

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).