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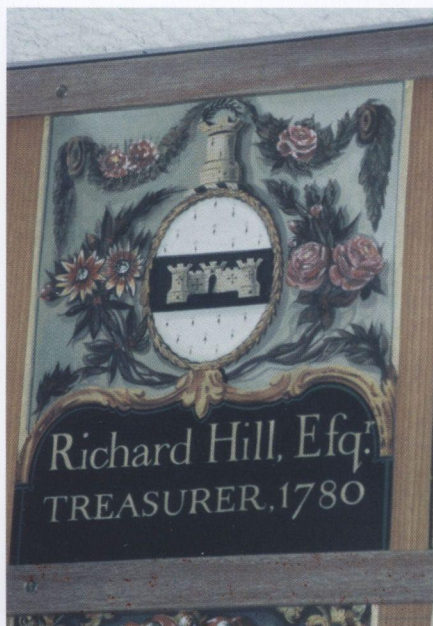
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PLATE 4



Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, board room: four armorial plaques formerly in the Royal Salop Infirmary, showing the arms of treasurers of that institution. Top left (a), Richard Hill (1780). Top right (b), Sir Walter Corbet, Bart. (1895). Bottom left (c), the Earl of Plymouth (1928). Bottom right (d), General Sir Charles Grant (1941).

See pages 27-32.

THE ARMORIAL PLAQUES IN THE ROYAL SALOP INFIRMARY

Janet Verasanso

In the eighteenth century Shrewsbury, like most English towns, was crowded and unhealthy. 'Contagious', 'sweating' and 'putrid' fevers were rampant; death was ubiquitous, not only among the old and young but also among those in the prime of life.¹

By the 1730s a number of socially conscious country gentlemen realised that the conditions in which the poor lived required an urgent solution. In 1737 an infirmary was proposed for the poor-sick and lame by Sir Rowland Hill, Bart., Sir Thomas Whitmore, C.B., and Thomas Hill, Esq.² However the announcement of this philanthropic project received little enthusiasm and it was not revived until 1744.³ Indeed, at this period, there were few provincial hospitals to provide a model for the Shropshire gentry to follow. Among those already in existence were hospitals at Winchester, Exeter and Northampton.

A public meeting was held on 24 March 1745 in the grand jury room after the judge's charges, and the success rates of the London hospitals were brought to the gentlemen's attention. A committee was immediately formed from among the Shropshire aristocracy and gentry to establish the infirmary, to be supported by voluntary contributions, benefactors and trustees.⁴ The project was advertised in the London papers, surgeons and physicians were engaged, who would become members of the committee and whose time was to be given without remuneration, together with a secretary who would be 'gratified for his trouble', an apothecary and a matron.⁵ On 25 April 1747 the first patients were admitted.⁶

The annual post of Honorary Treasurer was to be held by a prominent member of society. He would not, of course, be involved in the day to day supervision of the

¹ M. Keeling-Roberts, *In Retrospect. A short history of the Royal Salop Infirmary*, (Wem 1981), pp. 1, 2. This volume provides a very detailed account of the Infirmary from its inception to 1977, when it was transferred to its present site at Copthorne, Shrewsbury.

² Keeling-Roberts, *op. cit.* p. 3.

³ H. Bevan, *Records of the Salop Infirmary from the commencement of the charity to the present time* (Shrewsbury 1847), p. 7.

⁴ Shropshire Archives, Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Salop Infirmary 1745-1914, 1909/1/1, 1. no. 1. The Minutes are unpaginated and the numbers refer to the meetings.

⁵ *Ibid.* nos. 2, 11, 48, 89.

⁶ W. B. Howie, 'The administration of an eighteenth-century provincial hospital: the Royal Salop Infirmary, 1747-1830', *Medical History* 5 (1961), pp. 34-55 at 34. L. Picard, *Dr Johnson's London* (London 2002), p. 97.

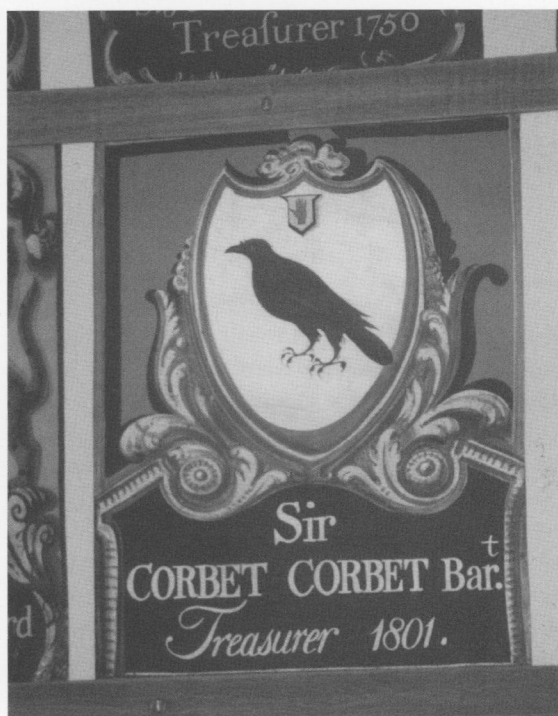


Figure 1: Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, board room. Plaque for Sir Corbet Corbet, Bart., treasurer of the Royal Salop Infirmary in 1801.

financial side of the work of the hospital, which would be delegated to his under-treasurers and auditors, but informal fund-raising among his friends and acquaintance would be expected. The Treasurer's involvement would entail an annual review of the accounts and attendance at the Anniversary Meeting, generally held during Race Week.⁷ At the close of the meeting the trustees and benefactors would process through the streets of Shrewsbury to St Chad's church where the Anniversary Service would be taken by a clergyman of the Treasurer's choice.⁸

Within the social arena from which the Treasurers were selected it was considered a great honour to be chosen.⁹ Locally prominent families predominated. The Treasurers, nevertheless, were not drawn solely from Shropshire patrician families, but also from Wales and other Marcher counties. Bishops as well as local Members of Parliament, originating from farther afield, might be selected and, with increasing frequency, towards the end of the nineteenth century, so might professional soldiers.

The series of armorial plaques, beginning in 1745 and lasting without a gap until the advent of the National Health Service in 1948, appears to have been initiated

⁷ Keeling-Roberts, *op. cit.* p. 15. During the first hundred years 20 treasurers were represented by others at the Anniversary meeting.

⁸ Keeling-Roberts, *op. cit.* p. 28; the Minutes record that on 1 October 1747 the Treasurer and preacher 'walked together'.

⁹ Picard, *op. cit.* p. 96.

voluntarily by three early Treasurers. At the quarterly board meeting held on 6 November 1750, the other remaining past Treasurers were asked to donate a plaque of their coats of arms 'painted in a uniform manner on copper, in order to be hung up in the boardroom as an ornament thereto.' William Tayleur, Sir Rowland Hill, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn and Sir John Astley (Treasurer that year), all assented. The two past Treasurers, Lord Powis and Sir Thomas Whitmore, who were both absent from that meeting, were requested to 'favour the charity in like manner.' It was further ordered that all future Treasurers would be requested to supply similar plaques.¹⁰

Two hundred and three years elapsed between 1745 and 1948. However, there are only 201 plaques, because, in 1908, Captain Heywood-Lonsdale was re-elected to serve a second term; and Sir George Holcroft, Bart., also served for two years, in 1922 and 1923. It is clear that over time the welfare of the Shropshire poor continued to engage the attention of the landed families, some of whom repeatedly provided the Treasurer: the Hills and Corbets, together with the Earls of Powis, heading the list, followed by the Bridgemans, Foresters and Leightons. In 1948 Lord Forester was the last Treasurer to hold this honorary position.

The plaques, all measuring 43cm x 34cm (see **Figure 1** and **Plate 4** for examples), have been restored more than once, the first restoration to be recorded occurring at the time of the rebuilding of the hospital in 1826-30.¹¹ Other unrecorded restorations may have taken place, but the last known happened about thirty years ago. A number of variations in the tinctures of the shields, as described in Burke's *General Armory* or recorded at the Shropshire Heraldic Visitation of 1623, can be seen.¹² Two examples will suffice. Thomas Knight (Treasurer 1798): the border has been painted black (sable) instead of the deep heraldic blue (azure). Robert Burton (Treasurer 1785): the field is quarterly, black and a very pale blue instead of purple (purpure) and blue. But perhaps the tincture which has suffered most throughout the early series has been black, which has often been replaced by, or faded to, a pale grey. However the painters may have exercised their discretion when considering the aesthetic demands and clarity of the shields. Thus, this widespread use of grey can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to enhance the overall effect, unless, of course, it is due to restoration or pigment deterioration. In an era which saw the breakdown of the workshop tradition, when mixing and grinding pigments was the only method available, it is impossible to determine without close technical examination the cause of these variations. The advent of the commercial paint manufacturers in the nineteenth century should have reduced any possibility of error. Furthermore the Treasurers' names and years of their Treasurerships are all situated in an identical position below their arms and, although the quality of the calligraphy varies, they

¹⁰ Shropshire Archives 1909/I/1, 1, no. 270.

¹¹ Keeling-Roberts, op. cit. p. 28.

¹² G. Grazebrook and J. Rylands (edd.), *Visitation of Shropshire, 1623, by Robert Treswell, Somerset Herald, and Augustine Vincent, Rouge Dragon Pursuivant, as deputies to William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms* (Harl. Soc. pubns. 28. London 1889) part 1, p. 95; Burke, *GA*, p. 572.

are all painted on a black ground, which supports the theory that grey has been used to effect a contrast. However it would be difficult to sustain any suggestion that gentlemen would not have exercised a close control over the representation of their arms, which might still re-enforce social rank and esteem.

After the hospital relocated to its present site on the outskirts of Shrewsbury in 1977 the panels were restored and hung in four-tiered rows around the walls of the new, utilitarian board room (see **Figure 2**). At this time, or shortly afterwards, they received their last restoration.¹³ It is not known if the individual engaged to execute this work was a professional heraldic painter, but a number of the shields are now enlivened with a blue that resembles heraldic *bleu-celeste* rather than the more usual *azure*; in particular the arms of William Lacon Childe (1826), Thomas Sandford (1885), and others. It is nevertheless possible that this particular tincture represents an expression of the original painter's desire to increase decorative effect and may not be due to over-zealous restoration. *Bleu-celeste* – a pale blue – became recognised as a heraldic colour in the last century and can be found on arms granted to those connected with aviation.

The heraldic content in the sequence of plaques reveals the variations in heraldic design over time (see **Plate 4**). Indeed within the limited confines of the plaques the Treasurers were forced to take decisions regarding the elements of their arms, including quarterings, that they wished to display and aesthetic considerations might be subordinated to demands to include these alliances. The stylistic choices, however, together with the competence of their chosen painters, frequently provide the main aesthetic impact and, at the same time, fulfil the original request of the early Treasurers to provide an 'ornament' for the boardroom. Focus on lineage could create shields that were often cluttered and therefore less effective than those which displayed the pronominal arms alone. This can be seen on the plaques of Sir Vincent Corbet (1874), T. F. Kinnersley (1892), and W. E. Hulton-Harrop (1915), where twenty or more quarterings can be discerned.

It is clear, therefore, that the Treasurers or their agents to whom they had delegated the supervision of their plaques had a number of choices as to which elements they wished to include beyond their shields. Interesting crests may be seen on the plaques of C. Childe Pemberton (1860), Offley Wakeman (1888), Thomas Sandford (1885), and H. D. M. Hulton-Harrop (1942). Following an eighteenth-century fashion crests were omitted by 24% of the early Treasurers. But perhaps these were examples of gentry economy? The first example of mantling is found adorning the arms of John Mytton, Treasurer in 1792. The earliest shields, however, are contained within cartouches or elaborate borders, some of which are charmingly inventive with flowers, foliage, aquatic creatures and grotesques. The great similarity found on the plaques of John Corbet (1775), Thomas Whitmore (1778), and Rowland Wingfield (1781), are close enough to suggest strongly, on stylistic grounds, that these gentlemen employed the same local painter. The fashion for exuberant mantling reached Shrewsbury in 1895 with Sir Walter Corbet's plaque (see **Plate 4b**) and,

¹³ I am indebted to Ms Julia Buckley of the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital for this information.

THE ARMORIAL PLAQUES IN THE ROYAL SALOP INFIRMARY



Figure 2: Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, board room. General view of the plaques formerly in the Royal Salop Infirmary.

in 1905, that of H. L. Allcroft. This method of surrounding the shields with lavish mantling had not been popular with local painters who, in general, preferred the earlier practice, in which architectural surrounds were incorporated and the mantling restrained. Both these fashions persisted until the end in 1948. When designing the lay-out of the several elements of the panel the painter could exercise a degree of freedom in the design, but over emphasized mantling could destroy the balance and this was characteristic of the fashion prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century. A less ebullient display can be seen on the earlier plaques of Thomas Eyton (1795), John Cotes (1828), and the Earl of Powis (1852).

Among the supporters only one in the collection seriously disappoints in not achieving a realism within the confines of the heraldic canon: the dexter supporter on the Duke of Cleveland's 1867 plaque, a lion guardant, the anthropomorphic head of which, together with some of the rest of its anatomy, is questionable. Although it detracts from the overall appearance of the plaque, it is not an unusual fault; indeed the portrayal of animals and chimerical creatures varied considerably. The skill of the painter determined the success or failure of the supporters. The winged griffins of the Earl of Craven (1835), the unicorns of the Earl of Powis (1928), and others are vigorous and well executed, but the mermaids of Lord Boyne (1856), the birds of prey of the Earl of Liverpool (1837), and also of Lord Sudeley (1870), are weak.

Two early shields fill out the panels, leaving space only for the name and year but, gradually, crests, coronets of rank, mantling and supporters were added which caused a reduction in the size of the achievements as all panels were restricted to the original dimensions. From 1819 the background to the achievements tend to lose the simplicity of the earlier panels. These later armorial bearings are placed within architectural surrounds, gothic arches, Greek columns and pedimented entablatures embellished

with rococo swags, urns, grotesques and other Greek motifs. This style features prominently in the panels commemorating the Earl of Bradford's Treasurership of 1893, Captain Heywood-Lonsdale (1907/8), and A. C. McCorquodale (1914). The attempts at drapery were less successful and are apparent on the plaques of Frances Darby (1840), W. O. Foster (1873), and Colonel Hope-Edwardes (1906), which are almost identical, differing only in the background colours and, of course, the arms, suggesting the same local workshop had been employed. Perhaps the least successful attempt at drapery can be found on Noel Hill's plaque of 1783: the crude handling of the drapery reflects the limited ability of his painter.

There is, however, one plaque which deserves special mention. It foreshadows the changes in the style of heraldic art of the later twentieth century and contrasts markedly with previous local practice. In 1941 General Sir Charles Grant became Treasurer; his plaque (see **Plate 4d**) does not fall within the tradition of arms painting in Shrewsbury, and may indeed have been commissioned elsewhere. It is a more contemporary work, two dimensional in effect with little shading to the helm or mantling. Two shields are placed *acollé* and is the only achievement to be displayed in this form which, together with the indifferently designed helm affronty and the discordant green background, all make for a less than satisfactory, albeit very interesting plaque.

On the plaques produced during the Victorian era signatures of the local painters can occasionally be detected. The earliest visible signature appears on Panton Corbet's plaque of 1850, executed by J. Bowen. W. H. Shepperd of Pride Hill, Shrewsbury, was employed by several Treasurers during the second half of the nineteenth century and another firm, T. W. Cole of Wyle Cop, Shrewsbury, which had been in business since at least 1828, produced good work.¹⁴ In 1905 Cole was listed in the trade directories as 'heraldic and scenic painter' and again in 1922, by which time Edwin Cole's workshop had moved to Dogpole, Shrewsbury. This long established firm ceased trading in 1973.

In spite of a few inaccuracies this superb collection of armorial plaques of the arms of those gentlemen who were motivated by their desire to help the less fortunate people of Shropshire is now displayed at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, in purpose-built frames along a corridor which is open to patients and visitors alike. The plaques are arranged in date order and bear witness to the changes in heraldic fashion over two hundred years.¹⁵

¹⁴ Tibnam & Co., *The Salop Directory* (Shrewsbury 1828), p. 104

¹⁵ A version of this article first appeared in the *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*.

Appendix: Honorary Treasurers of the Royal Salop Infirmary, 1745-1948

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1745 William Tayleur Esq. | 1786 Thomas Ottley Esq. |
| 1746 Sir Rowland Hill Bt | 1787 Edward Corbet Esq. |
| 1747 Sir Thomas Whitmore KB | 1788 John Smitheman Esq. |
| 1748 Sir Watkin Williams Wynn Bt | 1789 Nichiolas Smythe Esq. |
| 1749 The Rt Hon. Henry Arthur Herbert,
Earl of Powis | 1790 William Childe Esq. |
| 1750 Sir John Astley Bt | 1791 Robert Morhall Esq. |
| 1751 John Earl Gower | 1792 John Mytton Esq. |
| 1752 Richard Lyster Esq. | 1793 Thomas Jelf Powys Esq. |
| 1753 The Rt Revd Edward Bishop of
Llandaff | 1794 Robert Corbet Esq. |
| 1754 John Mytton Esq. | 1795 Thomas Eyton Esq. |
| 1755 Sir Orlando Bridgeman Bt | 1796 The Right Hon. Thomas Noel Lord
Berwick |
| 1756 John Corbett Esq. | 1797 Thomas Beale Esq. |
| 1757 William Forester Esq. | 1798 Thomas Knight Esq. |
| 1758 Thomas Hill Esq. | 1799 Revd. J.R. Lloyd |
| 1759 Francis Duke of Bridgwater | 1800 Sir Watkin Williams Wynn Bt |
| 1760 Sir Edward Smythe Bt | 1801 Sir Corbet Corbet Bt |
| 1761 Frederick Ld Bishop of Lichfield
and Coventry [later Archbishop of
Canterbury] | 1802 The Right Hon. Orlando Lord Bradford |
| 1762 William Earl of Bath | 1803 The Right Hon. John William Earl of
Bridgwater |
| 1763 Richard Ld Bp of St Asaph | 1804 Richard Lyster Esq. |
| 1764 Charles Baldwyn Esq. | 1805 John Kynaston Powell Esq. |
| 1765 Granville Earl Gower | 1806 Thomas Whitmore Esq. |
| 1766 Sir Henry Bridgeman Bt | 1807 Andrew Corbet Esq. |
| 1767 Sir Hugh Briggs Bt | 1808 Revd. Archdeacon Corbett |
| 1768 The Right Hon. Robert Lord Clive | 1809 John Cotes Esq. |
| 1769 Robert Pigott Esq. | 1810 Sir John Hill Bt |
| 1770 Sir Watkin Williams Wynn Bt | 1811 Richard Lyster Esq. |
| 1771 William Lord Craven | 1812 Lord Viscount Clive |
| 1772 John Mytton Esq. | 1813 Cecil Weld Forester Esq. |
| 1773 Charles Earl of Tankerville | 1814 John Cressett Pelham Esq. |
| 1774 John Ld Viscount Killmorey | 1815 William Cludde Esq. |
| 1775 John Corbet Esq. | 1816 William Charlton Esq. |
| 1776 George Edward Arthur Henry Earl of
Powis | 1817 The Right Revd. Foliot Lord Bishop of
Worcester |
| 1777 The Right Hon. Edward Lord Clive | 1818 Hon. Thomas Kenyon |
| 1778 Thomas Whitmore Esq. | 1819 Robert Burton Esq. |
| 1779 William Pulteney Esq. | 1820 Sir Baldwin Leighton Bt |
| 1780 Richard Hill Esq. | 1821 John Wingfield Esq. |
| 1781 Rowland Wingfield Esq. | 1822 John Mytton Esq. |
| 1782 Sir Charles Leighton Bart | 1823 Edward William Smythe Owen Esq. |
| 1783 Noel Hill Esq. | 1824 Hon. Robert Henry Clive |
| 1784 Isaac Hawkins Browne Esq. | 1825 The Right Hon. Rowland Lord Hill
G.C.B. |
| 1785 Robert Burton Esq. | 1826 William Lacon Childe Esq. |
| | 1827 Revd. Sir Edward Kynaston Bt |

THE COAT OF ARMS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1828 John Cotes Esq. | 1873 W. O. Foster Esq. |
| 1829 Sir Rowland Hill Bt | 1874 Sir Vincent Rowland Corbet Bt |
| 1830 The Right Hon. The Earl of Bradford | 1875 The Right Hon. The Lord Viscount.
Boyne |
| 1831 The Right Hon. Earl Gower | 1876 C. Donaldson Hudson Esq. |
| 1832 John Arthur Lloyd Esq. | 1877 Major T. C. Meyrick |
| 1833 The Rt Hon. Lord Forester | 1878 The Right Hon. Lord Forester |
| 1834 The Earl of Tankerville | 1879 J. J. Bibby Esq. |
| 1835 The Earl of Craven | 1880 A. P. Heywood Lonsdale Esq. |
| 1836 The Revd. Robert Norgrave Pemberton | 1881 The Rt Hon. Lord Windsor |
| 1837 The Earl of Liverpool | 1882 Rev. John Dryden Corbet |
| 1838 The Earl of Darlington | 1883 S. Kynaston Mainwaring Esq. |
| 1839 The Right Honourable Arthur Viscount
Dungannon | 1884 John Tayleur Esq. |
| 1840 The Rt Hon. William Noel Lord
Berwick | 1885 Thomas K. Sandford of Sandford Esq. |
| 1841 Sir Baldwin Leighton | 1886 James Watson Esq. M.P. |
| 1842 Thomas Botfield Esq. | 1887 T. Slaney Eyton Esq. |
| 1843 W. Ormsby Gore Esq. | 1888 Sir Offley Wakeman Bt |
| 1844 St John Charlton Esq. | 1889 The Right Hon. Lord Harlech |
| 1845 Sir Watkin Williams Wynn Bt | 1890 The Right Hon. Lord Rowton |
| 1846 Sir Andrew Vincent Corbet Bt | 1891 H. D. Greene Esq. Q.C. |
| 1847 The Rt Hon. and Revd. Richard Noel
Lord Berwick | 1892 T. F. Kynnersley Esq. |
| 1848 Robert Aglionby Slaney Esq. | 1893 The Right Hon. The Earl of Bradford |
| 1849 Francis Darby Esq. | 1894 Arthur Sparrow Esq. |
| 1850 Panton Corbett Esq. | 1895 Sir Walter Orlando Corbet Bt of
Moreton Corbet County of Salop |
| 1851 C. Kynaston Mainwaring Esq. | 1896 Francis Stanier Esq. |
| 1852 The Earl of Powis | 1897 The Rt Hon. The Earl of Powis |
| 1853 Thomas Eyton Esq. | 1898 Frank Bibby Esq. |
| 1854 J. W. Dod Esq. | 1899 The Right Hon. Lord Barnard |
| 1855 J. C. Burton Borough Esq. | 1900 Stanley Leighton Esq. M.P. |
| 1856 The Right Hon. The Lord Viscount
Boyne | 1901 The Right Hon. Lord Kenyon |
| 1857 John Pritchard Esq. | 1902 The Right Hon. Cecil Theodore Baron
Forester |
| 1858 The Rt Hon. Lord Wenlock | 1903 The Right Hon. The Earl of Bradford |
| 1859 Beriah Botfield Esq. | 1904 W. H. Foster Esq. |
| 1860 C. O. Childe Pemberton Esq. | 1905 H. J. Allcroft Esq. |
| 1861 Sir C. H. R. Boughton Bt | 1906 Col. H. J. Hope-Edwardes |
| 1862 George Tomline Esq. M.P. | 1907 Captain H. Heywood-Lonsdale |
| 1863 The Rt Hon. William Noel Lord
Berwick | 1908 Captain H. Heywood-Lonsdale |
| 1864 The Hon. Henry Wentworth Powys | 1909 A. Wynne Corrie Esq. |
| 1865 The Most Noble The Marquis of Bath | 1910 James Foster Esq. |
| 1866 His Grace the Duke of Sutherland K.G. | 1911 Hillyar D. Chapman Esq. |
| 1867 His Grace the Duke of Cleveland K.G. | 1912 C. F. K. Mainwaring Esq. |
| 1868 Algernon Charles Heber-Percy Esq. | 1913 Beville Stanier Esq. M.P. |
| 1869 Charles Spencer Lloyd Esq. | 1914 A. C. McCorquodale Esq. |
| 1870 The Right Hon Lord Sudeley | 1915 W. E. M. Hulton-Harrop Esq. |
| 1871 C. G. T. Wingfield Esq. | 1916 W. Swire Esq. |
| 1872 Adelbert Wellington Earl Brownlow | 1917 Edward Brocklehurst Fielden Esq. |
| | 1918 George Ralph Charles 3rd Baron
Harlech |

THE ARMORIAL PLAQUES IN THE ROYAL SALOP INFIRMARY

- 1919 Lt. Col. Harold P.Sykes
- 1920 The Rt Hon. Thomas Henry Lord
Berwick
- 1921 Lt. Col N. ff. Eckersley
- 1922 Sir George Harry Holcroft Bt
- 1923 Sir George Harry Holcroft Bt
- 1924 Lt. Col. Stafford Davies Pryce Davies
- 1925 The Most Hon. The Marquess of
Cambridge, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., C.M.G.
- 1926 The Right Honourable The Lord
Viscount Boyne
- 1927 The Right Honourable William Clive
Bridgeman M.P.
- 1928 The Right Hon. The Earl of Plymouth
- 1929 Major A. W. Foster M.C.
- 1930 Brigadier General A. H. O. Lloyd,
C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O.
- 1931 The Right Hon. George Cecil
Beaumont Baron Forester
- 1932 The Right Hon. The Earl of Bradford
- 1933 Major B. E. Parker Leighton M.P.
- 1934 The Right Hon. Thomas Evelyn Baron
Howard de Walden
- 1935 Capt R. A. Black
- 1936 Captain Joseph Eccles
- 1937 Capt John Arthur Gwynn Sparrow
- 1938 Lieut Col G. Windsor Clive, C.M.G.,
M.P.
- 1939 Guy Hope Coldwell Esq.
- 1940 Sir Offley Wakeman Bt
- 1941 General Sir Charles Grant, K.C.B.,
K.C.V.O., D.S.O.
- 1942 H. D. M. Hulton-Harrop Esq.
- 1943 Major Herbert R. Sykes
- 1944 Lt Col. R. A. Mostyn Owen, D.S.O.
- 1945 Sir Richard Leighton Bt
- 1946 Major A. Heywood-Lonsdale
- 1947 Major General Robert Clive
Bridgeman, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.
- 1948 The Right Hon. Cecil George Wilfrid
Baron Forester