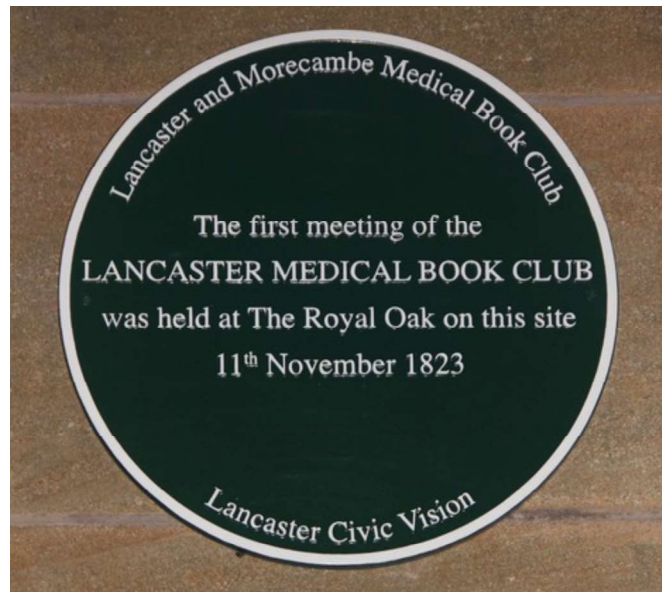


Centenary, Bicentenary and Quatercentenary

Bryan Rhodes

The Lancaster Medical Book Club (LMBC), recently renamed the Lancaster and Morecambe Medical Book Club, celebrated its bicentenary in November 2023. It is the oldest surviving provincial 'Medical Book Club' and the second oldest provincial medical literature society after the Bristol Medical Reading Society, formed in 1807. Alongside Andrew Gallagher, Robin Jackson and new President Shadaba Ahmed, I helped to organise the events celebrating the bicentenary on November 11th. These included the unveiling of a new heritage plaque in Market Square, Lancaster by our special guest, Prof. Gareth Williams. The plaque marks the location of the very first meeting of the LMBC, in the Royal Oak Inn (now the site of the Lancaster branch of TK Maxx) in 1823. I suspect that the



The Heritage plaque.

Royal Oak was originally chosen because the publican at that time, Jane Noon, had a reputation for offering high quality food; an early gastro-pub. We were blessed with a rare dry weather day and a generous crowd of Book Club members and onlookers.

The unveiling was followed by a lecture and display in the Storey Gallery, preceded by a celebratory toast. Edward Jenner died in 1823 so it was appropriate that Gareth Williams gave the lecture, featuring the life and career of Edward Jenner, father of vaccination, and our display featured items relating to the early LMBC members, smallpox vaccination and testing, and some old books from the LMBC archive. I was delighted to discover that one of my favourite medical history books: Prof. Williams' *'Angel of Death – The story of smallpox'*, will receive a second edition later this year with a new chapter.

On the subject of publications, in July I got to record my first medical history podcast as part of Lancaster City Museum's '100 years, 100 Objects' project celebrating their centenary with one hundred podcasts about items in their collection. My podcast was published in October: No. 83 and features a very rare double-ended set of Roman surgical forceps discovered in an archaeological dig near Lancaster Castle in the 1920s. Found in isolation, if they had been the common single-ended forceps then it would not have been possible to state conclusively that they were intended for surgical purposes. Only three examples of this specific design of double-ended forceps have been found worldwide,¹ so I am convinced that they represent the earliest evidence of surgical activity in Lancaster, and a great example of Roman surgical instrument design from over 1600 years ago. The curved end resembles a modern bone lever, so it seems likely that the earliest surgical procedures in Lancaster were performed for fractures or other trauma. The Podcast can be accessed on Spotify, Podbean and the Lancaster City Museum website.

The other podcasts in the series are well worth a listen and there are four others with a medical history theme: No. 24 features a Diphtheria card and Prof. Catherine Walshe; No. 31 features Dr. Buck Ruxton's diary; Mel Cookson-Carter,



Prof. Williams unveiling the Heritage plaque.



Prof. Williams with the organising committee.



Lancaster's double-ended Roman surgical forceps.

No. 2 features an Ophthalmic set and Dr. Karen Wright, No. 55 features a nursing notebook used by a student nurse at the Storey Institute and Dr. Alejandra Zarate Potes.

As usual, the British Society for the History of Medicine conference, in Cardiff last September, was great fun and very enlightening. I chaired one of the 'miscellaneous' sessions and also presented a paper on 'Lancaster Medical Book Club and the Dissection of Lancashire Murderers', describing what was, almost certainly, a unique episode in British history where a provincial medical book club became involved with the judicial dissection of criminals.²

The new Shakespeare North Playhouse, opened in 2022, recently exhibited a rare and very valuable copy of the 'first folio' of Shakespeare's work which was published seven years after the great bard's death in November 1623 (see folio400.com). Recent research has supported the theory that Shakespeare's plays can be best understood if they are performed with regional accents and over 20 of his plays have now been performed with original pronunciation. A play called 'A Yorkshire Tragedy', first published in 1608 and attributed to a 'Wylliam Shakespere', didn't quite make it into the first folio but is perhaps due further consideration. It seems likely that the 'William Shakeshafte' who worked at Hoghton, near Preston, in the 1580s was the budding playwright himself (Shakespeare's

grandfather sometimes used the surname Shakeshafte). Of course, a number of Shakespeare's plays featured the House of Lancaster or the Roman empire but did the man himself ever visit Lancaster? We don't know for sure but one thing is clear; over 400 years after he wrote them, audiences around the world are still enjoying his brilliant plays.

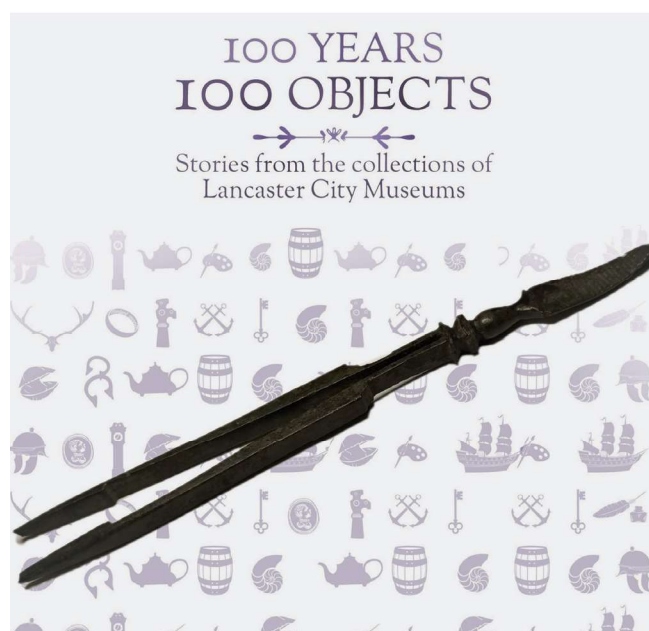
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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100 Years 100 Objects series no. 83 featuring the forceps.