



BSHP Gazette

The Newsletter of the British Society for the History of Pharmacy

June 2022

Number 21

Editorial

This issue of our newsletter is being distributed after the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. We trust you were able to enjoy whatever you had planned for this unique event. This Gazette has news of our first summer visit for 3 years (see page 3) and an item seeking expressions of interest in our idea for an online discussion forum just for BSHP members (page 4).

An Apology - Membership Subscription Renewals 2022

Due to some unfortunate communication and timing issues between ourselves and the Secretariat Office a number of members were sent, wrongly, a reminder letter and invoice about non-payment of their 2022 membership subscription. If you were one of these, then we are very sorry and we must apologise profusely for this administrative mistake. Many of you who rightly queried this reminder have been reassured of your payment. Some who have still not renewed have been contacted separately.

Pharmaceutical Historian - Volume 52 No.2

With this mailing you are receiving the June 2022 issue of our flagship international journal for the History of Pharmacy.

Michael Shaw - A tribute

In late April we were saddened to learn of the death of BSHP Member Michael Shaw who supported many of our evening lectures and selected annual conferences albeit some years ago now.

Michael was born on 11 March 1930 in North London and died on 27 April 2022 in North London.

He was educated at the Royal Masonic School for Boys from where he won a scholarship to be an apprentice pharmacist at Boots the Chemist. He worked in several branches in London but his favourites were Boots Piccadilly and Victoria Station, both venues providing him with great insights into the diversity of the general public using community pharmacies.

At 21 in 1951 he became a fully-fledged pharmacist and in 1952 he bought his first pharmacy in Knightsbridge, again a fantastic place, having many famous and interesting people as customers including some of the conquerors of Everest who stored some of their luggage in the basement.



Next, he bought pharmacies in Dulwich and then Holland Park, but sold the lot in the early 1970s and changed tack to source Italian ceramics, mainly large lamp bases to sell to the furniture trade. This required him to make many trips to Italy and other interesting countries in search of new styles etc.

In the 1990s he discovered some of the manufacturers of the original Italian drug jars still had some patterns going back 300 years. Adding yet another interest to his life and thus returning to the world of pharmacy with his company called Academica which developed and promoted replica drug jars.

He died peacefully at home after a long illness having developed dementia. He leaves a widow Renate who kindly prepared this tribute for us.

Bratislava Pharmaceutical Museum by Dr Chris Duffn

Bratislava Pharmaceutical Museum is located in Michalská Street, very close to St. Michael's Gate, the only survivor of four medieval gates that originally protected the city, now the capital of Slovakia. Of the original complex of double city walls, two bastions, a barbican and a bridge, only the barbican survives. Built around 1300, the gate was later reconstructed in baroque style in 1758. The Pharmacy Museum is part of the barbican complex and occupies the ground floor of a Baroque burgher's house. Appropriately, the building was earlier the site of a working pharmacy called the Red Crayfish, which is celebrated by retaining the original forged iron pharmacy sign above the front entrance (Fig. 1). The pharmacy, which is first mentioned in documents dating from the 16th century, originally occupied five rooms in the building, eventually closing with three rooms being transformed into the current museum in 1953. On entering the premises from the street, the visitor is greeted with the original fittings of the 18th century pharmacy. Although the collection of pharmaceutical materials on display is quite small, my eye was captured by some distinctive medicinal storage jars and my interest in them was rewarded with special permission to take some photographs.

Contemporary with the mid-eighteenth century redevelopment of the barbican, the metal container in Figure 2 was made by the Bratislava tinsmith Johann Christoph Trüber. It has a distinctive onion-shaped basal section and is made of pewter, a malleable alloy of tin, antimony, copper and bismuth. Lower grade pewter, as in this case, had lead added to the mix, and was used for storing oils, resins, medicinal honeys and other fluid and semi-fluid preparations. This particular vessel is marked up for 'Saniculi' – Sanicle or *Sanicula europea*, whose leaves were generally used to produce a decoction, according to Sir John Hill's (1755) *Family Herbal*, for excessive menstrual bleeding, bleeding from haemorrhoids and the treatment of ruptures.

Figures 3 and 4 show two ceramic jars which are clearly from the same workshop. Both have a distinctive marbled ground and depictions of saints on the central panels. One jar (Fig. 3) is for Lapis Pumicis – pumice. This is a highly vesicular glassy extrusive igneous rock cooled from a frothy type of lava. Commonly used as an abrasive, it used to be employed as a dentifrice, cicatrising agent, cleanser for ulcers (particularly on the skin and cornea) and depilatory. It was also an ingredient in various eye ointments and sternutatory (sneeze-inducing) powders. The central image on the jar depicts St John of Matha (1160-1213) who studied at Aix-en-Provence and Paris, finally being ordained in 1192. Following a vision of Christ holding two chained prisoners in his hands, John dedicated his life to buying Christian slaves at market and setting them free. The image on the jar shows the saint with his face lifted heavenward, but lacks the usual attributes ascribed to him (chains, captives close by, distinctive cross and mitre at his feet). St John does not seem to be associated with protection against any particular diseases.

The second example (Fig. 4) is for 'Lign. Phod.' and has an associated image of St. Dominic. The identity of Lign. Phod. is not completely clear; it may be an altered inscription for Lignum Rhodium – Rosewood (*Dalbergia* spp.), so-called because of its distinctive aroma. It formed the base material for the production of Rose Water, widely incorporated into complex pharmaceuticals, decoctions and tinctures. Oil of Rosewood was also produced and used in nervous conditions, cleansing ulcers in the mouth and in gargles. St Dominic (1170-1221) is famous for establishing the Dominican Order. Sometimes known as the 'Dog of the Lord' he is depicted on the jar next to a dog with a flaming brand in its mouth. This is a common attribute and refers to the legend that his mother, whilst barren and on a pilgrimage, experienced such a dog leaping from her womb carrying a flaming torch in its mouth, and seeming to set the earth alight, clearly an allusion to his wide-reaching spiritual influence. Medically, St. Dominic is usually associated with fevers.

A third jar in this series (Fig. 5) is marked 'Virid. Aeris' which refers to Verdigris or copper carbonate. This was produced by interlayering copper plates with grape skins left over from wine pressing and storing them in an earthenware pot for several days. Confined to topical applications, it was usually mixed with oils and waxes to cicatrise ulcers, dissolved in water to ease gout and dissolved in Spirit of Vinegar to treat eye diseases. As a component of compound medicines it was also employed in the treatment of weeping wounds and ulcers. The saint depicted in the central panel is Dorothea of Caesarea (died c. 311), a virgin martyr of the Diocletian Persecution. She is shown holding a basket of flowers. This commonly associated attribute relates to an event following her torture, trial and sentencing to death. On her way to the place of execution a pagan lawyer, Theophilus, mocked her by calling out 'Bride of Christ, send me some fruits from your bridegroom's garden'. Just before she was executed, she sent him her headdress which was redolent with the heavenly perfume of roses; immediately under conviction of sin, Theophilus professed Christianity and was himself tortured and martyred for his faith. Dorothea is associated with pregnancy and childbirth.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

All photographs were taken by the author who is currently BSHP President.

Figure 1. Bratislava Pharmaceutical Museum.

Figure 2. Pewter container for Sanicle.

Figure 3. Ceramic apothecary jar for pumice, with an image of St. John of Matha.

Figure 4. Ceramic apothecary jar for 'Lign. Phod.', with an image of St. Dominic.

Figure 5. Ceramic apothecary jar for verdigris, with an image of St. Dorothea of Caesarea.

BSHP Visit to The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew - 15th July

We are delighted to announce the return of our BSHP Summer visits starting with one to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew on Friday 15th July from 2-4pm. In this leisurely visit we will walk to the Nosegay Garden, behind Kew Palace, which features plants grown in the UK before 1700, and then go via the Princess of Wales glasshouse to see Kew's Evolution Garden, opened in 2019. Led by Mark Nesbitt, we will draw on the combined expertise of BSHP members to investigate the medical stories of some of the plants we see. At 4pm there will be optional tea, at members' own cost, in the Victoria Gate café, and the opportunity to either leave the garden, or to stay until it closes at 7pm for self-guided tours. There is much to see, including the artworks of the Forever Food summer festival.

We will meet at the Herbarium Gate on Kew Green, just to the north of the Elizabeth Gate. Postcode TW9 3AE. This visit will be free to BSHP members and will cost £10 for one guest or partner. Early entry from 10am is also possible. Please book your place, and indicate if early entry is wanted, by **4th July** with Chris Duffin (cduffin@blueyonder.co.uk). A map will be sent with an acknowledgement.

BSHP online lecture series

Since the last Gazette we have held the following two online lectures hosted on Zoom again via Eventbrite (see <https://www.youtube.com/c/BSHPBritishSocietyfortheHistoryofPharmacy>):

Monday April 25th

"The Doctrine of Signatures in Early Modern Medical Practice", by Xinyi Wen (University of Cambridge)

Monday May 23rd

"Precious and Potent: Tibetan Medical Pill Traditions" by Dr Barbara Gerke (University of Vienna)

These were very well supported internationally. The final one in this series is very soon this month:

Monday June 13th (NB 2pm)

"History of Pharmacy in the Arabic Civilisation in between past and future" by Dr Ayman Atat (Freie University of Berlin)

Wellcome Collection - Rooted Beings and Beyond - 5th July

For this exhibition, which opened in Spring 2022, the Wellcome Collection's Research Development Team and Kew-based Early Career Researcher, Kim Walker, convened a Research Circle showcasing works by the 19th Century naturalist, traveller and writer, Alexander Von Humboldt. The original ambition of the exhibition was to examine our symbiotic relationship with plants while presenting them as ancient, complex and sensitive beings that enable all existence. As the exhibition reaches the end of its season, they are inviting you to join a tour with Kim Walker (BSHP Member) who provided curatorial support to two of the commissioned artists, followed by a post-tour discussion.

As a counterpoint, they plan to display material from an exhibition on the 300th celebration of the discovery of cinchona which was held at the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in 1930, described to visitors as "An extensive collection of exhibits [which] has been arranged to illustrate the romantic history of this remarkable remedial agent, the addition of which to the world's material medica, has, for three hundred years, proved itself to be of incalculable value."

They want to explore the following research questions; What is the research potential for our collections on plant prospecting and drug discovery? How can we expand our network of researchers in this field? The afternoon **on 5th July** will comprise of a tour at 2.00pm with a showcase and discussion running from 3.00pm – 5.00pm, followed by refreshments 5.00 – 6.00pm.

For further information please email Angela Seward (a.seward@wellcome.org) but please note numbers are limited.

BSHP Members' Forum meetings

Following a suggestion made at the most recent BSHP Committee Meeting (May 2022), we are proposing to hold a series of Members' only Forum meetings. Each meeting will take place online using the Zoom platform so as to provide access to as wide a range of participating members as possible. The meetings will be free of charge and last for up to 1 hour 30 minutes. Members will be invited to speak for up to 10 minutes on the subject of a particular meeting's theme, and to join in the open discussion which follows each presentation. More about this in the September Gazette but expressions of interest and comments on the idea are welcomed (honsec@bshp.org).

An initial thought is to have *Pharmacy Artefacts* as the Forum's first theme. Other ideas for topics are warmly welcomed. We just want to gauge interest in the proposal at this stage.

Society of Apothecaries

The Faculty of the History and Philosophy of Medicine and Pharmacy have these forthcoming events:

Tuesday 21st June – Gideon de Laune lecture - "Learned Medicine and Alchemical Mysteries in the Library of Clare College, Cambridge (c.1570-1620)" Dr Timothy Chesters.

Please see: <https://www.apothecaries.org/events/event/learned-medicine/>

Wednesday 6th July – Friday 8th July – "Up Close and Medical: Behind the Scenes at London's Medical Museums". Full details are available here: <https://www.apothecaries.org/events/event/up-close-and-medical-behind-the-scenes-at-londons-medical-museums-3-day-course/>

New Members

We welcome the following into membership:

Francesca Richards (Whitstable) Raissa Bombini (Sweden/Brazil) Xinyi Wen (Cambridge)

Collection of Articles

The Apothecary Beyond the Shop: Chemistry, Medicine and Laboratories from the 17th to the 19th Centuries

Contributors to the academic journal *Ambix* have long been interested in examining the relationship between the apothecaries of London and their Society. This collection from *Ambix* and also the *Annals of Science* marks the 350th anniversary of the opening of a laboratory for manufacturing chemical medicines at Apothecaries' Hall in 1672 and one hundred years since the Hall pharmaceutical trade's closure in 1922. It places pieces specifically about the Society alongside articles which explore the broader social, economic and intellectual contexts of chemistry, medicine and laboratories from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

The articles in this collection have been made free access until the end of July 2022. Please visit the link here for access: www.tandfonline.com/journals/yamb20/collections/the-apothecary-beyond-the-shop.

Contacts

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