

DR. JOHN WALL (1708-1776)

John WALL, Doctor of Physic and very talented amateur painter, is reported to have been a 'sweet natured man' dedicated to improving the care of the sick of Worcester. He appears to have had an inquisitive nature and boundless energy as he found time to involve himself in many other aspects of Worcester life. In addition to his medical practice and scientific research, he was instrumental in founding the Infirmary in Worcester and setting up the Worcester Porcelain Manufactory. Never idle, what leisure time he had was taken up with his lifelong passion of painting.

EARLY LIFE

The Wall family was originally from Leominster, although John was born in Powick and christened on 12 October 1708. His father, also John, was a grocer who served as Mayor of Worcester in 1703. The young John was initially schooled at a small school in Leigh Sinton before becoming a pupil at King's School, Worcester, although he does not appear to have held a King's Scholarship. He was awarded a Cookes Scholarship to Worcester College, Oxford in 1726 and gained a B.A. in 1730. He was elected a Fellow of Merton College in August 1734 and subsequently became M.A. in April 1736 and M.B. in December 1736. The medical school records for St. Thomas' Hospital show a John WALL from Worcester was a physicians' pupil in November 1735 so it is possible that he also spent a short period of time studying in London. He was awarded an Oxford M.D. in June 1759.

In July 1736 Merton College gave him leave of absence to practice as a physician in Worcester and thereafter visits to Oxford became more infrequent. On his marriage in April 1740 his connections with Oxford diminished further when he resigned his Fellowship.

John Wall is often stated to have been the ward of Samuel Sandys, MP for Worcester 1718-43, who was created first Baron Sandys of Ombersley in 1743; however John Wall senior did not die until 1734, when the younger John was 26 years of age and at Oxford. It would seem that John Wall senior was declared bankrupt in March 1710 and W.H. McMenemy in his *A History of Worcester Royal Infirmary* suggests that Samuel Sandys may have acted as patron to John the talented artist during his youth; or as an MP he may have been a trustee for money possibly inherited from his mother's family; his mother, Catherine, having died when he was 14 years old.

JOHN WALL THE DOCTOR

John Wall married Samuel Sandys's cousin, Catherine Sandys on 13th March 1740. She was the youngest daughter of the Town Clerk of Worcester, Martin Sandys (a barrister) and his wife Elizabeth. He bought land in Foregate Street, where he built the house the family lived in and from which he practiced.

An estimated three quarters of the inhabitants of Worcester were reported to have been his patients, together with individuals as far afield as Ludlow, Stratford upon Avon and Alcester. His visits to these patients were not without danger as they were undertaken on horseback and he was waylaid by highwaymen on two occasions. He researched and wrote articles on various medical topics including one entitled *Experiments and Observations on the Malvern Waters* which was published in 1757. This influenced the popularity of the water as a health cure. As well as drinking the water, treatment often involved wrapping the patient in cloth soaked in well water for several hours.

Dr. Wall's younger son, Martin, a Professor at Oxford published a number of his father's papers under the title *Medical Tracts* in 1780.

John Wall was a close acquaintance of Bishop Isaac Maddox and actively supported his campaign in 1745 to establish an Infirmary at Worcester. With funding from prominent local individuals a building was purchased for £100 in Silver Street and an infirmary was established in 1746 with John Wall as the first Treasurer. Martin Sandys was an enthusiastic committee member of the hospital for many years and it is tempting to imagine father-in-law and son-in-law sitting together discussing and planning for the hospital's future. When the Silver Street hospital outgrew its premises 2 acres of land was purchased for the sum of £200 in the Artichoke Field at the rear of Dr. Wall's Foregate Street home for the construction of a new infirmary.



Dr John Wall's House as of 2010.

From the rear of his property, Dr WALL would regularly walk to check on the progress of the building work along what came to be known as 'Dr Wall's Walk', and which is now known as Infirmary Walk. The building was completed in 1770 and the first patients were admitted in 1771. Dr. Wall's elder son, also John, became a physician there for a short while (1770-1773) before moving to Gloucester Infirmary (1773-1778). John Wall senior served as one of the 4 honorary physicians until his death.

WORCESTER PORCELAIN MANUFACTORY

Dr Wall and William Davis, an apothecary who worked for the Silver Street Hospital and with whom he undertook analysis of Malvern water; together with 13 other local businessmen including William Baylies; Edward Cave, editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*; and mapmaker John Doharty Junior, a peer of John Walls at King's School, were all shareholders and instrumental in setting up the Tonquin Porcelain Manufactory at Warmstry House on the banks of the River Severn in 1751. The name of the company was presumably chosen to give it an eastern aura as Chinese and Japanese porcelain was very much in vogue. The raw materials were shipped up the River Severn and conveniently off loaded close to the factory.

It has been suggested that because of Dr Wall's involvement with the Worcester Infirmary he is likely to have visited Bristol to acquaint himself with the infirmary that had been established there in 1738. Whilst in Bristol, his interest in glass painting may have encouraged him to visit the glasshouses, situated in the same district as the Bristol Porcelain Factory and thus he became casually interested in the processes. With the Bristol factory struggling and Worcester trade in decline, it may have seemed a good idea to move the porcelain manufactory to Worcester. Certainly by 1752, the Bristol newspaper was reporting the merger of the two companies. The reason why Dr Wall should involve himself in the manufacture of porcelain is not obvious, but he was a Whig and the party at that time was proactive in the founding of clubs and other institutions to strengthen its cause with the people. A successful new industry would revive trade and increase prosperity in the city which was so important to him.

Experiments are reported to have been carried out by Dr Wall and William Davis at the latter's property, 33 Broad Street, but it is difficult to imagine that porcelain manufacture could have been carried out in such small premises, so perhaps experimentation was limited to glazing and decoration. This would certainly have been of interest to Dr Wall the artist. Both the Bristol and Worcester factories used soapstone in the manufacturing process, this having the advantage of not cracking when boiling water was poured into it (a big problem with other English Porcelain) and by the mid 1750's the Worcester Porcelain Manufactory was producing very desirable wares. Prosperity was further increased when the demand for tea wares rose in the 1760's as consumption of the beverage increased. The promotion of tea drinking was encouraged by Dr Wall as a means of discouraging the drinking of alcohol amongst the poor of the city. Apart from the social aspects, there was a scientific reason for his stance as amongst his medical investigations was research into poisoning from cider impregnated with lead from the presses during the processing of the apples.

THE LATER YEARS

Day to day management of the manufactory had been the responsibility of William Davis for a number of years, but Dr Wall was forced to step down from his interests in

the Porcelain Manufactory in 1774 due to a 'lingering disorder' (possibly gout) and he is understood to have spent the remaining 2 years of his life in Bath, although he retained his Foregate Street home. His death on 27 June 1776, was reported in the *Bath Chronicle* (No.820) of 4th July 1776 'Thursday died at his lodgings in this city, Dr Wall, an eminent physician of Worcester'. A similar brief report appeared in the *Worcester Journal* of the same date. He is buried in the Abbey and a plaque has been erected to his memory, the text flanked on the left by the staff of Asclepius and on the right by an artist's palette and brushes.



Sacred to the Memory
of
JOHN WALL M.D.
Late of Worcester,
Whose body resteth Here
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 the most beneficent to mankind
and
By an uncommon Genius for Historie Painting
(An amusement worthy his enlarged Mind)
He has produced many lasting evidences
of the
Noble simplicity of his Sentiments
and the
Extensiveness of his Abilities
He died June 27 1776
Aged 67
Husbands, Fathers, 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.

Dr Wall's interest in painting continued throughout his life and he had a studio behind his Foregate Street home. He exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1773 and 1774 and presented an allegorical painting of the founder, Walter de Merton, to Merton College where it hung for a number of years. He was also responsible for the design of a stained glass window at Hartlebury Castle, the residence of his friend and associate, Isaac Maddox, Bishop of Worcester.

A copy of his will is held at Worcester Record Office (705.99 BA3375/45). In it, he instructed that his funeral be 'as moderate as decency allows'. His executors were Edwin Lord Sandys, Baron of Ombersley and Reginald Lygon of Madresfield.

His sons, John (1744-1808) who married Mary Brilliana (of the Martin family of Pebworth) and Martin (1747-1824), who married Mary Humphreys of Tewkesbury, inherited his medical books and property at Twining and Tewkesbury. To his son John he also left a number of his works of classical paintings. Dr. Wall, also had 3 daughters: Catherine (1741-1825), Elizabeth (1745-1797) and Mary (1750-?), who married George Whitmore from Lower Slaughter in Gloucestershire. Mary and George lived in France during the Revolution, enduring many privations until George's death at Amiens. As a widow, Mary lived in Worcester possibly with her mother during the last 2 years of the old lady's life. Another son, Edwin, died within days of his birth in November 1749. Dr Wall and his wife lived in their Foregate Street home for the majority of their married life and the Parish Records of St. Nicholas Church (the building is now the Slug and Lettuce Restaurant) record a large number of marriages, christenings and burials for the family. Catherine Wall survived her husband by 20 years and was buried on 24th December 1796.

Sources:

- *A History of the Worcester Royal Infirmary*, W.H. McMenemey (1947)
- Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
- *A History of the King's School, Worcester*, Alec MacDonald (1936)
- *King's School, Worcester 1541-1971*, M. Craze (1972)
- The Worcester Porcelain Museum www.worcesterporcelainmuseum.org.uk
- *The Melting Pot* (Friends of Worcester Porcelain Factory)
- Worcester Record Office - John Wall's Will, Partnership Document, St. Nicholas Parish Records and *Worcester Journals*.
- Worcester Royal Infirmary Nurses League
- King's College Archives (holders of St.Thomas' Hospital Medical School Records)
- *Bath Chronicle* No 820 of 4th July 1776.