

Doctor John Wall

1708 - 1776

The Early Years



John Wall was born at Powick, near Worcester on 12th October 1708, the only son of John Wall a former Mayor of Worcester. He attended Worcester King's School and won a scholarship to Worcester College, Oxford in 1726. He studied Classics, Mathematics, Algebra and Experimental Philosophy and here he must have kindled his life long love of painting. After the death of his father in 1734 the young John Wall became the ward of Samuel Sandys of Ombersley, Worcestershire. Sandys was an important and well known figure, Member of Parliament for Worcester between 1718 and 1743, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. (Sandys was created Baron Sandys in 1753 and became Speaker of the House of Lords in 1756).

In 1735 John Wall became a Fellow of Merton College and qualified as a Bachelor of Physic at St.Thomas's Hospital, London the following year. He qualified as M.D. in June 1739.

In 1740 Wall returned to Worcester and married Catherine Sandys, cousin of Baron Sandys and they built a fine house in The Foregate, Worcester. The Sandys family were huge supporters of the Hospital and served on the committee for many years. At 32 he was already a wealthy and famous man.

Dr.Wall's medical practice was vast. He consulted as far away as Stratford, Kidderminster and Ludlow – visits (travelling on horse back with the risk of attacking highway men) were often lengthy affairs lasting several days and in Worcester three quarters of the city were said to have been his patients.

The Historian Nash remarked that,

"His benevolence displayed itself in its utmost extent, in his unremitting attention to the poor"

The Silver Street Hospital

Bad small pox epidemics of 1740 and 1742 led John Wall to join a local campaign for the establishment of a charitable hospital to relieve the physical suffering of the poor and search for medical knowledge and he found a great ally in the newly appointed Bishop Isaac Maddox. Funds were raised from the local gentry and an old house in Silver Street was purchased in 1745 for £100. After renovation the doors opened the following year – it

was only the 7th charitable hospital outside London. In the first 3 years there were 960 admissions seen by the four physicians. Only patients with letters of recommendation from subscribers were admitted and no-one with infectious diseases, expectant mothers or the dying were allowed in. By 1751 the infirmary had become famous, mainly for Dr.Wall's treatment of sore throats in scarlet fever and diphtheria. He was also one of the first to diagnose angina pectoris as a symptom of heart disease. His son Dr.Martin Wall, Professor of Surgery at Merton College, Oxford published his fathers medical writings in one volume in 1780.

Malvern Water

John Wall and the Apothecary, William Davis analysed, by evaporation, the water from the Holy Well in Malvern Wells and the Chalybeate Well in Great Malvern and found that the water was incredibly pure. Doctor Wall founded a popular Village Spa in Malvern Wells using the Holy well and the Eye Well and is said to have been the first person to bottle Malvern Water.

His interest in clinical investigation and his analytical mind, led him to collect together 79 case histories of water cures that were included in 'Experiments and Observations on the Malvern Waters' that he published on 1757 (and was re-printed many times.)

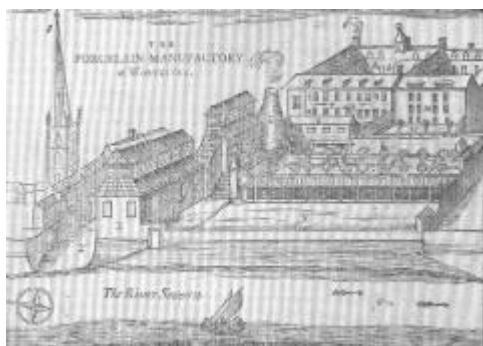


The wits of the 18th century wrote,

“The Malvern Water, said Dr.Wall, is famed for containing just nothing at all”

Malvern Water was recommended for all sorts of skin diseases, cancers, scurvy, tumours and ringworm, but John Wall suggested it should be drunk for days or weeks before being used externally. Diseased skin was wrapped in wet linen and patients had to endure many hours in wet clothes. This was the forerunner of the Cold Water Cure brought to Malvern by Dr.Wilson & Dr.Gully (a major share holder in Royal Worcester) in 1842.

Worcester Porcelain



All this must have kept John Wall exceptionally busy, but he still found time to pursue other interests. The sequence of events that led to the opening of a porcelain manufactory in Worcester is difficult to unravel, but it seems that Dr.John Wall and his friend William Davis, an apothecary who worked for the Silver Street hospital, discovered a method of making a porcelain type material. In June 1751 they persuaded a group of 13 local businessmen to join them and invest in a risky venture to start a new factory. The main

industries in Worcester at this time were gloving, carpet weaving (later driven out to Kidderminster by the powerful Worcester Guilds), printing and a declining wool cloth industry. The city needed new and reliable employment.

Wall and Davis's experiments must have been good enough to persuade the others to back them, but by 1752 it was decided to purchase a small Bristol porcelain company, run by Benjamin Lund and together with his expertise manufacture porcelain. A large premises, Warmstry House on the banks of the River Severn, was converted and one of the partners, Edward Cave, editor of the Gentleman's Magazine advertised the New Tonkin Manufactory in his publication of 1752.



Berrow's Worcester Journal of January 1909 reported that there may have been other reasons for the start of porcelain making, "Mr. Gladstone in a memorable speech on china at the Athenaeum Club..... was the first to point out that the establishment of a porcelain manufactory at Worcester was due to a political motive. In the middle of the 18th century the Dean & Chapter of Worcester were Jacobite in opinion and powered a great influence in that city. Dr. Wall was a steadfast Whig and staunchly loyal to the Hanoverian Dynasty.

The rising of 1745 had roused the Whig party to action and they were everywhere founding clubs and other institutions to strengthen their cause with the people. Dr. Wall was not behind hand in the work. He faced the retrograde Dean and Chapter and founded, close to their own precincts an industry which challenged their influence and in the future made itself famous throughout the civilised world, while it immortalised his own name."

In the 1740s and 50s Porcelain was regarded as a magical new material. Its production was invariably precarious and methods kept very secret. However Worcester soon cornered the tableware market with a remarkable body that was fine, thin, white and most importantly didn't crack when boiling water was poured into it.

The Castle Street Infirmary



By 1765 the Governors decided that the Silver Street Hospital was grossly over crowded and badly in need of repair. Expansion was desirable and 2 acres of land was bought in Castle Street, Worcester for £200. Dr. John Wall saw the construction of the new hospital from the back of his town house at 43, Foregate Street and is said to have walked down to watch every day. He must have been thrilled when his eldest son John was elected physician at the Infirmary in 1770.

The patients were transferred to the new building in September 1771 and to give an idea of scale, in 1773

there were 445 in-patients and 522 out-patients. Of the in-patients 217 were 'cured', 25 relieved, 4 discharged themselves, 2 were incurable, 3 were discharged for misbehaviour and 24 died. By the end of the century the Infirmary was well established and became the base for Sir Charles Hastings and the British Medical Association he founded in 1832.

John Wall's dream had come true. He had been a great inspiration to all who worked with him and was held in great esteem and affection.

It was later said of him,

"In all concerns of life, and particularly in his practice, he was distinguished by an uncommon sweetness and cheerfulness of disposition; which in union with his extensive knowledge, and penetrating discernment, attracted the affection and secured the confidence of those who required his professional assistance. To his zeal and diligence the City and County of Worcester are in no small degree indebted for the advantage of the infirmary. His zeal was increased by its establishment, and was still further animated by its success. He gave it constant and regular attendance during his whole life, under very trying circumstances of fatigue and indisposition. The Governors of the Infirmary have recorded in terms of great respect, their sense of the obligations they owe to his assiduity, after a life devoted to Worcestershire and its people."

Art & Later Life

It is always a surprise that John Wall found time in his busy life to become such an accomplished artist. He was fascinated by Art & design from an early age and was totally self-taught. He produced designs for many book plate engravings and some stained glass windows for the Chapel at Hartlebury Castle, the home of his friend Bishop Isaac Maddox, as well as portraits and History paintings in oil. He had a painting studio in the Green Dragon Inn building, behind his Foregate Street home and always had a picture on his easel to work on.



In his later years John Wall was able to further pursue his enthusiasm for painting. He concentrated on Classical and Allegorical subjects in a grand historical style. He exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1773 and 1774 and was much admired by his contemporaries including the actor, David Garrick who is said to have jumped on the chairs in Wall's home to get closer to the pictures!



Dr. Wall retired from the factory in 1774 and died after a lingering illness on 27th June 1776 – aged 67 years. He is buried at Bath Abbey. His epitaph reads –

'After a life of labour, for the good of others. Nature gave him talents; a benevolent heart, directed by the application of them to the study and practice of a profession most

beneficial to mankind; and by an uncommon genius for historic painting (an amusement worthy of his enlarged mind) he has produced many lasting evidences of the noble simplicity of his sentiments, and the extensiveness of his abilities. Husbands, father's, friends and neighbours saw in him a living pattern of their duties and ever must remember the various excellencies of that heart, the loss of which they now lament'.

Copyright 2009 Worcester Porcelain Museum

The Worcester Porcelain Museum

Severn Street, Worcester WR1 2ND

Telephone +44 (0)1905 21247

e-mail: info.admin@Worcesterporcelainmuseum.org

Registered Charity No.223753