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George Chalmers' portrait of James Lind, 1783–2008: a reconstruction

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Sir George Chalmers' portrait of James Lind is likely to have been painted in 1783, at the end of Lind's term as Chief Physician at The Royal Hospital, Haslar, which is shown in the background of the picture. The books shown in the picture are *Lind on Scurvy*,¹ which stands upright on *Lind on Climate*²; and *An essay on the most effectual means of preserving the health of seamen*,³ which lies open under Lind's left hand. The lettering on the spine of the other book (lying directly on the table) is not legible, but it is presumably Lind's *Two papers on fevers and infection*.⁴ The portrait seems likely to have remained at The Royal Hospital Haslar,⁵ until Edmond Peters, a descendant of James Lind, obtained it at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century.

The portrait passed from Edmond Peters to Jack Peters, one of his two sons. Jack and his wife Mabel (née Palmer) emigrated to South Africa in 1946; but two weeks after the family arrived in Johannesburg, Jack was killed in a road traffic accident, leaving Mabel to cope with two young daughters in a strange country. After Jack's estate had been wound up they moved to Highlands North, a Johannesburg suburb, when their possessions were brought out of storage. However, Mabel disposed of the portrait, together with other antiques, because she was concerned that the heat in South Africa might damage them.

The portrait appears to have been sold in the late 1940s. However, there is no information as to its whereabouts from then until it was purchased in Johannesburg in November 1953 by Kurt and Lorna Hepner. It is not known who the seller was, but it could well have been an art dealer. Since then the portrait has remained in the Hepner family. A note on the back of the portrait in Lorna Hepner's handwriting states that the

picture is "signed and dated 1783", although these details are not obvious in the current framing.

After Lorna Hepner's death, the painting was inherited by her family in England, arriving there late in 2008. Soon after, John Hepner, Lorna's son, discovered *The James Lind Library*, which contains biographical details about Sir George Chalmers, Lind's portraitist, researched by John Chalmers.⁶ Because John Chalmers' article noted (at the time) that the current whereabouts of the portrait were not known, John Hepner contacted him to let him know that the portrait was in the Hepner family's possession, and in England. John Chalmers informed Iain Chalmers, who went to meet the Hepner family with his son Theo Chalmers, a professional photographer, who photographed the portrait for publication in *The James Lind Library*. Copyright in the painting belongs to John Hepner.

References

- 1 Lind J. A treatise of the scurvy. In three parts. Containing an inquiry into the nature, causes and cure, of that disease. Together with a critical and chronological view of what has been published on the subject. Edinburgh: Printed by Sands, Murray and Cochran for A Kincaid and A Donaldson, 1753
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- 4 Lind J. *Two papers on fevers and infection*. London: D Wilson, 1763
- 5 Birbeck E. The Royal Hospital Haslar: from Lind to the 21st century. JLL Bulletin: Commentaries on the history of treatment evaluation, 2011 (www.jameslindlibrary.org)
- 6 Chalmers J. *Sir George Chalmers, (c 1720–1791), portraitist of James Lind*. JLL Bulletin: Commentaries on the history of treatment evaluation 2005 (www.jameslindlibrary.org)