

# *Texts and Documents*

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## THE POSSESSIONS OF A SUSSEX SURGEON

*By*

FRANCIS W. STEER, F.S.A.

*County Archivist of East and West Sussex*

WILLIAM WHIGHTE (or White), a surgeon, lived in the pleasant Sussex town of Midhurst. He made his will on 25 January 1631/2 and died shortly afterwards. The actual date of his death is unknown as there is a gap in the Midhurst parish registers for this period. Whighte's will was proved in the Court of the Bishop of Chichester on 7 March 1631/2, and probate was granted to his widow, Joan, who in accordance with the requirements of the Court had to exhibit an inventory of her husband's goods and chattels. The inventory, taken on 25 February 1631/2, has survived in the Diocesan Record Office at Chichester, and is a most revealing document. It is beautifully written on strips of parchment 5¾ inches wide joined to make a total length of 44 inches: the appraisers were John Locke, William Younge, Christopher Bridger, Samuel Butcher and Richard Hamon.

Whighte lived in a modest house comprising a hall or living-room, great and little parlours with chambers over them, a well-equipped kitchen and buttery, his bedroom, a chamber over the 'shop', a distillery in the attic, and beer and wine cellars. The house was sparsely furnished and there was little comfort except in one bedroom, where there was a canopied bed with curtains, a feather bed, two feather bolsters, a coverlet and a pair of blankets worth £5 10s. in all; other bedrooms had feather beds and pillows, but practically no other furniture. Whighte had two salt-cellars, two beer bowls, three wine bowls, and a dozen spoons all of silver worth £15, a garniture of pewter worth 69s., and sundry pieces of brassware.

If comfort in his house was Spartan by present-day standards, Whighte was fond of some good things. He had six hogsheads of beer, almost one and a half hogsheads of sack, three-quarters of a hogshead of claret and a quantity of white wine; this liquor, with pots, glasses, bottles, etc., was valued at over £33. He had tobacco worth 16s. Whighte was musical for a base viol and two lutes are listed in the great parlour. Armour described as a head-piece, a 'bastard' musket, a halberd and a target were priced at 18s.

Throughout the inventory are listed mortars of iron, brass, marble and stone, little earthenware or stone pots, nests of boxes, stills, glass bottles, 'urinalls & other glasses', and the following instruments:

One incision knife, one spatter (i.e. spatula), one stitching quill, a probe, a bodkin, a ladle, a clenser, and a squirt, all of silver and worth 20s.

Five lancets, syringes and other tools, 16s.

Other tools of surgery with the box, 5s.

His stock of distilled waters, 'poticary Druggs and other like things', were priced at £3 6s. 4d., and his library at £10. Unfortunately, except for those referred to in the will, we do not know the titles of Whighte's books.

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Such things as two fitches of bacon, a bag of hops, the well bucket and chain, and the wood, faggots and hay in his barn are accounted for; he had two little hogs and a nag. Miscellaneous items not worth listing in detail are dismissed as 'lumbery'. Whighte's wearing apparel and money in his purse accounted for £20; there were 'desperate' debts (i.e. those unlikely to be recovered) of £10, and the lease of his house was of no value. In all, Whighte's worldly goods were appraised at £180 17s. 10d. made up as follows:

	Value	Percentage of
	£ s. d.	total value
Household furniture and equipment	54 19 2	30·5
Beer, wine and tobacco	33 13 4	19
Silver	15 0 0	8
Pewter and brass	8 11 0	4·5
Linen	12 3 4	7
Instruments, mortars, stills, drugs	8 10 4	4·5
Books	10 0 0	5·5
Wearing apparel and money	20 0 0	11
Debts due to deceased	10 0 0	5·5
Wood, hay and livestock	6 0 0	3·5
Miscellaneous	2 0 8	1
	£180 17 10	100

Whighte's will is a fairly short document. As was customary, he bequeathed his soul to Almighty God and expressed the hope of salvation by the death and passion of Jesus Christ. He wished to be buried 'in Comely and decent manner' in Midhurst Church, and bequeathed 12d. to Chichester Cathedral.

To Marc Locke of Easebourne, near Midhurst, he left three small unnamed books on physic; to Richard Hamon of Midhurst he left eight books on physic and surgery, viz.:

Carus. (This is probably *Carie's farewell to physicke*, by Walter Cary, London, 1611.)

Thomas Gale, *Certaine workes of chirurgerie*, 1st ed., 1563-4, or 2nd ed., 1586.

John Arderne, *On fistula in ano*, trans. J. Reid, 1582.

Johannes de Vigo, *The whole worke [of chirurgerie]*, London, 1586.

Philip Barrough, *The method of phisicke*. (There were six editions of this work between 1583 and 1624.)

Guy de Chauliac, *The qvestyonary of cyrurgyens*, trans. R. Coplande, 1542. (As only the words 'Guidons Anatomy' occur in the will, the book in question may have been Chauliac's *Guydos questions newly corrected*, 1579; this was an elementary guide to anatomy and surgery extracted from the works of a thirteenth-century surgeon.)

L. Fioravanti, *A compendium of the rational secretas of physick and syrgery*, trans. John Hester, 1582.

Andrew Borde, *The breviary of healthe*. (There were five editions of this work between 1552 and 1598.)

John Kelsey of Midhurst was left the following books:

Christoph Wirsung, *The generall practise of physicke*, 1605, 1617.

Anon., *The key to unknowne knowledge*, 1599.

Jehan Goeurot, *The regiment of life*. (There were several editions of this work from 1544.)

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William Clowes, *A proved practise for all young chirurgeons*, 1588 or 1591.

Peter Lowe, *A discourse of the whole art of chirurgerie*, 1611–12.

Lanfranc of Milan, *A most excellent and learned work of chirurgerie . . .*, trans J. Hall, 1565.

To his near kinsman, John Tate, Whighte left his worst doublet and hose, a hat, coat, and shoes and stockings; to his cousin Alice Betesworth, 5s., and to his cousin William Tate, 5s., when he reached the age of twenty-one. John Locke and Christopher Bridger, both yeomen of Easebourne, were to have testator's gold ring and his swordbelt and paddle-staff respectively for their trouble in acting as overseers of his will. Joan Whighte, the widow and executrix, was the residuary legatee.

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