

Adopt a treasure: early impact and inspiring stories from our supporters

Earlier this year the RCP launched ‘Adopt a treasure’, a campaign inviting members, fellows and friends of the RCP to play a direct role in preserving the extraordinary history of medicine held within the college’s collections.

We are delighted to share that the first iteration of the campaign has already raised just over £10,500, with eight items adopted for conservation by 10 generous supporters. Thanks to our first ‘Adopt a treasure’ supporters, conservation work is now well underway, ensuring that some of the RCP’s most fragile and significant artefacts can be preserved for future generations.

A personal connection to medical history

One of the most powerful aspects of Adopt a treasure is the personal connection that it creates between supporters and the history of medicine.

Professor Diana Walford CBE FRCP, chair of the Board of Trustees at the RCP, chose to adopt *Anatomia del Corpo Humano*, a richly illustrated anatomical text. Her decision was inspired by a lifelong fascination with medical imagery:

‘I decided at a ridiculously early age to study medicine because my beloved grandfather, who was a GP, and my favourite uncle, his son, who was studying surgery, kept a stash of old medical and surgical textbooks in the attic of their house. I spent hours and hours looking at the anatomical and other pictures, which were pretty gruesome and which I found quite fascinating. That’s why I decided to adopt *Anatomia del Corpo Humano*, and it also chimes with the fact that I am currently learning Italian!’

Professor Diana Wood FRCP, emerita clinical dean at the University of Cambridge School of Medicine, adopted *The Quack Doctor* print because of her great fondness of the artist’s work:

‘I love the work of Thomas Rowlandson, who was one of Britain’s greatest satirists. To this day, his comic art is instantly recognisable and remains extremely funny. In his extraordinary caricatures he lampoons all Georgian life, from the royal family to politicians,

the military, and the professions and wider society. Inevitably we came under his scrutiny, and *The Quack Doctor* is a great example of his work. It is always good for us to see ourselves as others see us at whatever point in history!

Dr Timothy Chambers OBE FRCP chose to adopt two prints depicting leprosy cases treated by Dr Bhau Dajee, an Indian physician in the 19th century, because of his connection to the Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem, which has always supported, and continues to support, all aspects of leprosy care – clinical, pastoral and research. Timothy also wanted to recognise the RCP and its officers for their support during his career:

‘Many years ago, when serving as a college officer, I was proud to serve a long-established institution, well respected as a learned body of scholarship. Adopting a treasure is a way of repaying that privilege and thanking the senior officers who taught me so much.’

The granddaughters of Dr Una Ledingham FRCP, Dr Joanna Ledingham, Catherine Marsh, Clare Bowron and Sarah Ledingham, chose to adopt her portrait:

‘Una’s portrait hung in the dining room as we grew up and was a source of great pride and inspiration. It was the wish of our father, Professor John Gerard Garvin Ledingham, that it be donated to the RCP on his death in honour of his mother, of whom he was immensely proud. His four daughters have been delighted to cover the restoration costs allowing the portrait to be exhibited and to inspire, we hope, future generations of female physicians (including Una’s own granddaughter Joanna and great-granddaughter Maddie). We are so pleased that it is in such good hands.’

Stories like this reflect the unique way in which the campaign connects personal journeys in medicine with objects that have shaped the profession over centuries. This is an issue of social injustice; many members of our society are disproportionately affected. We need to invest more and take action, because these vulnerable groups carry the greatest burden.

From fragile objects to lasting legacy

Each adopted item represents not just a piece of history, but a commitment to its future. Conservation specialists like Plowden & Smith are now working to stabilise and restore the adopted treasures, such as the Alexander Fleming sculpture that was sitting on a badly damaged base. A new base is being created and the bronze bust will get a gentle clean and wax to get it in the best condition, to be put back on display at the RCP.

This work ensures that these objects remain accessible for research, learning and public display, continuing to inform and inspire physicians, historians and the wider public.

Building a more inclusive medical story

Alongside preserving historic collections, 'Adopt a treasure' also supports the RCP's wider ambition to ensure that the story of medicine is more inclusive and representative. Future adoptions will continue to support both conservation and the commissioning of new works that reflect the contributions of women, migrant doctors and other historically underrepresented figures in medicine, ensuring that the RCP's collections evolve alongside the profession itself.

An invitation to be part of the story

The early success of the campaign demonstrates the strong connection that RCP members and supporters feel to the RCP's heritage, and the importance of preserving it. With many more treasures still in need of care, there are further opportunities to get involved and to support the conservation of objects that have shaped the history of medicine. The Tobacco and Vapes Act will introduce other measures such as retail licensing to reduce tobacco availability and regulating other nicotine-containing products such as nicotine pouches, vapes, oral tobacco or heated tobacco products.

[Explore the collection and find out how to adopt a treasure.](#)

This feature was produced for the June 2026 edition of *Commentary* magazine. You can read a [web-based version](#), which includes images.