

The Physick Gardener

When medicine was first taught to students at the University of Melbourne in the 1860s, botany was an important subject in the curriculum – all students were required to learn about herbs and their medicinal applications. This practice derived from the sixteenth century European tradition of attaching gardens to medical faculties, which was subsequently emulated in England from the early seventeenth century.

The role played by the study of botany in the history of medicine was illustrated by an exhibition marking the re-opening of the Medical History Museum upon completion of renovations to the Brownless Medical Library, entitled, 'The Physick Gardener: Aspects of the Apothecary's World from the Collections of the University of Melbourne'.

The impetus for this exhibition was the generous gift of a group of ceramic drug jars and copper alloy mortars and pestles from the estate of Graham Roseby. We were also able to borrow from the Baillieu Library's Special Collections, Print Collection and East Asian Collection, the University of Melbourne Herbarium in the School of Botany, and the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

It is a remarkable tribute to the University's cultural acumen that the exhibition was curated entirely from six of its own collections on the historic Parkville campus. The items on display served to illustrate the tools of the apothecary's practice – through the plants cultivated in the 'physick garden' such as that in Chelsea in London, and at Oxford; the sturdy mortars in which the dried elements of those plants were ground by pestles; the herbals or illustrated manuals which outlined the uses and benefits of the botanical species grown by the apothecary; the pharmacopoeias of instructions for the manufacture of remedies and herbal medicines; and the ornate drug jars in which the apothecary would store preparations.

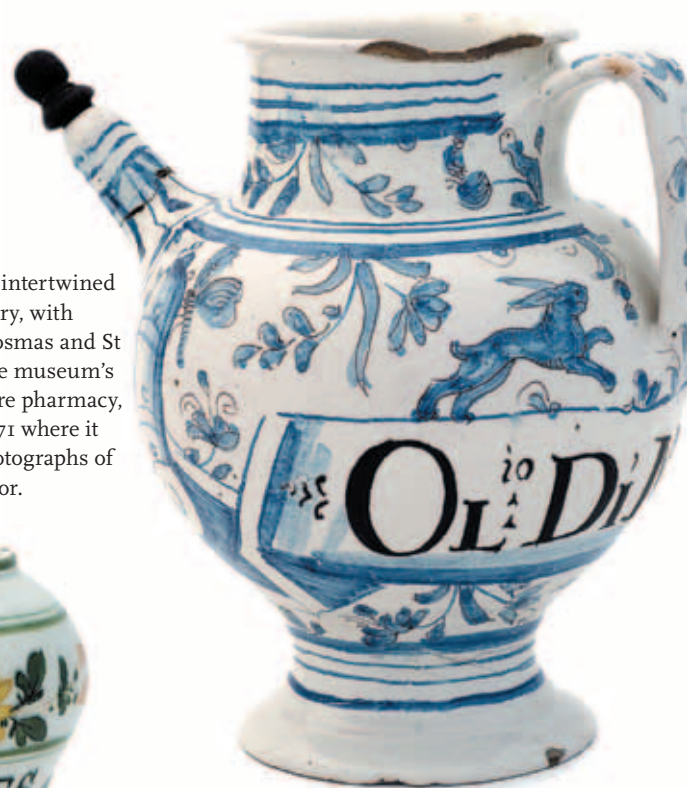
The Physick Gardener also provided a context for the Medical History Museum's nineteenth century pharmacy, a faithful reconstruction of the Belgravia branch of Savory and Moore,

the London firm of chemists. The intertwined origins of the doctor and apothecary, with their venerated patron saints St Cosmas and St Damian, provide a rationale for the museum's acquisition of the Savory and Moore pharmacy, which arrived in Melbourne in 1971 where it was re-assembled according to photographs of the Chapel Street, Belgravia interior.



The richness and depth of the University's cultural heritage is evidenced in the objects which comprised *The Physick Gardener*. We are very grateful to Alison Roseby and her family for their generous donation of Graham Roseby's collection, and for their contribution to the work of the Medical History Museum. I would also like to thank the University's Cultural and Community Relations Advisory Group and its chairman, Professor Warren Bebbington, for supporting the publication of the exhibition catalogue; the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund for the conservation of drug jars and documents in the collection of the Museum; John Coppock of Pharmaceutical Defence Ltd for his assistance towards the exhibition photography; and Sir Andrew Grimwade who has provided information on the Grimwade family.

Susie Shears, Curator, Medical History Museum



Above: Italian spouted jar for oil of mint (date uncertain), earthenware and wood. Gift of the estate of Graham Roseby, 2009.

Left: Italian jar (19th century), earthenware. Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973. Transferred from the University of Melbourne Art Collection, 1988.

Established in 1967, the Medical History Museum's collection numbers more than 6000 items. It is one of 31 collections which form part of the University of Melbourne's astonishingly rich cultural capital. The museum's collection has largely been acquired through public-spirited donors, many of who have had a professional or student relationship with the University's medical teaching program, or a fascination with the history of medicine.

We encourage medical alumni to become involved in the development of the Medical History Museum collection and the documentation of the history of the Melbourne Medical School. If you would like to contribute materials or information to the University's repository of medical history and culture, please contact either Susie Shears on (+61 3) 8344 9935 or: sshears@unimelb.edu.au or Liz Brentnall on (+61 3) 8344 5325 or: eabren@unimelb.edu.au