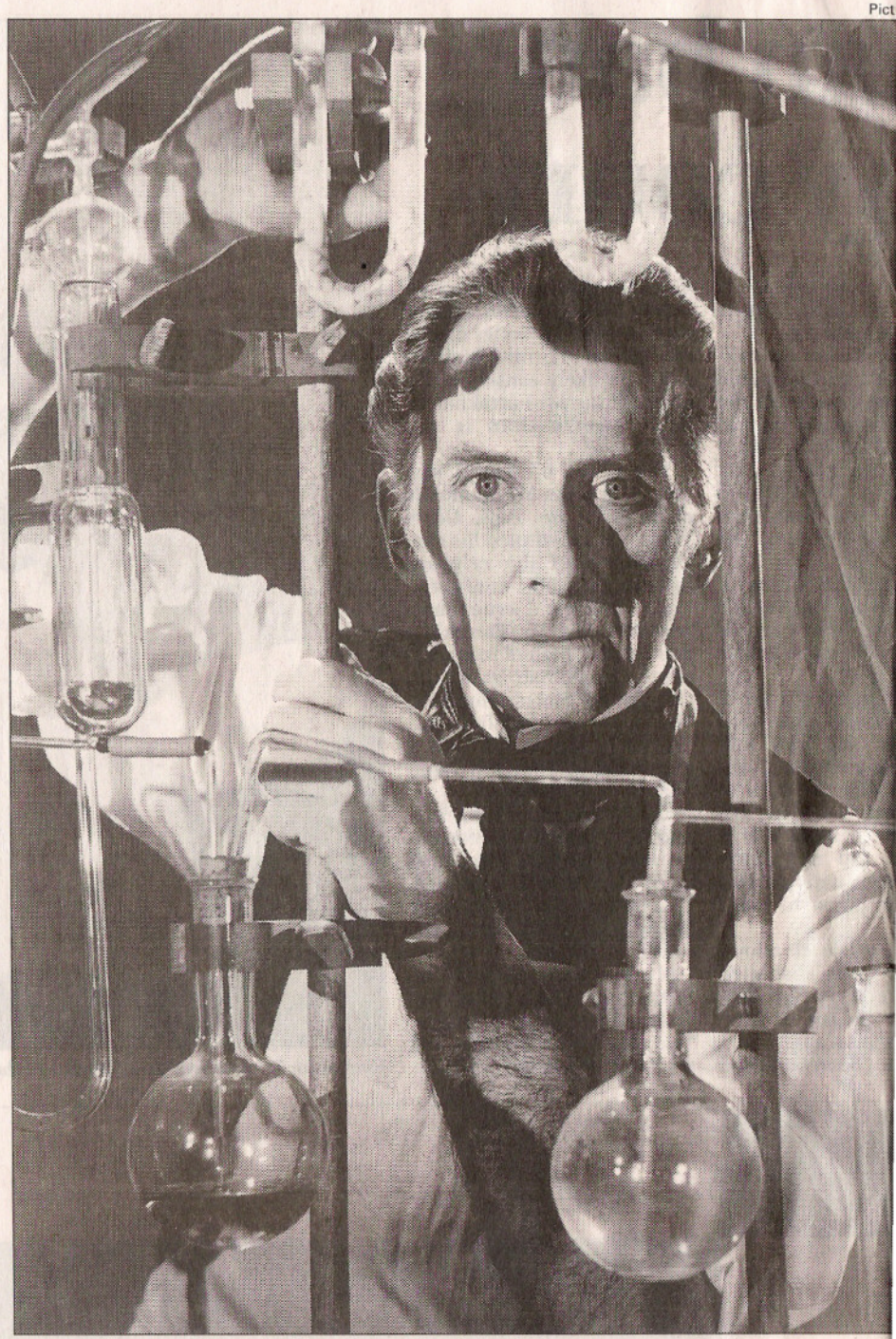
Mr Goulding says that, according to accounts by his son, Lind's study was full of scientific paraphernalia of the time. "There were telescopes, galvanic batteries, daggers, electrical machines and all the divers apparatus which a philosopher is supposed to possess."

Shelley, as a student at Oxford, had rooms full of similar objects, including "an electrical machine, an air pump, the galvanic trough, a solar microscope and a small glass retort above an argand lamp".

Shelley's admiration for Lind is not in question. He is Zonoras in the poem of the same name and described by the poet as a beloved friend with silver white hair "and lips where heavenly smiles would hang and blend with his wise words".

Mr Goulding concludes: "Notwithstanding Mary Shelley's own talent and her night of inspiration in 1816, we might now give some credit to the time spent six years previously by her husband-to-be in the study of a retired Scots physician in Windsor."

Pict



Peter Cushing in The Curse of Frankenstein. The real doctor was more benign, argues a Ph