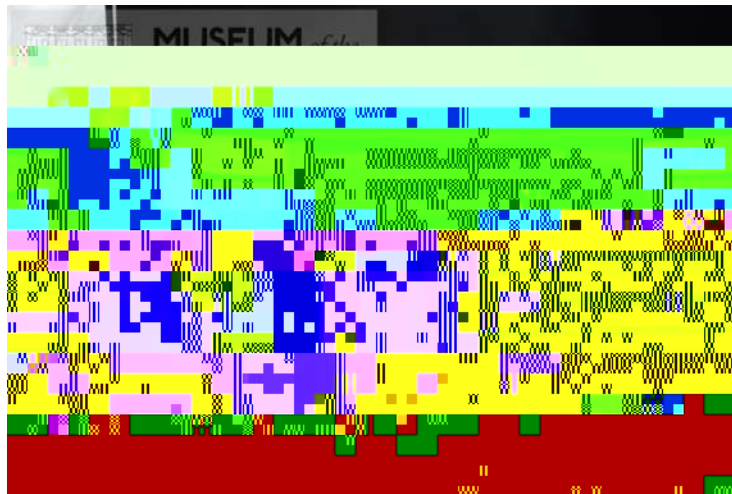


## Early Science in New College II: The Oglander Collection (1730): A Deluxe Chemistry Set from the Eighteenth Century

In around 1925, the first Keeper of the newly-named Museum of the History of Science, R. T. Gunther, was invited to the muniment rooms in New College by the legendary ancient historian J. L. Myers. Gunther, who had just set in type most of the third volume of his exhaustive survey *Early Science in Oxford*, was excited to find a cabinet containing in six drawers a complete collection of such objects of natural history as were supposed to be useful in medicine during the first half of the eighteenth century. The drawers had rarely been opened since the death of the owner.<sup>1</sup> Gunther immediately wrote this note and inserted it at the end of his chapter on biological collections in the *collège*.

The 'owner' was John Oglander, who was Warden from 1768 until his death in 1794. He was a connoisseur, with an eye for paintings, and in 1770 he also gave to the college the two fine Adams celestial and terrestrial globes and kept today in the college in glazed cabinets in the McGregor-Matthews Room.

Gunther had no time to write further on this remarkable survival of an eighteenth-century chest of *matéria medica* but he clearly managed to persuade the college to place the chest on permanent loan in the Museum of the History of Science, as in 1925 it was handed over to the Museum, and there it remains today (Inventory no. 25401); Myers spoke in favour of the deposit before Governing Body.<sup>2</sup>



As we can see, the chest is indeed divided into six drawers, labelled (in abbreviated Latin) 'Woods, Barks, Gums, Saps'; 'Flowers, Seeds, Fruit'; 'Roots'; and finally two drawers of 'Parts of Animals'. These last two drawers also each contain a bound volume of dried and classified plants, collections known as *herbaria sicca*, or 'dried gardens'.

<sup>1</sup> *Early Science in Oxford* (1925), vol. 3, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> NCA 9644, fol. 249 (State General Meeting minutes for 14 January 1925): 'On the proposal of Professor Myres, it was agreed to deposit a cabinet of scientific specimens, presented to the college by Warden Oglander about 1770, at the Old Ashmolean Museum, on the understanding that the Collection shall be kept intact.'

After the Museum had had time to examine the chest, a great deal more was ascertained about who made it, for whom, and when. The old label that was affixed to the chest explains these matters, and fixes the date of the chest's construction to 1729-30, by a London Quaker pharmacist. Here is the text of the Museum's old label:

Wooden cabinet containing a materia medica collection made up in 1729-30 by the

The collection was later owned by John Oglander, Warden (1768-94) of New College, Oxford, thereafter remaining in the college until transferred to the Museum.<sup>3</sup>

Because the cabinet is not easy to display effectively in a museum and also because it contains several dangerous substances, impure, it is not on public display and is instead kept carefully in a corner of the Keeper's office. I went to visit it on the afternoon of 28 August 2012 in the company of the Keeper, Jim Bennett, and the conservator, Cheryl



