

The true face of James Parkinson

To celebrate the 200th anniversary of James Parkinson's

Essay of the Shaking Palsy, there have been many commemorative meetings, notably three large international ones held in London, UK, in 2017, at The Royal Society, The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, and The Royal London Hospital. Despite belated recognition of his contributions, Parkinson (1755–1824) remains a man without a recognisable face.

An internet search for pictures of Parkinson returns two photographs, both of which have found their way into several book chapters and review articles and feature regularly in promotional brochures for medical meetings and slide presentations at conferences. The most reproduced image purporting to be Parkinson is actually of James Cumine Parkinson (1832–87), a discovery made by the neuroscientist Simon Stott in 2015 using reverse image search engines. The photograph had originally been put on the Lecale and Downe Historical Society website and then on the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeontology, Queens University Belfast website. James Cumine Parkinson had hoped to enter medicine but failed his Classics examination. After sailing the seven seas and seeking his fortune in the Australian gold rush he eventually became a lighthouse keeper near Hobart, Tasmania.

The other misattributed image—which appeared in the 1938 book *Medical Classics* by Emerson Crosby Kelly, who had a lifelong interest in the history of medicine—is a photograph of James Parkinson, the first treasurer of the British Dental Association. Note that daguerreotypes of the human face did not appear until 1839, 15 years after the death of Parkinson the surgeon apothecary. In their desperation to put a face to a name, many physicians have uncritically accepted these early photographs as authentic. Over time, the narratives around these images have developed a life of their own and transformed into factoids as explained by the neurologist Mark Lawden in 2011.

The Oddfellows is one of the oldest tradesman guilds and fraternal societies in the UK. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Oddfellow lodges employed a surgeon to provide medical treatment for members and their dependants as a fringe benefit of membership. After being granted the Grand Diploma of the Company of Barber Surgeons on April 1, 1784, Parkinson entered practice with his father at 1 Hoxton Square, London and, sometime after, records show that he was appointed as surgeon to the Oddfellow's Grand Imperial Lodge in Old Street Square, London. *Meeting Night of the Club of Odd Fellows*, a satirical 1789 engraving shows a convivial gathering of the Imperial Lodge at The Cock, Old Street Square, London and depicts members and the lodge surgeon (holding a medicine bottle

and a script). Oddfellows records confirm that Parkinson was the surgeon at the time of the engraving.

Another possible authentic portrayal of Parkinson comes from the fold out frontispiece of *The Ale House Sermon from The Villagers Friend and Physician*—a book written by James Parkinson in 1804. Shirley Roberts, a radiologist with an interest in historical research and medicine, suggested that the apothecary in a dress coat depicted in the book may in fact be a selfportrait of Parkinson. *Meeting Night of the Club of Odd Fellows* and *The Ale House Sermon* caricatures are not incompatible with one another. Both depict a short gentleman with rather refined features, growing in stoutness and reserve with the passage of time.

Although we feel there is considerable circumstantial evidence to support the surgeon in both prints being a caricature of Parkinson, we hope that neither will be uncritically recycled. What is definite and new is that Parkinson was not only a man for all seasons but, an Oddfellow.

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Meeting Night of the Club of Odd Fellows by artist Samuel Collings, engraver John Barlow
With permission from Metropolitan Archives, City of London

The Ale House Sermon

The Wellcome Collection

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James Cumine Parkinson (1832–87)

James Parkinson, first treasurer of the British Dental Association (1872)

For more about the **image of James Cumine Parkinson** see *Pract Neurol* 2015; **15**: 148

For a **discussion on Parkinson's facies** see *Pract Neurol* 2011; **11**: 316

For the **Oddfellow society** see <https://www.oddfellows.co.uk/about/>

Further reading

An Essay on the Shaking Palsy. London, UK: Whittingham and Rowland, 1817.

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Kelly EC. Annotated reprinting: Essay on the Shaking Palsy by James Parkinson. (1938) *Medical Classics*; 2: 957–98

Editor. The Monthly Reporter or Manual of Odd Fellowship for the use of the Brethren of the Grand United Order. Sheffield: J. Sunderland and Co. 1835

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In Context



