



historical society

Historical Happenings

THE PIPE OF PEACE

One of the more unusual items in the St John Museum's collection is a boxed set of Sir Hiram Maxim's Pipe of Peace and the Maxim Inhaler. While its use was never endorsed by St John it has some strange parallels with our organisation.

Sir Maxim was an inventor. He was born in Sangerville, Maine, USA in 1840. He took out some 271 American and British patents for a variety of contraptions ranging from hair curling irons to chandeliers. The electrical pressure regulator he displayed at the Paris Exhibition of 1881 earned him the decoration of Legion of Honour.

Hiram moved to London and became a British citizen. There, in Clerkenwell, the suburb in which St John's Gate is located, he developed the invention for which he is most famous. It was the Maxim gun, the first efficient fully automatic machine gun. It could fire 666 rounds per minute. It worked by using the recoil to eject each spent cartridge and to load the next one. The Prince of Wales was most impressed by the gun and it was adopted by the British Army in 1889 and the Royal Navy in 1892. Hiram received a knighthood for developing this weapon of war.

As an adult Sir Hiram began suffering from severe bouts of bronchitis. To treat this he invented the Pipe of Peace and the Maxim Inhaler. The inhaler was the smaller of the two devices. It was comprised of a glass tube containing a gauze material soaked in menthol. Inhaling the menthol vapour gave sufferers some relief. The larger Pipe of Peace was similar but was loaded with a compound essence of pine instead of menthol. Added to the pine essence were essences of Wintergreen and Sweet Birch. This combination of essences was marketed as 'Dirigo', the motto of the American State of Maine where he was born. Dirigo is Latin for 'I lead'.

The whole outfit, the boxed set of both inhalers and bottles of menthol and Dirigo could be bought from John Morgan Richards & Sons of 46 Holborn Viaduct, London, EC for 15 shillings and sixpence.

A thankful patient helped by the Pipe of Peace wrote to Sir Hiram saying the Pipe was 'of great use in a prolonged attack'. So was the Maxim gun!

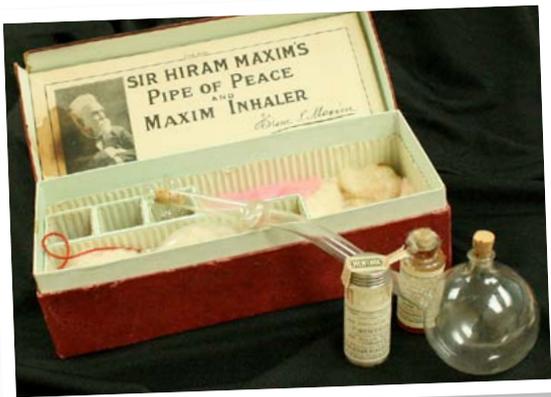
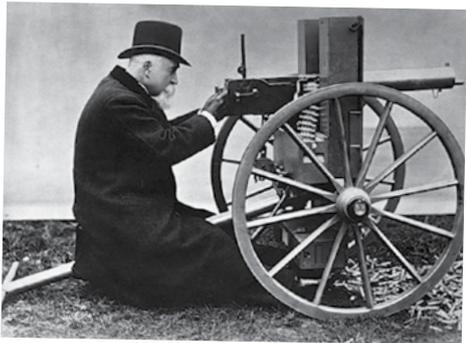
Belair Hilloc wrote

'Whatever happens, we have got
The Maxim gun, and they have not'.

Here are the parallels between Sir Hiram and St John. Both worked at Clerkenwell. Both were engaged in warfare in various ways in their early history, Maxim with his invention and St John with the military aspects of the early Hospitallers. Both then turned to relieving the sick; Sir Hiram with his Inhaler and his Pipe of Peace and St John with its renowned care of sick and injured people.

Question: Another parallel: what place with a name you know is on the coast of Maine, USA, directly east of Sangerville?

Brian Fotheringham
Chairman



Answer to the previous question:
The person who succeeded the Blessed Gerard as the Master of the Hospitallers was Raymond du Puy

