

The Old Operating Theatre, Museum and Herb Garret

GROUP VISITS and EDUCATION SERVICE

**Hidden in the roof of a church, a 300-year old herb garret houses
Britain's only surviving 19th century operating theatre...**

This museum, one of London's most intriguing historical interiors, contains: the **Operating Theatre**, which was used between 1821 and 1862 in the days before anaesthetic and antiseptic surgery; and the **Herb Garret**, used by the apothecary of St Thomas's Hospital to store and cure herbs for medicines.

Museum collection

- Instruments for surgery, cupping, bleeding, trepanning and childbirth;
- Devices used in the early days of anaesthesia and antiseptics;
- A skeleton, and pathological specimens;
- An extensive and aromatic display of dried herbs, fully labelled;
- Equipment for preparing pills and cachets, and storing medicines;
- A display on Florence Nightingale and the history of nursing;
- History of the Evelina Childrens' hospital, first established at Guy's.

**We offer a visit in a unique setting that emphasises medical history
through the senses of sight and smell, and presents visitors of
any age with an unforgettable experience.**

GROUP VISIT INFORMATION

Address: The Old Operating Theatre, Museum and Herb Garret
9a St. Thomas' Street
London SE1 9RY
Phone: 020 7188 2679
Fax: 020 7378 8383
Website: www.thegarret.org.uk
e-mail: curator@thegarret.org.uk
Opening hours: 10.30 am – 5.00 pm daily including weekends
(Closed 15th December – 5th January annually)

Group size: minimum 10, maximum 60. All groups must pre-book their visit.

How to book: contact the Museum by phone, fax or e-mail with details of your group and preferred dates. Then complete the enclosed booking confirmation form and send it to the Museum.

Visit length: groups are generally booked in for a period of 60 minutes to include programme and Museum visit.

Group programmes: the following pages give full details of the Museum programmes and resources for group visits. We can adapt programmes to suit groups with Special Needs.

Group prices: Under 16: £3.00 Student/Concession: £4.25 Adult: £5.25
Talk & Walk: Child/Concession: £7.45 Adult: £8.45
Group leaders and accompanying staff are admitted free.

Payment: groups can pay cash when they visit, or by cheque, or be invoiced.
Cheques to be made payable to: The Lord Brock Memorial Trust.

Access: the Museum entrance/exit is via a 32-step spiral staircase. If this access restriction means you are unable to visit, we may be able to offer an outreach service: see Other Museum Services on back page.

Toilets: these are on the ground floor at the bottom of the spiral stairs. There are two unisex cubicles. Keys are held upstairs by the staff.

Lunch: visitors are not allowed to eat or drink in the Museum. Hay's Galleria (see map) has a covered area suitable for packed lunches. Adults can find a wide range of sandwich bars and pubs nearby.

Shop: the Museum shop stocks an extensive selection of books and goods for both adults and children, covering museum themes and general interest. The shop is small, so please allow extra time for purchases.

Transport: the Museum is 5 minutes' walk from London Bridge Station. See map opposite for details of location and transport links

THE OLD OPERATING THEATRE: background notes

The hospital

St Thomas's was founded in the thirteenth century. A mixed order of Augustinian monks and nuns provided shelter and treatment for the poor, sick and homeless. The monastery was dissolved in the Reformation, and reopened in 1553. At the end of the Seventeenth Century the hospital and church were rebuilt by Thomas Cartwright.

The theatre

The Old Operating Theatre came into existence in 1821 when part of the garret of St Thomas's church was converted into a purpose-built operating theatre for women. This strange location arose from the fact that the female surgical ward abutted the garret. Before this time, operations had taken place on the ward.

In 1862 the operating theatre was closed when St Thomas's Hospital began its move to the present site at Lambeth. The theatre lay undiscovered until 1957.

The patients

The patients were mainly the poor who were expected to contribute to their care if they could afford it. Rich patients were treated and operated on at home. The patients at the Old Operating Theatre were all women. Those who visit the museum will be relieved to know that the patients did not have to climb the spiral staircase! They came in from the women's ward through what is now the fire escape.

Figure 2 - Amputation of the Leg by the Fragment Method

The majority of cases were for amputations or superficial complaints, as, without antiseptic conditions, it was too dangerous to do internal operations.

Medical students packed the theatre to witness the operations. Patients tolerated this because it meant they received treatment from some of the best surgeons in the land which they could not otherwise afford. Wealthy patients were operated on at home, usually on the kitchen table.

The risk of death at the hands of a surgeon was greatly increased by the lack of understanding of the causes of infection. Although cleanliness was a moral virtue, it seems that a surgeon was as likely to wash his hands after an operation as before. The old frock coats that surgeons usually wore during operations were, according to a contemporary account, "stiff and stinking with pus and blood". The death rate was further heightened by the fact that operations took place as a last resort, so patients tended to have few reserves of strength.

Figure 1 Abscess Knife (top), Symes' Abscess Knife (bottom)

Operating conditions

Until 1847 surgeons had no recourse to anaesthetic and depended on swift technique (an amputation could be performed in a minute or less), the mental preparation of the patient, and alcohol or opiates to dull the patient's senses. Thereafter ether or chloroform came into use.

Figure 3 Various Scalpels

THE OLD OPERATING THEATRE: Victorian Surgery programme

Content of talk/demonstration

This talk provides a compelling interpretation of surgery before the advent of anaesthesia or antiseptics. It draws spine-chilling immediacy from the venue – the event takes place in Britain’s oldest surviving surgical operating theatre.

The talk is given by one of the museum’s curatorial staff who takes the role of a nineteenth-century surgeon. The group is asked to sit around the tiered stands of the Operating Theatre where nineteenth-century medical students would originally have stood

to witness operations performed without the aid of either antiseptics or anaesthetics.

A ‘patient’ is then chosen from the audience and asked to lie down on the contemporary

wooden operating table. Original Victorian surgical instruments are then used to perform a (simulated!) amputation of the ‘patient’s’ left leg. The curator uses the talk to

Figure 4 Amputation by Teale's method

place this surgical procedure within a historical context. All the patients who

underwent operations in the Old

Operating Theatre were poor people

dependent on the charity offered by St

Thomas’s Hospital. By examining the

experiences of these patients, visitors

learn about Victorian living and working conditions, and the effects of poverty and

public policy on the health of the

community.

Figure 5 Amputation at the Thigh

Curriculum links (History)

KS1 & KS2 Victorians

[Southwark Cathedral (020 7367 6715) has a programme on The Victorian Classroom and a joint visit can be arranged]

KS3 Britain 1750-1900

KS4 ‘Medicine through Time’ syllabus (History GCSE)

Audiences

This talk is readily adapted to suit different audiences: apart from schools, it is also popular with student and adult groups from various backgrounds, such as:

Health and Social Care; Nursing, Medical and Operating Department trainees; History of London; Adult Education and Third Age; Tour groups.

Museum visit

Before or after the talk groups will have time to look around the rest of the museum (see details of collection on front page). Worksheet resources for studying the wider museum collection are being developed: please enquire when booking. Clipboards are generally available for borrowing.

THE HERB GARRET: background notes

Original use

The term 'Herb Garret' describes both the attic location and purpose (drying herbs) of the roof space that houses the Operating Theatre and our museum displays. The roof has a strikingly steep pitch with heavy oak rafters topped by slates. The apothecary of St Thomas's hospital made use of this space for drying (curing) herbs for use in making medicines. These were actually prepared by assistants in laboratory buildings further down St Thomas's Street. A list of herbs supplied to the apothecary at Guy's Hospital (across the road) in 1731 lists:

Comfrey
Elderflower
Liquorice
Marshmallow
Meadowsweet
Myrrh
Penny Royal
Willow bark
Wormwood

Figure 7 American ginger

Figure 6 Ginger

Herbal displays

Our aromatic display recreates the range of herbs that was used and adds labelling on their uses as traditional remedies. Dried herbs hang from the rafters and occupy the niches of the garret. The theme is further developed at the apothecary's counter which has scales, pestles and mortars and a pill-making machine. This reproduction nineteenth-century pill-maker, in wood and brass, can be used by visitors to try out their pill-making technique.

Boxed displays show other pill-making equipment. Jars and carboys, poison bottles and recipes, apothecary's receipts and orders, all provide evidence of the apothecary's trade, a theme which stretches back into the earlier apothecary's tradition.

Medical history displays

The garret also contains displays for exploring and understanding the history of medicine in relation to St Thomas's hospital and the wider world – including aspects of the history of nursing, and obstetrics. A whole skeleton, preserved specimens, and case notes from the Evelina children's hospital are on display.

Figure 8 Cascara Tonic, Celery Tonic & Sarsaparilla Syrup

Outside the theatre, the displays relate particularly to surgery, including instruments for trepanning, 'cutting for the stone', and amputation. Devices from the early days of anaesthesia and antisepsis include a Lister carbolic acid spray.

THE HERB GARRET: Herb Talk programme

The Apothecary's Assistant

Figure 9 *Garcinia morella*

Hands-on activities in the Herb Garret are led by a member of the curatorial staff. Particularly suited to KS1 and KS2 students, the group will learn the history of herbal medicine through a series of fun activities, including herb grinding in a mortar and pestle, pill-making and poultices. The talk ends with an introduction to the Operating Theatre, and can include a mock operation, as in the Victorian Surgery demonstration. Suitable for groups of less than 20, larger groups can be accommodated in two sessions, with worksheets provided for the group not currently engaged in the activities.

A more adult-orientated herb talk, "Herbal Sanctuary", can also be provided.

KING CHOLERA WALKS!

Public Health In Victorian Southwark

From the herbal medical practices of the Medieval Cathedral through to modern Guy's Hospital this walk trails the rich and extensive medical history of the London Bridge area. The walker tells of the health, social and working conditions as suffered by the Victorian poor and the mass cholera infection and 'miasma' produced by Father Thames. Tales of the London patient from hospital to prison, to the health and survival of the modern organic Borough Market. The perfect complement to a museum visit, the walk highlights illustrates historical topics for all key stages.

Route includes: The Old Operating Theatre Museum and Herb Garret, Old St Thomas' Hospital, Southwark Cathedral, the Clink, the Anchor Inn, The Thames, London Bridge, Borough Market, the Hop Exchange, the George Inn, Guy's Hospital.

THE APOTHECARY PACK – Resources for Key Stage 2

WHAT IS IN THE PACK

Resource Sheets covering 20 themes, based on our intriguing Museum.

New contexts for **Maths, Science, English, Art & Design and History** - from satire, shopping and spiral stairs to hops, hospitals and herbs, Latin names and leeches; plus weighing, measuring, designing, drawing and distilling. **Activity Sheets** suggesting classroom-based work, linked to **KS2** curricula. Activities developed with pupils at our partner school. Ideas can be adapted for other age groups.

Use of the Pack does not rely on a visit to the Museum. It is designed for classroom use, and can provide an introduction to the site, or be used as a stimulus for a group visit, or as the basis for project work.

The printed **Pack** is priced at £5.50, including postage, and sheets can be photocopied for use in the classroom. To order a pack, simply send a cheque made payable to **The Lord Brock Memorial Trust**, including your address details.

*** **"Our Blood"** – New Resource Pack for Key Stage 4 "Medicine Through Time" coming soon! ***

BOOKING CONFIRMATION FORM

Please contact the museum by phone or email first to ensure the time of your visit is still available. After contacting us, please fax or post this form back to the museum to confirm your booking:

The Old Operating Theatre, Museum and Herb Garret

9A, St. Thomas' Street

London SE1 9RY

Phone: 020 7188 2679

Fax: 020 7378 8383

Group Leader's Name: _____

School/Group Name: _____

Address: _____

City/ County: _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____ Website: _____

Date of Visit: _____ Time: _____

Number in group: _____ Number(s) of staff/leaders: _____

Programme you are booking:

- VICTORIAN SURGERY
- APOTHECARY'S ASSISTANT
- KING CHOLERA WALKS!
- HERBAL SANCTUARY

Tick if you want to borrow: Clipboards Quantity: _____

Curriculum you are studying or special interests of Group:

Does the Group have any Special Needs? (Please re-read access details):

How did you hear about the Museum?

