

Treasures of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Collections

The Society's mace

The usual image people have of a mace is as a medieval weapon of war, often formed of a club and a spiked head. Its transition to a symbolic staff, used by officials such as lord mayors and the Speaker of the House of Commons, can probably be traced through the chivalric tradition of sovereigns and nobles being accompanied by armed champions, ready to defend them and their rights.

The mace was presented to the Society by the Wellcome Foundation Ltd in 1957. Michael Perrin, chairman of the company, stated that "it was a general, and ancient, custom that bodies such as the Society should possess a mace which could be displayed at formal meetings and which could contribute to the dignity, as well as to the decoration, of such events." The President, Granville Shaw, accepted the presentation, calling it a "most generous and handsome gift" and a "mark of confidence in the Society's future".

The mace was designed by Cyril Shiner. He was well known as a teacher of silversmithing, and as a designer of objects for ceremonial and public use. His works included a number of badges of office, a presentation sword for the Royal Air Force and maces for the Northern Rhodesian Legislative Council and the Institution of Gas Engineers. He also designed plate for a number of cities and universities, including his home city of Birmingham.



The head of the mace, showing the Society's arms

The mace is of hand-wrought silver with gold motifs. It was made in 1956 by five craftsmen working in London and Birmingham for Padgett & Braham Ltd, manufacturing goldsmiths and silversmiths.

The design represents the past and present of pharmacy. The head has an engraved and pierced thistle, leek and rose border, and has the Society's coat of arms applied to it. Below the head are six motifs: a pair of scales, a drug jar, a pestle and mortar, a specie jar, a conical measure and a shop round. The shaft is engraved with a scroll inscribed "Founded 1841: Royal Charter of Incorporation 1843:

Supplemental Charters 1901, 1948, 1953." Designs around the scroll represent recent discoveries and developments. The antibiotic era is shown by *Penicillium notatum*. Chemotherapy is represented by a benzene ring and a methane molecule. Radiochemistry is denoted by the radioactive isotope carbon-14. Pharmacology is shown by an open book showing a leaf and a mosquito. Research is represented by a microscope. Injection therapy is denoted by a group of ampoules.

The mace is still used ceremonially at Council meetings and the Society's annual general meeting.

The Society's collection of silver consists of both ceremonial and presentation items. Although the Society was established in 1841, all the ceremonial items, including the mace, date from the 20th century. They include the original President's chain by Wetherston & Son (1901) and the current President's chain by John

Donald (1963). Also in the collection are a number of items presented to the Society dating from the 18th century to more recent medals and badges.

Members and their guests are able to view the museum's displays during the Society's office hours. The displays are open to general public visitors by appointment on Tuesdays between 1.30 and 4.30pm (bookings should be made with the museum on 020 7572 2210 or by e-mail to museum@rpsgb.org.uk). Researchers are able to make an appointment to see items from the collections on any weekday by contacting the museum.