



< Syrup of ginger apothecary jar

Oil of swallows > apothecary jar

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Jar contents

The jars' labels name many substances prepared and sold to treat illness over 300 years ago. John Quincy, who owned one of the jars in the collection, wrote *A Compleat English dispensatory* in 1718, describing the preparations' ingredients and uses including:

Oxymel of squills

This is vinegar of squills (sea onions) boiled with honey. Quincy explained: 'It is a mighty good Puke for Children, and greatly helps to keep their Stomachs, and tender Organs of Respiration, clear from that Phlegm and Viscidity, with which they are so apt to be stuffed, and sometimes quite suffocated.'

Oil of swallows

Herbalist Nicholas Culpeper in his *Compleat herbal*, 1653, wrote that 'swallows, being eaten, clear the sight, the ashes of them (being burnt) eaten, preserves from drunkenness, helps sore throats being applied to them, and inflammations.'

Lohoch of fox's lungs

Culpeper described dried fox lungs as 'an admirable strengthener to the lungs.' A lohoch was a remedy taken for chest complaints, sucked from the end of a liquorice stick.

Syrup of ginger

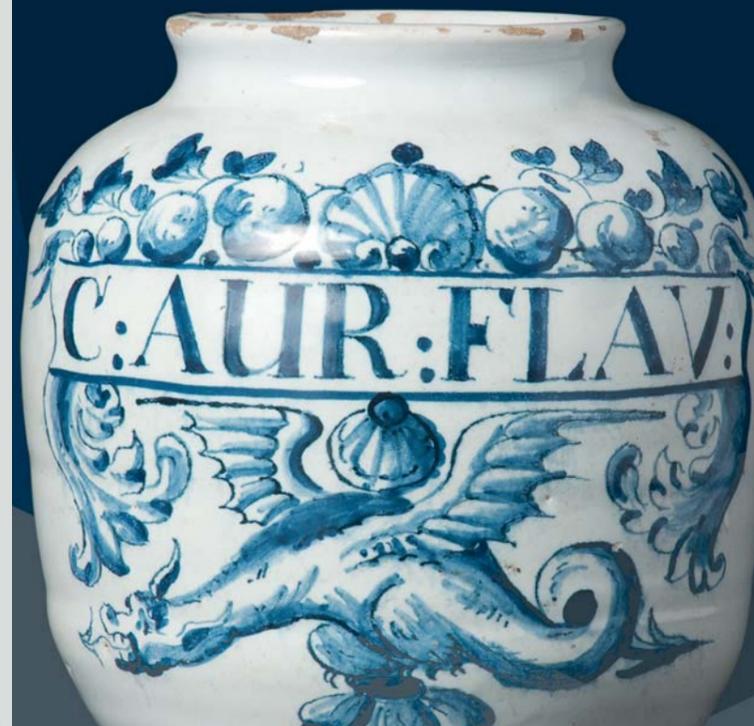
Culpeper described ginger as helping digestion and warming the stomach, and it is still used to treat nausea and motion sickness.

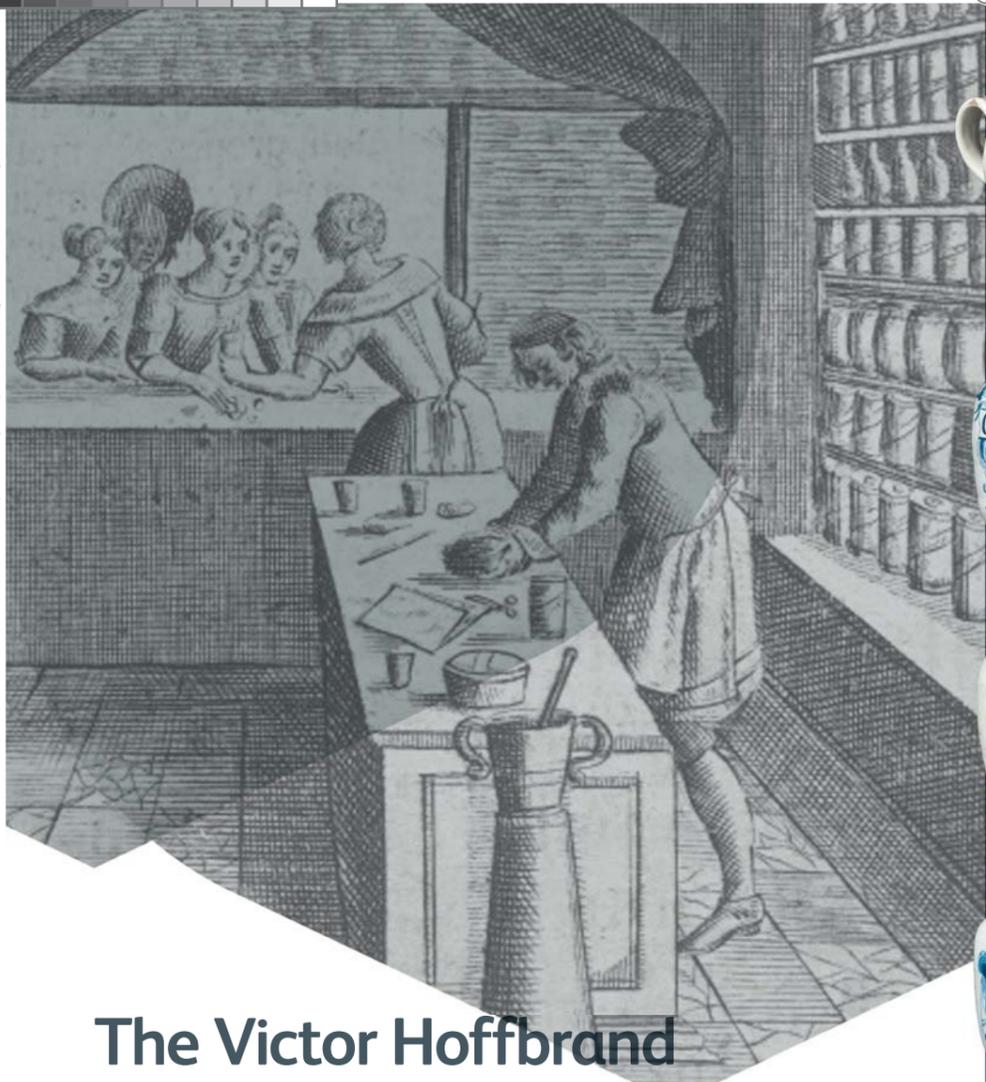
Further reading is available in the Wellcome Library Reading Room on the 2nd floor.



The Victor Hoffbrand collection of apothecary jars at the Royal College of Physicians

In the 17th and 18th centuries, wealthy apothecaries stored their medicinal preparations and ingredients in tin-glazed jars. With decorative Latin labels naming their contents, the jars were functional, attractive and fashionable, designed to impress customers and fellow medical practitioners.





The Victor Hoffbrand collection of apothecary jars

The collector

Professor Victor Hoffbrand FRCP, consultant haematologist at the Royal Free Hospital, London, has collected English delftware apothecary jars for over 30 years. Professor Hoffbrand was inspired to begin his collection after hearing a lecture from another great delftware collector, Dr John F Wilkinson. He bought his first jar soon afterwards and described himself as 'hooked'. This important collection includes rare dated jars with unique designs and unusual shapes and sizes. There are 183 jars, dating from the 1640s to 1740s, forming the largest privately owned group of apothecary jars in the country.



< 'Wet' or 'syrup' apothecary jar



< 'Dry' and 'small dry' apothecary jar



< 'jar belonging to John Battersby, Master of the Society of Apothecaries



< 'Jar featuring popular 'angel with shell' design



< 'Jar featuring 'bird and basket' design

What is Delftware?

Delftware is a type of tin-glazed earthenware. Pots were fired at a low temperature then dipped in a tin oxide glaze to make them white and opaque. The design was then hand painted onto the surface and the pot was re-fired. Delftware first arrived in England around 1567, when Dutch potters fled Antwerp following religious persecution. Southwark and Lambeth became the main locations for London potteries, using the Thames as a transport route.

Jar shapes

English delftware apothecary jars have four main shapes and functions:

- > **Wet jars or syrup jars** held liquid preparations. They have a spout and usually a handle at the back.
- > **Dry jars** held dry ingredients. They are usually cylinder-shaped and taper at the top and bottom.
- > **Small dry jars** were used to hold pills and lozenges.
- > **Large dry jars** often feature the coat of arms of the Society of Apothecaries, and were used for display only.

The jars originally had parchment, vellum or fabric lids tied on to protect their contents, which do not survive today. Metal lids were added later.

Jar designs

Apothecary jars have common features including:

- > a Latin inscription labelling the jar's contents
- > a decorated cartouche surrounding the inscription
- > more rarely, a date and the initials of the apothecary who commissioned them.

One common design is called 'angel with outspread wings'. This example is dated 1679, and the initials show that the jar belonged to John Battersby, Master of the Society of Apothecaries, who had a well-known business at the Great Helmet, Fenchurch Street, London. Samuel Pepys was one of his customers. The jar's label is 'V EGIPTIACV', or Egyptian ointment. Its ingredients were verdigris, honey and vinegar, and it was used to treat ulcers.

Other designs include:

- > angel with shell
- > Apollo and peacocks
- > cherubs and shell
- > fleur de ly
- > bird and basket
- > wyvern (dragon) and shell