

Things in our lives: Object handling study session 1 of 3

*Here is a summary of the objects that were used in today's session...*

**Floor Protector**

This 18th century piece was made in France and was used by the bourgeoisie to protect the floors from tables and large chairs.



**Obsidian Mirror**



This is a 21st century obsidian mirror. Mirrors like this one were once used by pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures, particularly the Aztecs in Mexico during the 12<sup>th</sup> century for divination purposes. Following the first wave American exploration in the 1500s, objects like this were brought over to England and appropriated for use in 'srying'; contacting spirits, angels and daemons. Elizabethan magician, mathematician and alchemist John Dee (1527-1608) owned an object similar to this one along with several other crystals and 'seeing stones'. Over a period of around 10 years in the 1580s Dee used these objects with the sryer Edward Kelly in an attempt to contact angels.

**Salt Shaker**

This ceramic salt container was made in Chicago by artist Heidi Jones in 2005.



**Yoruba twin figures** made by contemporary artist.



These figurines are made by the Yoruba people in Nigeria when one or both twins die. Yoruba have one of the highest rates of twin birth in the world and so twins are seen as having a supernatural ability to bring 'happiness, health and prosperity', and ward off disaster. They also have 'unstable temperaments' which can bring about disaster, disease and death and so the figurines are respected with food, clothes and jewellery offerings.

### **Crystal Slice**

This is a thin slice of Agate and is around 1-3 million years old. It is from Sardinia.



### **Lucky Iron Fish**

Contemporary, sold in the Wellcome Collection shop and online.



The 'Lucky Iron Fish' is designed to help fight iron-deficiency health issues like anemia. When boiled for 10 minutes into a pot it can release up to 75% of an individual's daily iron intake. It was the brain-child of a Canadian science graduate, Christopher Charles when working in Cambodia, one of the countries most affected by iron deficiency (anemia). When he realised that a type of fish was considered to be lucky in Cambodia, he hit on the idea of forming iron into it and encouraged families to add this to their cooking pot. The fish was offered to the community via health clinics and NGOs and uptake was almost universal. More information can be found on the company's website: <https://luckyironfish.com>

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### **Sandalwood Elephant**

This elephant shaped object may be used as a Pomander. It may be used to hold whole spices such as Cloves, Rosemary, Civet etc. or incense cubes that gave off a gentle scent. A pomander is a ball of perfume. The name is from the French “pomme d’ambre”, meaning “apple of ambergris”. The traditional pomander was carried in a vase or container, often very valuable and beautifully decorated, and hung as a charm from your belt or neck chain. Perfume worn on the body was thought to create a barrier used to protect yourself against bad smells, which were considered to be the barer of disease. The city was incredibly dirty and smelly. People emptied their bins and chamber pots in the gutter, and the lack of sewers made the streets muddy. These good and powerful smells of the pomander were believed to have the power to chase them away.



### **Woven Basket**



This basket was made in Indonesia in the 1950s on the island of Sumatra.

### **Black Pepper**

*Piper nigrum* comes from a flowering vine of the family *Piperaceae* and is native to southern India. A good source of manganese and copper, pepper stimulates the taste buds and this may help digestion by increasing the secretion of hydrochloric acid in the stomach. In Ayurvedic Medicine, black pepper is said to stimulate *agni*, digestive fire. It was a valuable commodity. The Romans are said to have paid in pepper to lift a siege on Rome: black pepper, weighing three thousand pounds, was given to the Visigoths in 410 CE, along with gold and hides.

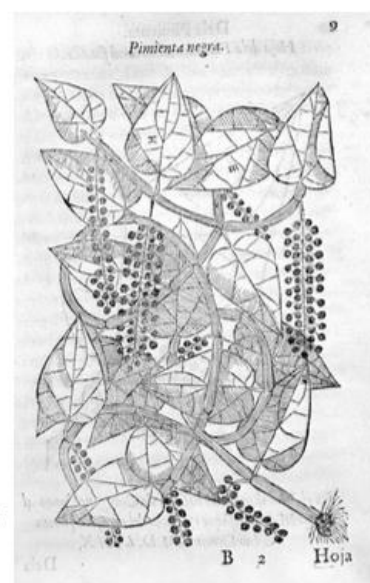


Image: *Tractado de las drogas y medicinas de las Indias orientales (Treatise of the Drugs and Medicines of the East Indies)*, Cristóbal Acosta, 1578

Article: <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/WmchwyQAACYApIyE>

## Cinnamon



Cinnamon is a sweet, pungent spice derived from the inner bark of several different species of *Cinnamomum* tree. These trees are now spread widely across south east Asia but its source was once a mystery to all but certain Arab merchants who held a valuable monopoly on the cinnamon trade. Recent studies have investigated traditional benefits attributed to cinnamon, including its anti-inflammatory properties and potential for blood glucose control,

Image: *Cinnamon tree (Cinnamomum serum): flowering and leafy stem with floral sections. Coloured lithograph after M.A. Burnett, 1843*

Article:

<https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/WilSbykAANoWFUHP>

## Cloves

Cloves are aromatic flower buds of *Syzygium Aromaticum*, a tree in the family *Myrtaceae*. They are native to the Maluku Islands of Indonesia, formerly known as the Moluccas, or Spice Islands. According to the *Doctrine of Signatures* - the theory that God intended certain plants to be curative and marked these with a clue as to their use - the resemblance of clove buds to teeth indicated that they were helpful with dental problems. Paracelsus (1491–1541) first developed the concept: "Nature marks each growth ... according to its curative benefit".



Image: *Close-up of dried brown clove heads by Rowan McOnegal*

Article: <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/WhRqRCEAACyAzNOF>

## Turmeric



Turmeric, known as Haldi in India, comes from the rhizome of the plant *Curcuma longa* and is native to India. When not used fresh, the rhizomes are boiled in water and then dried in an oven, after which they are ground into a golden-orange powder. It is used in Indian households to help with burns, cuts and digestive disorders.

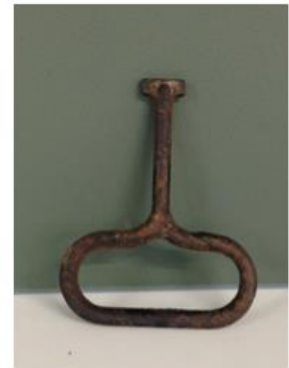
In 1999 the Indian government fought and won a legal battle that forced a pharmaceutical company to withdraw a US patent filed for the medicinal use of turmeric. The Indian government argued successfully that such traditional medical knowledge couldn't be patented.

Image: *Turmeric (Curcuma longa L) rhizome with flowering stem and separate leaf and floral segments. Coloured engraving after F. von Scheihl, 1776*

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### **Metal Key**

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century iron metal key used to open gas and water manhole covers. Many are still used today; from Rye, East Sussex.



### **Acupuncture Teaching Model**



These are Chinese medicine models used to teach students the location of points into which they might insert an acupuncture needle, or apply heat or focused touch. There are different schools of medicine in China and the number and position of points varies somewhat.

Chinese Medicine involves the recognition and understanding of hundreds of patterns based on the behaviour of Qi in the body – a ‘substance’ or ‘potential’ that constitutes and organizes matter to give rise to growth and change. There is debate about how old medical practices like this are. *The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*, a classic text, probably dates to the first century BCE, but is likely to be a compilation of older texts and practices.

### **Tile replica**

A ‘real ceramic’ tile replica (21<sup>st</sup> century) of a floor in Canterbury Cathedral from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Made in Spain.



### **Fisherman's floats**



Miniature versions of glass fisherman's floats found in different European and Asian countries from the last 300 years, now replaced by plastic floats in most areas of the world. These floats were made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Vietnam.

## C20th Baby's feeding bottle

This boat-shaped feeding bottle, used from the 1900s to the 1940s, is often called a 'banana bottle'. It is made of clear glass and has a hole at either end which helped both with cleaning the bottle and with regulating the flow of the milk. These were the first feeding bottles to incorporate a teat and a valve.



The Allenbury is the most well known double ended bottle, perfected in 1910. They were easier to clean than earlier models because, when the valve and teat were removed, the bottle could be washed through under a running tap. This interesting example was purchased from eBay from a woman whose husband was fed by it as a baby in the 1940s.

## Prosthetic hand



This is a prosthetic hand made from silicone by Cathy Kidd, Lead Silicone Technician at *Otto Bock Healthcare*. The silicone used is medical grade, and can be sculpted.

It represents a hand, which would belong to an older client and is designed for aesthetic purposes - it isn't functional. Cathy says that she takes great care with colour matching and with matching the age and tone of the skin to the residual limb and the 'sure side'.

Sometimes patients will ask her to make their prosthetic lighter or darker, or younger than the 'sure side' limb. The term 'uncanny valley' is sometimes used in relation to prosthetics. The more realistic prosthetic limbs are, the more people like them - but only up to a point... and after that point, ultra-realistic forms can evoke unsettling feelings.

## Knitted Neurons

There are billions of neurons or nerve cells in the human body and each has its own identity. Most neurons consist of a cell body, with a nerve fibre, the 'axon', that transmits messages and the 'dendrite' that receives messages. Most communicate with each other via electrochemical processes.

These models were created by *Knit a Neuron*

<http://knitaneuron.blogspot.co.uk> as an educational tool, and are made of wool, thread and buttons.



## Gomez boxes



These boxes are constructed using objects from 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Made from collected 'found and secondhand objects' in the UK and elsewhere by Rye artist, Antonio Gomez.

Gomez's boxes tell a story from some aspect of his life—imagined or otherwise. He follows in the tradition of European surrealist artists and American artist Joseph Cornell, in bringing together disparate objects to make a whole.

Mr. Gomez is also the proprietor of The Tiny Bookshop, 70 Church Square, Rye:  
<https://www.facebook.com/tinybookstore.rye/>

