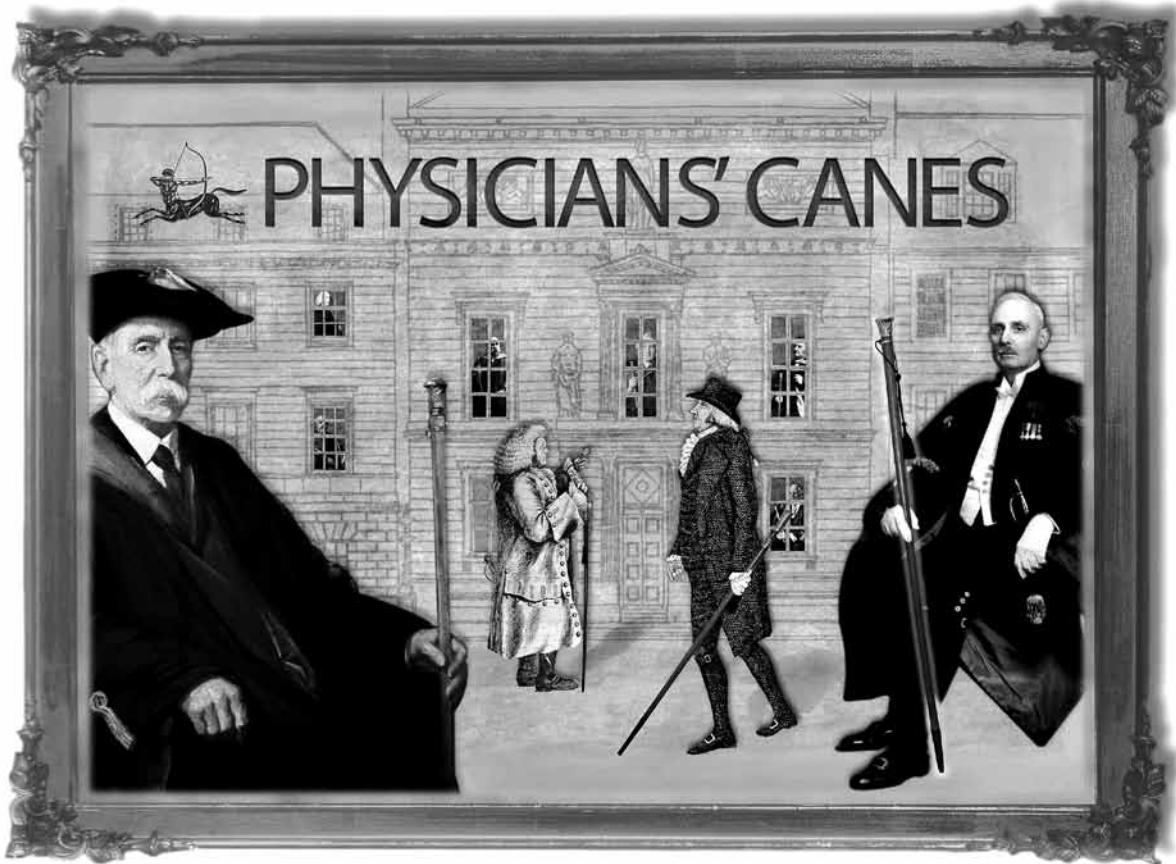


## Physician's canes online exhibition



The College website now contains an online exhibition featuring one of the lesser known collections in Queen Street that gathers together eight examples of physicians' canes. The finest is the presidential cane which features in many portraits. Indeed it is striking how many of the paintings hung on the College walls feature physician's ceremonial canes either proudly displayed or more subtly featured. The importance of the cane lay with its symbolism which had very little to do with medicine per se but represented authority and gentrified elegance. This seems to have originated in the French court of the late 17th century where canes had strong connotations of wealth and social status.

Despite a shift to photographic portraits in the 19th century the cane persisted. Beginning with Dr James Andrew in 1898, the cane was included relatively consistently in each presidential portrait until the 1970s. The earliest portraits are the most grand in appearance, with the presidential chair, mortar board and presidential gown all featured. There is a marked shift in the style of portraits in the latter half of the 20th century, with informality and modesty prevailing over grandeur.

Perhaps a reason for the denouement of the cane tradition was that it was seen to be just that; a 'tradition' and thus not in keeping with progressive modern society. Interestingly none of the many

portraits in the Royal College of Physicians of London feature physician's canes. It has been suggested that this might be because of the association of canes with a fashionable and frivolous elite which was not in keeping with the dignity or professionalism of the College.

If you would like to view the exhibition, please visit the Library website at <http://www.rcpe.ac.uk/library/exhibitions/canes/index.php>.

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