

Poster presentation

Historic *Cinchona* collections at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

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Introduction. The Economic Botany Collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, holds about 800 specimens of *Cinchona* bark, mainly dating between 1850 and 1900. Half derive from the life's work of the distinguished quinologist and pharmacist John Eliot Howard; the rest from diverse collectors including Richard Spruce and Charles Ledger. 19th century interest in *Cinchona* was because of its role as a treatment for malaria.

Objectives. To link botanical specimens to relevant manuscripts and printed publications in which they were originally published, thus enabling more effective use of both botanical and textual resources by historians of medicine and botany.

Methods. Labelling on *Cinchona* specimens was compared to museum entry books and to a wide range of manuscripts and printed resources. Correspondences were verified by reference to specimen numbers, laboratory numbers, dates etc. Where individual specimens could be linked to documents, this was recorded in a relational database.

Results. At completion of the project in April 2007, it is expected that 90% of samples will have proved linkable to relevant documentation. The database will be made available on the Internet.

Conclusion. This project is funded by the Wellcome Trust's "Research Resources for Medical History" program. We aim to demonstrate that heritage collections of botanical material are far more informative if studied within the context of the original research programs that led to their collection.

Keywords: quinine, pharmacology, malaria

Selected References

1. Prendergast, H.D.V. and Dolley, D. 2001. Jesuits' bark (*Cinchona* (Rubiaceae)) and other medicines. *Economic Botany* 55: 3-6.

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