

The
LINNEAN
SOCIETY
of London



REMEMBERING JAMES PETIVER (1665–1718)

THURSDAY 26TH APRIL 2018 | DAY MEETING AT THE LINNEAN SOCIETY OF LONDON

This day meeting marks the tercentenary of the death of James Petiver FRS, an important but often overlooked professional apothecary and compulsive natural historian in 18th-century London. Petiver made significant contributions to multiple fields of natural history, above all botany and entomology. An assiduous correspondent and collector, he successfully cultivated sources of natural historical intelligence and material from the Americas to the East Indies. Speakers will assess Petiver's life and legacy by deploying a range of historical and scientific disciplinary perspectives.

PROGRAMME

- 9.30–10.00 Registration
- 10.00–10.15 Welcome and introduction by Richard Coulton (QMUL)
- Session 1: **Personal and Professional Background**, *Chair*: Patrick Wallis (LSE)
- 10.15–10.50 Katrina Maydom (Cambridge) | **Collected Rarities and James Petiver's Apothecary Practice**
- 10.50–11.25 Alice Marples (Manchester) | **Accumulating Agency: James Petiver as Sloane's Agent**
- 11.25–11.45 Tea/Coffee in Reading room
- Session 2: **Networks of Correspondence and Exchange**, *Chair*: Miles Ogborn (QMUL)
- 11.45–12.20 Kathleen Murphy (Cal Poly) | **Petiver's "Kind Friends" and "Curious Persons" in the Atlantic World: Commerce, Colonialism, and Collecting**
- 12.20–12.55 Sebastian Kroupa (Cambridge) | **James Petiver, "A Man of Greater Correspondence in Africa, India, & America than any one"**
- 12.55–13.50 Lunch in Reading room
- Session 3: **Petiver the Natural Historian**, *Chair*: Sachiko Kusukawa (Cambridge)
- 13.50–14.25 R.I. Vane-Wright FLS (NHM/Kent) | **James Petiver's *Papilionum Britanniae Icones*: an explanatory review**
- 14.25–15.00 Charlie Jarvis FLS (NHM) | **'The most common Grass, Rush, Moss, Fern, Thistles, Thorns or vilest Weeds you can find ...': James Petiver's plants**
- 15.00–15.20 Tea/Coffee in Reading room
- Session 4: **Collection, Publication, and Legacy**, *Chair*: Arthur MacGregor (Society for the History of Natural History)
- 15.20–15.55 Arnold Hunt (Cambridge) | **James Petiver and the Book Trade**
- 15.55–16.30 Victoria Pickering (British Museum) | **'given me by Mr Petiver': The Natural History Contributions made by James Petiver to Hans Sloane's Collection**
- 16.30–17.00 Response led by Emma Spary (Cambridge) and discussion
- 17.00–18.00 Wine Reception in Reading room

Organiser: **Richard Coulton** (QMUL)

ABSTRACT

COLLECTED RARITIES AND JAMES PETIVER'S APOTHECARY PRACTICE

Katrina Maydom | University of Cambridge

Following an eight-year apprenticeship, James Petiver was made a freeman of the Society of Apothecaries in 1685 and established an apothecary shop in Aldersgate from which he practiced for more than thirty years. It was from this shop that Petiver entered into correspondence with the merchants, physicians, planters, ship captains and others who provided him with the botanical information and specimens of plants from around the world. Petiver published detailed lists and instructions for collection of medicinal plants which were “imperfectly known” in his *Musei Petiveriani*. He was particularly interested in obtaining samples of those which he claimed were “altogether unknown.” The degree of knowledge about these plants was in a process of continual updating, revision and normalisation.

During Petiver's lifetime, imports of exotic drugs into London increased considerably, and the English pharmacopeia was being expanded with medicinal plants from East and West. In this paper, I will examine the relationship between Petiver's medical practice as an apothecary and his collecting and knowledge-gathering activities. How did his collections and intellectual inquiries influence his medical practice? To what extent did he incorporate knowledge of new medicinal plants into his work as an apothecary? In order to answer these questions, I will consider Petiver's career in private practice, as apothecary to the Charterhouse and medical supplier to St Bartholemew's Hospital. I will consult Petiver's medical journal, prescription lists and collection of medical recipes to see how his professional medical activities reflected his collecting practice and engagement with scholarly networks.

'ACCUMULATING AGENCY: JAMES PETIVER AS SLOANE'S AGENT

Alice Marples | University of Manchester

The aim of this paper is to examine in more detail the working relationship between Hans Sloane and James Petiver—both as practicing naturalists and as patron-agent—in order to raise questions about the role of the 'agent' in early modern natural historical networks. It looks at how their correspondence networks overlapped and interacted, reflecting on their different strategies for gaining materials and maintaining contacts, and their wider national and international identities as connectors and communicators of natural knowledge. By examining the workings of Petiver's correspondence and collections within and without Sloane's, this paper seeks to reveal hidden epistolary networks and complicate assumptions of mediation, influence, authority, and 'agency' in early modern exchange networks.

PETIVER'S "KIND FRIENDS" AND "CURIOUS PERSONS" IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD: COMMERCE, COLONIALISM, AND COLLECTING

Kathleen Murphy | California Polytechnic State University

In 1695, James Petiver concluded the first "century" of his *Musei Petiveriani* by observing that he had received the specimens described within it from his "*Kind Friends* from divers parts of the World" and "*Curious Persons...Abroad.*" The specimens depicted included an African medicament for smallpox sent by an Anglican minister at Cape Coast Castle, the "Fair Black Maidenhair" plant gathered by a traveling naturalist in Barbados, and a trio of plants collected along the Gold Coast of West Africa by a slaving agent employed by the Royal African Company. This paper examines Petiver's network of such "Kind Friends" and "Curious Persons" in the Atlantic World. It traces how Petiver exploited networks of commerce and colonialism to collect specimens and the correspondents who might provide them from West Africa, Spanish America, the Caribbean, and mainland British America. Although Petiver attempted to recruit collectors from almost anyone who had reason to travel or live outside of Britain—colonists, medical men, imperial officials, missionaries, soldiers and sailors—mariners proved the most important to his collecting networks within the Atlantic. The paper highlights how Petiver's collecting practices reflected the geographies, personnel, and social and economic structures of the Atlantic World. The centrality of slavery and the slave trade to Atlantic economic and social structures necessarily meant that the naturalist relied on the institutions, infrastructures, and individuals of slaving. The paper thereby demonstrates the entangled histories of commerce, colonialism, collecting, and the production of natural knowledge.

**JAMES PETIVER, "A MAN OF GREATER CORRESPONDENCE IN AFRICA, INDIA, &
AMERICA THEN ANY ONE"**

Sebastian Kroupa | University of Cambridge

As these commending words of the renowned naturalist John Ray reveal, James Petiver was a man with an exceptional talent for recruiting correspondents and collectors on a global scale. In this paper, I will focus on one of the eastward branches of Petiver's extensive network and explore his transactions with two English surgeons based in Madras—Samuel Browne and Edward Bulkley—and a Bohemian Jesuit pharmacist Georg Joseph Kamel stationed in the Spanish Manila. Based on an extensive archival research and analysis of the letters and consignments involved, I will shed light on the construction and operation of Petiver's long-distance networks of knowledge exchange, as well as on the transition of natural knowledge between disparate geographical, political, and social contexts. I will argue that the infrastructure for knowledge circulation across geopolitical frontiers was provided by pre-existing networks of commerce and that of particular importance in Petiver's naturalist endeavours was the way he used these naval routes and those who moved within them. Furthermore, I will discuss Petiver's strategies in recruiting his men, which were closely tied to his publishing efforts. There was substantial socio-cultural capital at stake in collecting and Petiver's periodicals enabled him to mobilise this capital and—by the same token—his collaborators, as he remunerated them with acknowledgements and membership in a worldwide community of naturalists, built precisely around Petiver's publications. Petiver's knack for enlisting intercontinental correspondents as natural historical collectors and informants therefore has to be considered in close association with his endeavours as a publisher and editor of natural-historical texts.

JAMES PETIVER'S *PAPILIONUM BRITANNIAE LCONES*: AN EXPLANATORY REVIEW

R.I. Vane-Wright FLS | Natural History Museum/University of Kent

Published in 1717, and arguably the first ever attempt at a complete 'atlas' of British butterflies, Petiver's *Papilionum* includes images and accounts of some 80 different taxa. Modern books on British butterflies—although they include species such as the Large Copper then unknown to English entomologists—list only 60 or so native sorts. Petiver is considered to be "the father of British butterflies". What can be said of the disparities between Petiver's pioneering account and today's far more sophisticated knowledge of our native butterfly fauna? This presentation offers a tale of seasonal variation, sexual dimorphism, mistaken attribution and even climate change necessary to reconcile then and now.

**‘THE MOST COMMON GRASS, RUSH, MOSS, FERN, THISTLES, THORNS OR VILEST WEEDS
YOU CAN FIND ...’ – JAMES PETIVER’S PLANTS**

Charlie Jarvis FLS | Natural History Museum

James Petiver’s broad interests in natural history led him to amass a collection of tens of thousands of dried plants. As a collector, Petiver has long been in the shadow of his far more famous mentor, Hans Sloane (despite nearly half of the 265 volumes that now comprise Sloane’s herbarium having come from Petiver). While some of Petiver’s plant specimens were collected by him personally on excursions in England, the vast majority were acquired via other travellers whom he persuaded or cajoled into collecting material for him, resulting in the acquisition of a remarkable diversity of material, via several hundred collectors, from an impressively wide range of destinations. Petiver has a reputation as having been keener on the acquisition of specimens than their subsequent documentation and arrangement. However, study of Petiver’s surviving plant collections alongside published and manuscript sources throws considerable doubt on this assessment.

JAMES PETIVER AND THE BOOK TRADE

Arnold Hunt | University of Cambridge

Petiver’s involvement with printing and publishing formed a natural adjunct to his collecting. His archive includes correspondence with booksellers about the purchase of books, with printers about correcting proofs, and with fellow botanists about methods of publication. This paper will explore Petiver’s connections with the London book trade, focusing particularly on his *Gazophylacium Naturae et Artis*, which was published, by subscription, in instalments over a period of years. It will show how Petiver managed the sale and distribution of his works, and seek to draw some more general conclusions about the economics of scientific publishing in the early 18th century.

**‘GIVEN ME BY MR PETIVER’: THE NATURAL HISTORY CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY JAMES
PETIVER TO HANS SLOANE’S COLLECTION**

Victoria Pickering | British Museum

Hans Sloane has become known for being a collector of collectors and this played an important role in the formation of his vast and varied collection. Indeed, one of the

major collections that Sloane purchased was that which had been created by the London apothecary James Petiver. It appears to have taken Sloane many years to organise Petiver's objects and describe them in his manuscript catalogues. There are however, a variety of items in Sloane's collection that Petiver gave to Sloane while he was alive including a 'Course cloth made of the inward bark of the Lagetto from Jamaica' and 'A resin from Mr Petiver. [East Indies] with the bark'. There are also more detailed descriptions pertaining to the different uses of this material such as a root that was used for 'curing the colic'. This paper will therefore, explore the evidence of Petiver's natural history and miscellaneous contributions to Sloane's collection. Focusing on Sloane's own descriptions of his collection and the sorts of information that they include will hopefully shed further light on the complex connections between these two important collectors of natural history.
