

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 antisepsis;
- 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.**

MAP showing location of OLD OPERATING THEATRE Museum
(arrow labelled OOT indicates actual museum entrance)

Transport links

The Museum is five minutes' walk from London Bridge Station.

Underground connections: Northern and Jubilee lines.

Mainline rail connections stopping at London Bridge.

Bus station and taxis in concourse at London Bridge Station.

Coaches are usually able to stop briefly in St Thomas's Street for set-down.

Coach and car parking is very limited in this area.

Local Attractions (marked on map)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Vinopolis | 6. Tourist Information |
| 2. Anchor Inn | 7. Borough Market |
| 3. Clink Prison | 8. London Dungeon |
| 4. Golden Hinde | 9. Britain at War |
| 5. Southwark Cathedral | 10. George Inn |

Tate Modern and **Globe Theatre** are 15-20 minutes' walk from the Museum.

GROUP VISIT INFORMATION

Address: The Old Operating Theatre, Museum and Herb Garret
9a St. Thomas' Street
London SE1 9RY
Phone: 020 7955 4791
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.
(For Special Needs we can book groups of less than 10.)

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 75 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: £2.50 Student/Concession: £3.00 Adult: £4.00
(for 2001) 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.

Local attractions: please see map opposite for other places to visit in the area.

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 17th 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.

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. 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.

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 19th century surgeon. The group is asked to sit around the tiered stands of the Operating Theatre where 19th 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 19th century

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

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.

Curriculum links (History)

KS2 Victorians

[Southwark Cathedral (020 7367 6715) has a programme on The Victorian Classroom]

KS3 Britain 1750-1900

KS4 ‘Medicine through Time’ syllabus (History GCSE)

Audiences

This talk is readily adapted to suit different audiences: apart from schools (age 7+), 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. Use was made of this space by the apothecary of St Thomas's hospital 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

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 19th 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.

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 antiseptics include a Lister carbolic acid spray.

THE HERB GARRET: Activity Hour programme

Audience

This interactive programme can be booked by KS1 or KS2 classes of up to 30. It will last 60-75 minutes depending on the group's needs.

Structure of session

The session is led by one of the curatorial staff. Whole class groups are usually divided so that the curator-led activities are done with a half-size group, allowing the other half to do a self-guided exploration of the museum, for which clipboards, paper and pencils *or* slates/slate pencils are available. This exploration produces striking observations and images, which can be discussed at the end of the session or later at school. It is accessible to the whole age range. In addition, the museum is developing sheets suitable for use at KS2. Groups then swap over.

The curator-led half of the session uses an interactive style. Museum staff are able to draw on a wide range of equipment such as the **pill-maker, pestles and mortars**, and **poultices**, to explore the manufacture of medicines from herbs, linking to present day health care and caring for yourself. In addition, a range of other activities is currently available or will be in use shortly:

Anatomy table

Large-size weighing scales

Egyptian prescription

Object boxes (touch/feel)

Museum staff can also demonstrate a replica set of Roman surgical instruments, or lead discussion centred round a 13th century body image.

Curriculum links

This programme develops cross-curricular themes involving personal, social and health education, art, technology, history, science, mathematics, English and citizenship.

THE HERB GARRET: Herb Talk programme

Content of talk/demonstration

This talk is offered to adult groups and is located in the Herb Garret. As this location is smaller than the Operating Theatre, the maximum number here is 25.

The talk is given by a member of the curatorial staff and explores the history and use of natural medicines, ranging from ancient cultures through to the apothecaries of old St Thomas's Hospital. It starts with documented medicinal herb use by Chinese, Egyptian and Roman cultures, and goes on to look at plants such as rhubarb, garlic and wormwood which were to put to medicinal use in times of both peace and war for more than 2000 years. Later, developments in hospital care brought surprising remedies: one of the most popular 'cures' used 3 gallons of earthworms!

This herbal history is illustrated throughout by touch and smell, with demonstrations of the techniques of herbal medicine, using the museum's exhibits.

Museum visit

In addition to this talk, groups will have time to look around the rest of the museum.

OTHER MUSEUM SERVICES

Public talks These take place approximately once a month at weekends, on various themes: Victorian Surgery, Herbal Medicine, other sessions involving specialist speakers: please contact museum for details, or visit our web site. Pre-booking not usually necessary.

Public health walks We are sometimes able to offer groups a guided walk around the local area of Southwark on the theme of Victorian Public Health, but this is subject to staff availability. Please enquire: any walk has to be pre-booked.

Outreach services For groups physically unable to visit the museum due to our restricted access, we may be able to offer an outreach service subject to staff availability. Please contact us at the museum to discuss your needs.

Art exhibitions The museum is occasionally used by artists for display of work or installations. These are integrated into the museum space.

Poetry events A programme of poetry events is run periodically at the museum, in the evening. Details can be obtained from our web site or by enquiry.

Hire The museum is available for hire for filming, private functions, etc. Please contact the museum for rates and details. We generally prefer to arrange hires outside normal museum opening hours.

MUSEUM PLAN

BOOKING CONFIRMATION FORM

PLEASE CONTACT THE MUSEUM BY PHONE FIRST TO BE SURE OF DATES.

After contacting us, please post or fax this form to the Museum to confirm your booking:

The Old Operating Theatre, Museum and Herb Garret

9a St. Thomas' Street

London SE1 9RY

Phone: 020 7955 4791

Fax: 020 7378 8383

Group Leader's name: _____

School/Group name: _____

Address: _____

City/County _____ **Postcode** _____

Phone: _____ **Fax:** _____

e-mail: _____ **Website:** _____

Date of visit: _____ **Time:** _____

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

Type of School Group: (indicate Key Stage and Age)

Infant _____ Junior _____ Secondary _____

Type of Group if not School: Student 16+ Adult Concession

Programme you are booking:

Victorian Surgery (Age 7+) Activity Hour (KS1&2) Herb Talk (Adult)

Tick if you want to borrow: Clipboards Slates **Quantity:** _____

Tick if you would like to use Museum worksheets suitable for:

College/16+ KS4 KS3 KS2 Family Self-guide

(These resources are under development: they will be supplied if available).

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?
