



## A VISIT TO THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS LONDON

By Caroline Rubinstein

On my trip to London in May 2017, the first stop was the Royal College of Physicians to view their silver collection. The Royal College of Physicians has a long history. In 1511, the Royal physician and scholar Thomas Linacre (1460-1524), petitioned King Henry VIII to establish the College of Physicians. The Royal Charter was issued in 1518, it is the oldest medical college in England. The College was to grant licenses to practice medicine and to punish unqualified practitioners and those engaged in malpractice. In addition, the College set the standard for classification of diseases.

Presently the Royal College of Physicians is located in Regent Park in one of the few post World War II Buildings with Grade I status. The building is a modernist masterpiece, designed by Sir Denys Lasdun, and was opened in 1964. This is the fifth location for the College; the first was south of St. Paul's Cathedral, the second was located nearby Amen Corner in 1614, it was destroyed in the Great Fire 1666. The College was then rebuilt in Warwick Lane in 1674, moved to Pall Mall East, Trafalgar Square in 1825. It was originally called the College of Physicians or King's College and then the Royal College of Physicians of London in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The original garden was started in 1614. The Medicinal Garden of the Royal College of Physicians was replanted in 2005. It contains over 1300 plants all with links to medicine with examples from the time of the pyramids to the present.

The Royal College of Physicians had established a library since it was founded in 1518. William Harvey (1578-1657), a prominent physician who discovered the circulation of blood, donated his library and collections to the College in 1656, creating a museum. The collection was largely destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. Presently the Rare Book and Special Collection Library contains over 30,000 books printed before 1900, 130 books printed before 1502, 100 incunables and the first book printed in English in 1473. 3,000 books in the Dorchester Collection date up to 1688 on travel, science, medicine and architecture. The library also has some of the earliest printings of classical medical texts by Greek, Roman and Arabic doctors as well as books belonging to and annotated by the Elizabethan astrologer and occultist John Dee.

Over 400 items of silver and metal works are in the museum collection forming a display of wealth and power in the nearly 500 year of the College. The collection spans from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Most of the original silver collection was stolen by looters during the chaos of the plague in 1665. Only a few items in the silver collection predate the Great Fire in 1666. They are William Harvey's whalebone demonstration rod and Baldwin Hamey's inkstand bell. The bell is the earliest known piece of English hallmarked silver.



Fig. 1

Noteworthy are the ceremonial silver objects still used by the College today on formal and presidential occasions. The silver inkstand bell is rung once a year at the Presidential Procession. The silver-gilt mace made by Anthony Nelme, London 1683, is similar in design to the one in the House of Commons. It was presented to the College in 1684 by Dr. John Lawson. Its decoration features the emblem of England, France, Scotland and Ireland and the monogram of Charles II. (Fig. 1) The Caduceus was given to the College in 1556 by Dr. John Caius during his presidency, it is one of the objects predating the Great Fire. It is a silver rod topped with four carved snakes with the Royal College of Physicians coat of arms. The use of silver indicates that the President should rule with moderation and courtesy not with an iron rod while the snakes on the Caduceus symbolize prudence. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2

The Porter's Staff is a silver and bamboo object dating to circa 1679. It was presented to the College by Sir John Micklethwaite (1622-1682), physician to King Charles II.

Many prominent physicians contributed to the College collection. Sir Francis Prujean (1573-1666), an eminent London Doctor, was the President of the Royal College of Physician from 1650-54. On view in the Treasures Room is his chest of surgical instruments given in 1873 by the last direct descendent of Sir Francis. He played rare musical instruments (harp, lute, theorbo, etc.) and was a major patron and collector. He graduated from Caius and Gonville College, Cambridge, in 1625 as a medical doctor. Sir Prujean was knighted by King Charles II in 1661 and attended Queen Catherine when she suffered a fever in 1663.

A clause in the will of Dr. Baldwin Hamey Jr. (1600-76), a benefactor of the College, provided for each future President to purchase a piece of silver plate (sterling) above three ounces of silver. An entry for September 19, 1750, records Dr. William Wasey receiving 25 pounds from the annual fund to purchase silver. Dr. William Wasey (1691-1757) was the President of the College from 1750-1754 and physician to George III. He obtained two pairs of candlesticks. (Fig. 3) It marks the only time a President purchased silver from the Hamey fund. This set of George III figural candlesticks was made in London in 1750 by Thomas Heming, Royal Silversmith (1722-1801). The fluid modeling of the bases, with their continuous movement makes them some of the purest examples of the English Rococo. Besides Thomas Heming, both Paul de



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Lamerie and Phillips Garden made candlesticks of this caryatid form.

A 12 K gold champagne cup represents the College's long history of drinking and dining. It was made by Holland, Aldwinckle and Slater, London 1895. The cup's first owner was Dr. Sir Samuel Wilks (1824-1911), a pathologist. He was President of the College and physician to Queen Victoria. He presented the cup to the College in 1911. The cup is inscribed in Latin to commemorate his appointment as President. The cup stands 10cm or under 4 inches on its knapped stem and domed hood. (Fig. 4)

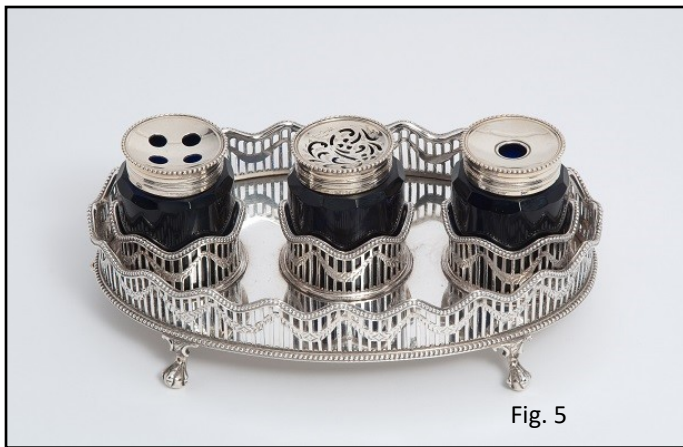


Fig. 5

On display is a gold top cane which was used by five eminent physicians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was a symbol of the profession and was used for over a century before being presented to the college in 1824.

Other donations include a 3- piece silver ink stand with blue glass liners by Burrage & Davenport, London, 1778. It was a gift from Queen Charlotte consort to George III, given on November 12, 1810, to Dr. Matthew Baillie who attended Princess Amelia in her final illness. Obviously an inkstand was considered an appropriate gift. It was presented to the College by the Countess of Carnarvon in 1947. (Fig. 5)

The Archbishop of Canterbury presented a silver- gilt tankard made by Seth Lofthouse, London 1711, with the arms of Thomas Secker (1693-1768) to the College in 1938.

The College received two silver handled cup and covers by Peter and William Bateman, London, 1812, in memory of the Great War of 1914 - 18. They feature sheaf of wheat finials and are engraved with a land-

scape with a rising sun on the body. A small silver table bell, made by Harmanus Nieuwenhuys, Amsterdam, (1710-1763) was presented to the College by Farquardt Buzzard and Lord Lawson of Penn in 1931.

In 1935, Sir Arthur Hall gave a silver tankard made by William Shaw II and William Priest, London 1756, to the College. Its body is engraved with the College arms above applied girdle. A set of four silver salt cellars made by Paul Crespin, London, 1755, was donated by Geoffrey Balmanno in 1948.

A silver pap boat by Rebecca Emes and Edward Barnard, London 1822, is another donation from a member of the College. This was used to feed soft or semi solid foods to invalids and infants. Mostly dating from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, these pap boats resembled cream boats without feet or a handle; by end of the century, they were more elongated with rims. Besides being made in silver, they were also made in wood, glass or ceramics.

(Lord) Robert Platt added a modern silver object to the College's collection: a silver-gilt basin made by Leslie Durbin, London 1959 with the donor's inscription on the underside. (Fig. 6)

A Charles II silver circular-shaped fruit dish with fluted sides divided into 18 sections, the center engraved with a coat of arms of Sir Francis Purjean, the reverse engraved with a lozenge-of-arms within foliate mantling was bought by the College in 2005. (Fig. 7) The dish is hallmarked London 1664, master/sponsor mark A.F. (probably for Anthony Ficketts, London) Its design shows Portuguese influence following the arrival of Queen Catherine of Braganza. That year Sir Francis married Margaret Fleming, which suggests the dish may have been a wedding gift from a Fleming relative. A similar dish with the same markings is in the Untermyer Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Only two recorded examples of this type of side dish are in England.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

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A major collection on display in the Treasures Room comes from Cecil Symons, 1921-87, physician, cardiologist and major collector of fascinating medical items. He enthusiastically collected items of the Georgian period, 1714-1837. He also had interest in objects from different areas including Chinese and Roman cultures. The collection came to the College in 1996. He collected many fascinating artifacts which would have been used by physicians and at home for personal care. The objects are made from a variety of materials, including silver, ivory, glass, wood, leather and lead. The materials have changed over the years but not the shape. The Symons Collection includes nipple Shields used for breast feeding to ease the discomfort which has been used since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The material being used is mostly silver, glass and even lead.

There is a large collection of spoons from early feeding spoons, teaspoons, and castor oil spoons to double ended spoons for travel. A French invention made of pewter by A. Caron, Paris late 19<sup>th</sup> century has two compartments one for medicine and the other for something sweet to make taking the medicine more pleasant. Castor spoons sometimes called "Gibson Spoons" because they were made by the silversmith C. Gibson. This type was invented by Royal College of Physician Fellow Dr. Anthony Todd Thompson (1778-1849). The earliest feeding spoon in the collection is made by Lawrence Coles, London, circa 1680; a silver spoon with long sprout with trifled and pricked handle inscribed with the letters I.A.S.

The College has one of the largest collections of tongue scrapers in the world, made mostly of silver and mother of pearl. The earliest example in the collection is made of silver by T. Daniel, London, 1775. There are also tongue depressors made in silver, as well as bone and mother of pearl dating to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Leeching, bleeding and cupping objects were a popular cure for many ailments until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were made of silver, pewter, tortoiseshell and brass.

A peculiar item is a stethoscope in the collection made of silver which was designed to fit into the top of the



Fig. 8

hat of the visiting physician made by J C &Co. Edinburgh, 1894. It is engraved James Smith M.D., 4 Brunton Place, Edinburgh.

Displayed in the Collection are a pair of hearing aids made in silver, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by The Naturton Co., London circa 1840. Also on display is a magnificent silver William IV ear trumpet which unscrews into three parts and can be carried in a handbag. It was made by

Rawlings & Sumner, London, 1833. (Fig. 8) Many other objects are on display from the Symons Collection in the Treasurers Room for use by physicians and at home for self-care.

As a retired physician, the visit to the College was very rewarding. A special thanks is given to Kristin Hussey, Curator, Royal College of Physicians London, for giving access to the Silver Collection and enabling the writing of this article.

SOURCES:

1. Royal College of Physicians - London
2. Catalogue of the Symons Collection

**Dr. Caroline Rubinstein**, a retired physician, is a member of the New York Silver Society and a collector of silver for many decades. She had written numerous articles on silver collections in the United States (Columbia University, San Antonio, Hispanic Society of America, Baltimore Historic Society, etc.) and in Europe (England, France, Belgium, Spain and Scotland).

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