

The Wolverhampton Hospitals Heritage Collection

A Guidebook

About RWT Arts & Heritage

The RWT Arts and Heritage group is managed through the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust Charity (RWT Charity). Established in 2020, the purpose of the group is to deliver projects which use the arts to enhance the experience of patients, staff, visitors, and the wider community, and to increase historical awareness in relation to Wolverhampton's hospital heritage.



The Royal Wolverhampton
NHS Trust Charity

Our aims:

These aims are informed by the values and strategic aims of the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust (RWT). These areas of focus provide a framework for the projects and activities carried out by the Arts and Heritage group:

- ❖ To contribute to and enhance the healing environment for patients, visitors, and our wider community (Care)
- ❖ To develop community connections between RWT and local arts and heritage individuals and organisations (Community)
- ❖ To explore and exhibit the history of healthcare in relation to the RWT, its workforce, and the wider city (Colleagues)

A Custodian of Heritage

As referenced in our third aim, the Arts and Heritage group strives to explore and exhibit the history of healthcare and its advancements in Wolverhampton. We hope to do this by:



exhibiting and interpreting items from the Wolverhampton Hospitals Heritage Collection, which includes medical artefacts, records, and artworks, and make this accessible to the public through the development of a central resource;



delivering supporting projects and activities which engage the wider community, including staff, with the heritage of where they live and work;



providing opportunities which enable the wider community to contribute to the telling of this history, and find ways to increase its relevance for the people of Wolverhampton today.

This is the mission statement of our Collection.

The Collection



1: Items from the Collection

The Wolverhampton Hospitals Heritage Collection is a collection of items relating to the provision and advancements of healthcare, in Wolverhampton and the UK more broadly. It is made up of over 100 objects ranging from medical equipment to memorabilia, as well as a large archive of photographs.

The core of the collection was first gathered together by Roy Stallard, with many of the items being gifted by past staff from Wolverhampton's Royal Hospital. Roy was a Nurse and later a Nurse Tutor at the Royal and the Wolverhampton and Midland Counties Eye Infirmary; he was also the last president of the Nurses League. As a result, Roy is an authority on Wolverhampton's hospitals, with a wealth of knowledge on how healthcare provision has developed in the local area.

The collection amassed by Roy was first displayed at Bantock House Museum in 2013, under the curatorship of Helen Steatham. Helen continued to care for and curate the collection as it was displayed in other venues including All Saints Action Network and New Cross Hospital (read more about these below).

Roy and Helen became members of the RWT Arts and Heritage group when it was established in 2020. Shortly before the Arts and Heritage group applied for a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Roy and other contributors (including Frank Sharman, who had collected a large number of glass medicine bottles) donated their collections to the RWT Charity, and ownership was transferred to the Arts and Heritage Group.



2: Roy Stallard

Care, Create, Conserve

In October 2023, the Arts and Heritage Group were successful in obtaining a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, for an exciting new programme called 'Care, Create, Conserve'. This programme strives to involve a wide range of people in telling the story of our shared healthcare heritage in Wolverhampton.



The poster features the Arts & Heritage logo at the top left and the NHS logo at the top right. Below these are three horizontal bands: a green band with the word "Care" and a photo of people in white coats; a purple band with the word "Create" and a photo of people working; and an orange band with the word "Conserve" and a photo of a museum display. Below the bands is a text box with a list of bullet points and two blue call-to-action buttons. At the bottom, there are logos for The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust Charity and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Arts & Heritage

NHS
The Royal Wolverhampton
NHS Trust

Care

Create

Conserve

Step into the story of healthcare in Wolverhampton, and explore how medicine and medical methods have evolved over two centuries.

- Investigate our fascinating historical collection from the Royal Hospital
- Share your stories, experiences, and memories of healthcare in Wolverhampton
- Get involved in our vibrant programme of events and workshops

Find us in Wolverhampton Central Library at Snow Hill, Wolverhampton, WV1 3AX.

Get in touch with us by emailing rwh-tr.artsandheritage@nhs.net

The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust Charity

Heritage Fund

The flagship part of 'Care, Create, Conserve' is the development of Wolverhampton's first healthcare museum and co-creation centre, where the Wolverhampton Hospitals Heritage Collection will be exhibited and shared with the community.

The programme will also showcase the healthcare stories of today: through four community co-creation projects, four creative residencies for local artists, and a vibrant programme of talks and events, the subject of healthcare will be explored through different lenses and perspectives.

The role of Arts and Heritage Volunteers will involve local people who are passionate about sharing our local heritage and healthcare stories. These volunteers will help manage the exhibiton, as well as gaining unique opportunities for training in collections care and curation.

3: Care, Create, Conserve

The Catalogue

Curators for the collection, Helen Steatham and Sharron Wise, have diligently catalogued the collection as it has grown. Most items donated by Roy Stallard and Frank Sharman are given an object number with the reference 'RH', standing for Royal Hospital. Items donated by staff from various departments at New Cross Hospital are given an object number beginning with 'NX'.

The catalogue exists in Microsoft Word as both a Short Catalogue, which contains object numbers, brief descriptions, and dimensions, and a Long Catalogue, which contains a more detailed entry for each item.

RH 14.1	Blue Ceramic Pharmacy Jar	18 x 12cm
RH 14.2	Blue ceramic pharmacy jar with lid	18 x 12cm
RH 15	Blue Glass Jar with stopper	18 x 12cm
RH 16	Clear glass pharmacy bottle	23 x 9cm
RH 17.1	Transparent blue glass pharmacy bottle	21 x 9cm

4: Excerpt from the Short Catalogue

Long Catalogue entries contain the following information about each item, as far as it is known:

- Object number
- Admin category
- Object name
- Brief description
- Physical description
- Additional/supporting information
- Thumbnail (if a photo exists)
- Maker (if known)
- Colour
- Material
- Dimensions (in centimetres)
- Number of items
- Production date/period
- Condition
- Current location
- Catalogue date
- Acquisition source/note
- Acquisition date
- Catalogue status

Object Number	RH 14.1
Admin Category	Pharmaceutical
Object Name	Pharmacy jar
Brief Description	Blue ceramic pharmacy jar
Physical Description	Pale blue ceramic Jar with a label on light brown crazed background marked <u>P.ZINGIB</u> (Zingiber). Dark blue lid.
Additional /Supporting Information	Originated from Massey's Chemist, Tettenhall Green, Wolverhampton
Thumbnail	
Maker	
Colour	Pale blue and dark blue
Material	Ceramic/earthenware
Dimensions	18 x 12cm
Number of Items	1 plus lid
Production Date/Period	Victorian
Condition	Chip on rim of jar and base. Base cracked. Inside of lid badly crazed
Current Location	
Catalogue Date	June 2013
Acquisition Source/Note	Roy Stallard. Given to Roy by Miss E.M. Massey
Acquisition Date	July 2023
Catalogue Status	Catalogued

5: Entry from the Long Catalogue

A Growing Collection

The catalogue is a living document, undergoing constant alterations as details change (for example, current location) and additions are made (when new items are acquired). While our collection is not as large as some museums, things can quickly become confusing if the correct process is not followed!

The next couple of pages will look at the processes we have developed in more depth. Here is a glossary of some terms you may find unfamiliar.

Glossary

Accession	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (n) An item transferred into a collection. 2. (v) The process of transferring a material into a collection, such as adding it to the catalogue. Sometimes termed 'object entry'.
Acquisition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (n) An item or items transferred into a collection as a unit at a single time. 2. (v) The process of seeking and receiving materials from any source by transfer, donation, or purchase (as the item is <i>acquired</i>).
Appraisal	(n) Assessing a collection to determine its long-term value. This often happens during accession and is sometimes termed 'review'.
Catalogue	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (n) A compilation of concise descriptions of library and archives resources. 2. (v) The process of adding a new item into a catalogue. Sometimes termed 'object entry'.
Collection	(n) Materials assembled by a person, organization, or repository from a variety of sources.
Context	The circumstances surrounding the creation, receipt, storage, or use of a collection of materials.
Provenance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (n) The origin or source of something. 2. (n) Information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or group of items.



6: Objects from the Collection

Our Process

1. **Appraisal/Review:** We determine whether the object fits in the collection.

When do we make this decision?

If an individual or group approaches us with an object they would like to donate to the collection, we ask them to email us a photo of the object with any information they have about it, including how they came by it. We then use this information to appraise the object. If we already have the object, we will conduct an appraisal before accession.

How do we make this decision?

Appraisal can be difficult, as we might be offered an object which we are unsure about accepting into the collection. Reasons we might not want to accept an object include:

- *Relevance – the object is not relevant to Wolverhampton’s healthcare history and will not help us achieve our objectives.*
- *Provenance – the object is not from Wolverhampton or the Black Country, and so doesn’t contribute to the local healthcare story we are trying to share.*
- *Ownership – we are not sure the current owner has the rights to donate the object to us.*
- *Duplication – we already have the object, and having an identical duplicate would not serve us.*
- *Condition – the object is in very poor condition, and we do not feel we have the resources or funds to see to its preservation or conservation.*

We have to see the object and find out as much about it as possible before making a decision.

2. **Acquisition:** The object is donated into the collection, the transfer of ownership is marked by the completion of an object entry form, and we physically receive the object.

What information is included on an object entry form?

An object entry form asks for the address and contact details of the donor and the current owner, a description of the object(s), the reason for entry (gift, sale with price, loan with duration, or for purposes or identification), confirmation of understanding, and signatures of the donor and the museum signatory.

3. **Temporary Storage:** The object is carefully stored until our curators can accession them.

4. Accession/Cataloguing: The object is inspected and recorded, with a new entry being added into the Long Catalogue, and brief details being added to the Short Catalogue.

5a. Storage: The object is packaged, clearly marked, and moved into a longer-term storage location. The current location is recorded on the object's Long Catalogue entry.

How are the objects stored?

When they are accessioned, a small white label with the object number (eg: 'RH 14.1') is stuck to the object in an unobtrusive place (normally on the base). Objects that are not going on display are wrapped in acid-free tissue paper, with special attention made to fragile elements (spouts or handles, for example). The object is then either placed in a box, or wrapped in a layer of bubble wrap and labelled with the object number. Wrapped items are then stored in large plastic boxes or crates.

5b. Display: The items are incorporated into an exhibition and put on display. The current location is recorded on the object's Long Catalogue entry.

How do we decide what goes on display?

Our collection can be grouped into broad themes, assorted by the field of medicine they stem from (for example, pharmaceutical or surgical). Sometimes objects that relate to each other (such as glass bottles and ceramic pots for medicines and ointments) create a pleasing display by themselves. Alternatively, other categories can be used to group objects, such as material they are made from, or the rough era in which they were made and used.

Sometimes, we might change up the objects on display to curate specific exhibitions around themes. For 'Care, Create, Conserve', we will be developing exhibitions which reflect the themes of our artist residencies and community projects – themes such as gender, disability, and language. We will also create displays which shed light on the 'behind-the-scenes' of heritage work, such as conservation and object disposal. Where possible, we will also use the collection to mark particular public holidays and awareness days/months, like Black History Month.

If you have any ideas for potential displays or exhibitions, please do let us know!

Previous Exhibitions

Bantock House Museum

Under the curatorship of Helen Steatham, the collection of medical objects owned by Roy Stallard were first exhibited at Bantock House Museum in 2013.

The exhibition was extremely popular with local people and the accompanying talks attracted capacity audiences. Many visitors had personal memories of the Royal Hospital and the Eye Infirmary in particular, remembering fondly their experiences of working at the hospitals or time spent as patients and the care they received.



7: Surgical exhibition at Bantock House Museum

Heart and Lung Building

In June 2018, items from the collection were displayed across three cabinets in the atrium of the Heart and Lung building at New Cross Hospital. The objects were organised into five main displays:

- Doctor's Orders – items which may have been found on a doctor's desk during an examination, such as a stethoscope and a blood pressure monitor;
- Carry On Nurse – items commonly found on wards in the past, such as a ceramic bedpan and a thermometer;
- Take a Breather – items used to give anaesthetic such as ether masks, or to ease breathing like a Nelson's Inhaler;
- Full Steam Ahead – a couple of steam kettles for 'steam inhalation treatment', to aid patients with difficulty breathing;
- Pills and Potions – items such as glass pharmacy jars which would have once contained medicines, and a brass mortar and pestle for grinding compounds;

In 2023, a display was reintroduced into the Heart and Lung atrium ahead of the 75th birthday of the NHS. A small selection of the collection remains on display here.



8: 'Carry On Nurse' exhibition in the Heart and Lung atrium

Bell Library

These cabinets were later moved into the Bell Library, which is based in the Wolverhampton Medical Institute (WMI) building at New Cross Hospital. From 2018 to 2023, this display engaged and inspired future doctors and nurses as they completed their studies and training. With an additional two cabinets, more items were displayed including objects relating to the Wolverhampton Eye Infirmary, and a surgeon's 'General Set'.



9: Eye Infirmary exhibition in the Bell Library

All Saints Action Network

Alongside the displays at New Cross Hospital, a small selection of items were exhibited at the community centre operated by All Saints Action Network (ASAN), in the neighbourhood behind the Royal Hospital. This display contained a large number of bottles and jars from local 'Manufacturing Chemists' Reade Brothers & Co Ltd, who were located opposite the Royal Hospital. These items were on loan from Frank Sharman, and were later added into the collection. This display remained at ASAN from 2018 until 2023.



10: 'Pills and Potions' exhibition at ASAN

Central Library

To celebrate the 75th birthday of the NHS, a selection of objects from the collection were displayed in the main Central Library in Wolverhampton, between June and July 2023. This was the first time the collection went on display after its ownership was transferred to the RWT Arts and Heritage Group.



11: 'Take a Breather' exhibition at Central Library

Mander Centre Health Hub

For a short while in February and March 2024, a small selection of the collection was displayed in a single cabinet in the Mander Health Hub, the RWT's community-based health venue offering walk-up health checks and vaccinations. This display accompanied an artist residency as a part of 'Care, Create, Conserve', in which poets Emma Purshouse and Sophina 'Brwn Girl in the Ring' Jagot were developing creative pieces based on their conversations on healthcare held in this space.



12: Exhibition in the Mander Health Hub

A Brief History of Healthcare in Wolverhampton

Public Infirmary

In 1821, the first Public Dispensary was opened in Wolverhampton at 46 Queen Street.

In areas such as the Black Country, where rapid industrialisation had led to overcrowding, poor living conditions, and increasingly dangerous occupations, the need for public health provision was a high priority. Recognising that much of the town's working populace could not afford the medical care they needed, local philanthropists resolved to raise funds through donations and subscriptions to open a Public Dispensary.



The Dispensary opened on Tuesday 10th July 1821, with a dispensing room, waiting room, consulting room, and examination room, as well as a ward with room for 10 beds. Medical care was conducted by two physicians, two resident surgeons, plus an apothecary. Care was provided freely, but patients had to obtain a recommendation in the form of a ticket in order to be treated.



Did you know? You can still see the building which was once the Public Infirmary on Queen Street – it is now occupied by cafes and fast-food restaurants.

Some useful links to learn more about the Public Dispensary on Queen Street:

- Wolverhampton Art and Culture, 'Queen Street Through Time – Number 46 : The Public Dispensary' <https://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/queen-street-time/>
- Wolverhampton History and Heritage Society, 'Wolverhampton Public Dispensary' <https://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/health/Dispensary/htm>

Founding of the Royal Hospital

In 1846, plans to replace the Dispensary with a purpose-built Infirmary were developed.

Despite its bed capacity eventually increasing to 20 beds, the Public Dispensary was very limited in its scope of both surgical and medical provision. Money was raised through public donations, reaching a sum of £18,000 to fund a public hospital. Land on Cleveland Road was purchased from the Duke of Cleveland for £3,000, and plans for the building were drawn up by local architect Edward Banks.



13: The South Staffordshire Hospital and Dispensary

In 1849, the South Staffordshire Hospital and Dispensary was opened on Cleveland Road.

Over the next century, this hospital would change names several times. The most significant change was to come on 23rd December 1928, when His Majesty King George V decreed that the hospital should be renamed The Royal Hospital, Wolverhampton. This followed a visit from HRH The Prince of Wales earlier that year, who presented the Hospital Board with a Royal Charter of Incorporation. In July 1930, the hospital applied for and was granted a coat of arms.



14: Doctors at a child's bedside

Did you know? At the Royal Hospital, patients were treated irrespective of their wealth – but there was a sort of ‘means test’ to determine whether they could provide some funding for their treatment. A workman’s fund, or patient’s aid, was established, where workmen paid into the fund and for the sum of 2 guineas, 2 tickets were provided for services to the Royal Hospital.

Royal Hospital Developments

Over its century and a half of service, the Royal Hospital underwent many developments.

Due to the development of a railway line between London and Wolverhampton, many medical professionals travelled from hospitals such as St Thomas' in Lambeth to work at the Royal Hospital.

By the turn of the 19th century, electricity was installed in the building, which allowed for a lift to be built across the hospital's three stories. Electricity also replaced the old gas and oil lighting throughout the hospital, allowing for better lighting in the operating theatres.

In 1907, a new Nurses' Home was opened, enabling nursing staff to reside on the hospital site. A new wing was opened in memory of King Edward VII, which provided additional beds on the Edward and Alexandra Wards. Shortly after, the West Wing was opened to create a further two wards, the Dartmouth and McLaren Wards.



15: The King Edward VII Memorial Wing

After the First World War, a pathology laboratory was established, as well as a very early x-ray department. By the 1920s, the Royal Hospital included an outpatients department, ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) department, Accident and Emergency, and a Pharmacy. By the 1950s, services had grown to encompass oncology, orthopaedics, and cardiothoracics.

Did you know? The Royal Hospital also had a swimming pool at the base of the 'new wing', for use by staff, their families, and patients. It was provided by the local Graham family. In our collection, we have two tokens that granted use to this pool.

Some useful links to learn more about the Royal Hospital:

- Wolverhampton History and Heritage Society, 'Royal Hospital'
<https://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/RoyalHospital/RoyalHospital.htm>
- All Saints Action Network, 'A Brief History of the Royal Hospital'
<https://www.asan.org.uk/heritage/hospital-history/>
- BBC, 'Look inside abandoned hospital set for redevelopment'
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4ny58wj341o>

Notable Figures

The Royal Hospital was shaped through the influence of a number of notable figures.

Local businessman George Briscoe (1792 – 1866), after breaking his leg and receiving insufficient care at the Public Dispensary, determined that Wolverhampton needed a significant hospital to treat its sick and injured. With the support of other local philanthropists like Henry Rogers and through generous public donations, Briscoe's vision for a purpose-built infirmary was realised in the Royal Hospital.

The Royal Hospital was designed by local architect Edward Banks (1817 – 1866). Banks was a renowned talent with many local buildings in his portfolio, including Compton Hall (now the Hospice), Holy Trinity Church in Health Town, and the Queen's Building which formed part of the initial railway station. He received £100 for his design of the Royal.



16: George Briscoe



17: Royal Hospital Chapel with stained-glass windows

Miss Gray took over as Matron of the Royal Hospital following the early termination of Matron Goodchild, who had blocked the entrance of men into the nursing profession. Matron Gray established a male nurse training school, a school of physiotherapy, and a school of radiography at the Royal Hospital. In 1967, three stained glass windows were dedicated to Matron Gray and installed in the chapel at the Royal Hospital.

New Cross

In the late 1960s, services at the Royal Hospital merged with New Cross Hospital.

In the 1990s, the decision was made to relocate all services to New Cross Hospital on the Wolverhampton Road. Previously the local workhouse, New Cross grew from the workhouse infirmary, which had joined the NHS in 1948.



18: New Cross, Autumn 1968

Did you know? A number of the original workhouse buildings are still standing on the New Cross Hospital site, including Board Offices which is now the Social Services offices, and the Nurses' Home which is now the administrative building Hollybush House.

Engaging the Public

Quick Facts

