Blue plaques: London houses of medicohistorical interest

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Blue plaques on London houses associated with famous people are a familiar sight to the Londoner as well as to the visitor to the metropolis. There are at present around 400 of these plaques, which commemorate the eminent in many walks of life, such as politics, the law, the arts, and the sciences. Of these, a couple of dozen relate to medicine, and it is these that I have collected together here so that those with a medicohistorical bent may conveniently visit them (table I).

Minton in chocolate-brown terracotta with white lettering. In 1901 the London County Council undertook to continue the scheme, and between 1903 and 1965, 331 plaques were erected. From 1903 to 1907 the style of the Royal Society of Arts was continued, but in 1907 an alternative design was introduced, rectangular in form, and made of stone, lead, or bronze. Between 1907 and 1921, 23 such rectangular tablets were erected, as well as 43 circular ceramic plaques. In 1921 Doulton glazed ware

First plaques

The Royal Society of Arts initiated the scheme, the first plaque being erected in 1866 at Lord Byron's residence at 24 Holles Street, W1. It was circular and made of deep blue terracotta with white lettering. Between 1867 and 1900, 36 further plaques were erected by the society, including the one to John Keats in 1896. These plaques were circular and made by

TABLE 1—Plaques arranged by London boroughs

Westminster	Sloane
Berlioz	Wakley
Bright	Willan
Fildes	Kensington and Chelsea
Garrett Anderson	Simon
Gray	Smollett
Hunter, John	Fleming
Hunter, William	Tower Hamlets
Hutchinson	Barnardo
Huxley	Southwark
Jackson	Oliver
Lister	Wandsworth
Maugham	Wilson
Nightingale	Bromley
Radcliffe	Grace
Camden	Croydon
Dale	Conan Doyle
Darwin	
Freud	
Keats	

Pilgrims Corner, Pilgrims Way, Reigate, Surrey

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TABLE II—*Plaques to people who qualified in or were closely related to medicine*

Description	Address	Date of erection	Description	Address	Date of erection
Barnardo, Thomas John (1845-1905), began his work for children in a building on this site in 1866	58 Solent House, Ben Jonson Road, Tower Hamlets	1953	Jackson, John Hughlings (1835-1911), physician, lived here	3 Manchester Square, Westminster	1932
Bright, Richard (1789-1858), physician, lived here	11 Saville Row, Westminster	1979	Keats, John (1795-1821), poet, lived in this house	"Keats House" (Wentwood Place), Keats Grove, Hampstead	1896 (Royal Society of Arts)
Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur (1859-1930), creator of Sherlock Holmes, lived here 1891-1894	12 Tennison Road, South Norwood, Croydon	1973	Lister, Lord (1827-1912), surgeon, lived here	12 Park Crescent, Westminster	1915
Dale, Sir Henry (1875-1968), physiologist, lived here	Mount Vernon House, Hampstead	1981	Maugham, William Somerset (1874-1965), novelist and playwright, lived here 1911-1919	6 Chesterfield Street, Westminster	1975
Ellis, Henry Havelock (1859-1939), pioneer in the scientific study of sex, lived here	14 Dover Mansions, Canterbury Crescent, Lambeth	1981	Nightingale, Florence (1820-1910), lived and died in a house on this site	10 South Street, Westminster	1955
Fleming, Sir Alexander* (1881-1955), discoverer of penicillin, lived here	20a Danvers Street, Kensington	1981	Radcliffe, John (1650-1714), physician	19-20 Bow Street, Westminster (Included in Bow Street plaque)	1929
Freud, Sigmund (1856-1939), founder of psychoanalysis, lived here in 1938-1939	20 Maresfield Gardens, Camden	1956	Simon, Sir John (1816-1904), pioneer of public health, lived here	40 Kensington Square, Kensington	1959
Garrett Anderson, Elizabeth (1836-1917), the first woman to qualify as a doctor, lived here	20 Upper Berkeley Street, Westminster	1962	Sloane, Sir Hans (1660-1753), physician and benefactor of British Museum, lived here 1695-1742	4 Bloomsbury Place, Camden	1965
Grace, William Gilbert (1848-1915), cricketer, lived here	Fairmount, Mottingham Lane, Bromley	1966	Smollett, Tobias (1721-1771), novelist, lived in part of the house 1750-1762	16 Lawrence Street, Chelsea (Included in Chelsea China plaque)	1950
Gray, Henry (1827-1861), anatomist, lived here	8 Wilton Street, Westminster	1947	Wakley, Thomas (1795-1862), reformer and founder of the <i>Lancet</i> , lived here	35 Bedford Square,† Camden	1962
Hunter, John (1728-1793), surgeon, lived here	31 Golden Square, Westminster. (Premises rebuilt and plaque refixed 1931)	1907	Willan, Robert (1757-1812), dermatologist, lived here	10 Bloomsbury Square, Camden	1949
Hunter, William (1718-1783), This was the home and museum of Dr William Hunter, anatomist	Lyric Theatre (rear portion), Great Windmill Street, Westminster	1952	Wilson, Edward Adrian (1872-1912), Antarctic explorer and naturalist, lived here	Battersea Vicarage, 42 Vicarage Crescent, Wandsworth	1935
Hutchinson, Sir Jonathan (1828-1913), surgeon, scientist and teacher, lived here	15 Cavendish Square, Westminster	1981			
Huxley, Thomas Henry (1825-1895), biologist, lived here	38 Marlborough Place, Westminster	1910			

* There is also a plaque on St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street W2 which reads: Sir Alexander Fleming 1881-1955 discovered penicillin in the second storey room above this plaque.

† Thomas Hodgkin (1798-1866) lived later at 35 Bedford Square.

TABLE III—*Plaques to four people associated with medicine*

Description	Address	Date of erection
Berlioz, Hector (1803-1869), composer, stayed here in 1851	58 Queen Anne Street, Westminster	1969
Darwin, Charles (1809-1882), naturalist, lived in a house on this site 1838-1842	Biological Sciences Building University College, (site of 110) Gower Street, Camden	1961
Fildes, Sir Luke (1844-1927), artist, lived here 1878-1927	16 Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster	1975
Oliver, Percy Lane (1878-1944), founder of the first voluntary blood donor service, lived and worked here	5 Colyton Road, Southwark	1979

became the standard material for the tablets. In 1937 the plain design used today was adopted, and in 1939 the distinctive white edging was added. In 1955 the manufacture of the plaques was taken over by Carter's of London.

Greater London Council plaques

The Greater London Council came into being in 1965, and because it covers a larger area than the previous London County Council, plaques may now be seen in the outer suburban areas, such as Bromley and Croydon. The choice of houses and personages to be commemorated lies in the hands of the

Historical Buildings Board of the Greater London Council, which publishes a useful booklet on the subject. Their present policy is to erect a plaque only where the original house survives, and not on any later building on the site. The London blue plaque scheme is now world famous and is widely imitated in many countries.

In the accompanying list (table II), all plaques, except one, relate to people who qualified in medicine. The exception is Florence Nightingale, whose pioneer work in nursing transformed hospital practice. In many cases the plaques were erected for fame in a non-medical field. Thus John Keats is commemorated as a poet; Tobias Smollett, Conan Doyle, and Somerset Maugham for their contributions to literature; W G Grace for cricket; E A Wilson for polar exploration; and Thomas Henry Huxley as a biologist.

In addition to the medically qualified group there are plaques to four others who were associated with medicine (table III). Both Hector Berlioz and Charles Darwin were medical students for a few years before they decided that their talents lay elsewhere. Another non-medical person was Percy Lane Oliver, who founded the first voluntary blood donor service. Finally, Sir Luke Fildes is included because his painting, "The Doctor" (1891), which hangs in the Tate Gallery, is one of the great works of art depicting the physician and his patient.

Addendum

Arrangements have recently been made for plaques to be erected to commemorate two pioneers of tropical medicine, Sir Ronald Ross (1857-1932) and Sir Patric Manson (1844-1922), as well as the surgeon-veterinarian, William Moorcroft (1767-1825).