

Physicians save 17th century silver fruit dish

27 February 2006

A magnificent Charles II silver fruit dish has been purchased, and saved from export, by the Royal College of Physicians (RCP).

The acquisition was partly made possible by a grant of £42,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), together with donations from Fellows and friends of the College.

Dating from 1664, this exceptionally rare fluted dish bears the arms of the celebrated 17th Century physician Sir Francis Prujean (1597-1666) and his second wife Dame Margaret Fleming (d.1679). Sir Francis was a highly successful London physician, serving as President of the College from 1650 to 1654. He was also an active patron of the arts and is mentioned in the diaries of both Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn. Prujean was knighted by Charles II in 1661 and famously cured Queen Catherine of typhus in 1663.

The College already owns Prujean's surgical instruments, which are on display in the late Stuart gallery at the Museum of London. The silver dish will complement the College collections filling a significant gap, as most of the seventeenth-century College silver was stolen while the College was deserted during the Great Plague in 1665; Sir Francis's dish is a rare survivor from the period.

Sir Richard Thompson, Treasurer of the RCP, said: "I am delighted that with the help of the NHMF and our Fellows we have been able to save this superb dish for the College and the nation."

Stephen Johnson, Head of the NHMF, said: "Symbolising such a fascinating part of the UK's rich history, this rare survivor is now safe in the nation's collection. As the dish joins the College's collections, it also joins the treasure trove of objects and places saved with the help of NHMF, that together tell the story of our nation and its people."

Notes to editors

Digital images of the dish, Prujean's chest of surgical instruments and a portrait of Sir Francis Prujean are available from the RCP Press Office.

Further information

An evening lecture on Prujean and 17th Century silver by leading expert Philippa Glanville will take place at the College on Monday 3rd April 2006 at 6.30pm. For information and booking details please email heritage@rcplondon.ac.uk

To see the dish and College's historic collections visit the Heritage Centre by appointment from 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. Contact us on 020 7224 1539, heritage@rcplondon.ac.uk or visit www.rcplondon.ac.uk/heritage/prujean