



UPDATING OUR CHAIN OF OFFICE

Why update our chain?

Our visual iconography has been represented on an item of jewellery since the late 19th century, when we were still the National Association of Medical Herbalists. That original representation was then updated in the 1950's when we became the National Institute, updated our visual identity and adopted our coat of arms. Our recent rebranding and creation of a new visual identity meant that that chain no longer aligned with who we are as an organisation and the chain itself essentially became redundant.

What options did we consider?

One option was for us to consign chains and items of jewellery to history, and not to have a physical embodiment of our identity.

Another option was to simply replace the pendant on the existing chain of office with one reflective of our new identity, or even to commission a new chain and pendant in a slightly modernized version of one commissioned in the 1950s

We considered a number of issues, including whether a chain of office felt appropriate given the culture of collaboration and inclusiveness that we are fostering, whether physical items were necessary in an increasingly digital world, and the cost of commissioning any new item.

We decided to commission something because it felt appropriate to maintain our history of having a physical item that represents the Institute and because we felt we could repurpose the concept of a chain and allow it to reflect the progress we have made as an organisation, becoming a symbol of a more modern and inclusive Institute.

How did we commission this piece?

In order to create our new item we worked with Buddy Creative, our creative partners in Exeter who rebranded the Institute in 2019, and Amy Warburton, a jeweller who we selected to work with us following a tender process based on the draft design that we had created with Buddy.

What did we commission?

The critical question we asked ourselves was what we wanted the item we created to be. It had to represent all of the key parts of our identity that fed into our rebranding and it had to reference a sense of what the Institute is, what it means to its members, and our strong link to the plants that they work with.

Crucially, we didn't feel that it was appropriate to consider it to be a presidential chain or a chain of office, in reflection of our ethos that we are all the Institute, and that council, office holders and presidents hold no greater status than any other member. We wanted to create something that could be for everyone who was part of the Institute.



Traditionally the chain has been worn by the president or by their deputy on occasions such as General Meetings, conferences and key public addresses. In recent times it has become something that is worn annually at our AGM and very rarely outside of that.

We have chosen to call the item we have created the Institute garland. This reflects the dual use of the word 'garland' as both a noun and a verb. It might suggest a physical adornment for the neck made of plant materials or precious metals, but it also defines a public act of welcome or recognition for those who may be new to our group or who have distinguished themselves in some way.

Dictionary definitions include;

garland noun

- 1 : a circular or spiral arrangement of intertwined material (such as flowers or leaves)
- 2 : a wreath or festoon of flowers, leaves, or other material, worn for ornament or as an honor or hung on something as a decoration
- 3 : "wreath of flowers" also "crown of gold or silver", derived from "an ornament of twisted wire"

garland verb

- 1 : to crown with a garland
- 2 : to adorn with or as if with a garland

How will it be used?

We hope to use it on any occasion where the Institute and its members come together. In particular we are looking forward to using it as part of a welcome to new members, where the garland is placed around their neck by another member as a way of welcoming them to the Institute and to their herbal family. It is our intention that the garland will eventually have been worn at least once by every member of the Institute, and that each member will have added some of their own character, spirit and strength to the garland, to be shared amongst their colleagues

How have we funded the garland?

The costs of designing and producing the garland have been kept to a minimum, and at £2,000 the garland cost a lot less than the £4,000 - £6,000 initial estimate we have for a like-for-like replacement. We only went ahead with the project after agreeing that the costs would be met from accumulated royalties from previous publishing projects, meaning that our history would be funding something for our future.



The materials:

The chain is made from recycled silver and the logo elements and linking rings are made from recycled gold. We felt it was important to use recycled materials, not only to minimise the environmental impacts of the project, but also to echo the hidden uses of many plants, even from the parts that people might throw away or discard thinking them weeds, or that they had used the useful parts already.

We selected reclaimed oak for the pendant. Oak has long been seen as a symbol of strength and survival, and this reflects the strength and resilience of herbal practitioners and the Institute. Oak leaves and acorns also appear in our previous coat of arms.

The design:

The design of the chain features a series of interlocking recycled silver stands. These represent our members, who are strong on their own but are able to do so much more when they join with others. They come together to look like a root or stem structure, with each strand ending in a bud-like shape to represent the way that we are all capable of new growth, no matter how long we have been a herbalist.

The threading together of these strands is also reminiscent of a daisy chain, the very embodiment of child-like joy and celebration of the plant world.

The individual chains are kept in place by passing through a representation of our logo, which itself derived from the Tudor rose to represent Henry VIII's act of parliament protecting our right to practice. This shows that the Institute is here to support and guide herbalists and to keep them aligned and together, reinforcing their collective strength.

Although not included in the original design brief, this threading of the silver strands through the perforations of the logo also echoes the appearance of cytoplasmic filaments passing through phloem sieve plates in the vascular bundles of higher plants.

Symbolism:

Silver

Associated with the energy of the moon and motherhood, silver is associated with the healing arts and protection against evil. It is seen as the mirror of the soul and reflects maturity.

Gold

Bringing the energy of the sun with it, gold symbolises illumination, wisdom, compassion and courage. It speaks of perfection of the mind, spirit and soul.

Oak

Said by many cultures to be rooted in strength, wisdom, and healing. Oak traditionally symbolises longevity, stability, endurance, power, justice and honesty.

Rose

Traditionally a symbol of universal love, the rose also represents the Tudor rose and the historical role of Henry VIII in supporting the work of herbalists.



The highlighted copy below from the description of the coat of arms designed in the 1950s shows how we have taken the symbolism represented in the previous chain of office, and updated it to reflect the Institute today.

The essential part is the Shield. This is in green and gold. The green representing the fruits of the Earth, all its vegetation, herbs and plants, the gold, that represents the Sun, under whose rays all things fructify, and in whose absence, all things would cease to exist.

On the centre green upright bar we have the ancient healing symbol of Aesculapius, the Greek God of Medicine, whose temples were erected in the mountains near to healing Springs. The cult was introduced into Rome 293 B.C.

The top green bar has three roses shown in white, which represents silver in Heraldry "barbed and seeded proper." They are our tribute to a British Monarch, Henry VIII whose Act some 400 years ago to "protect herbalists and those with skill in healing from persecution from those who had a monopoly in that Art" and who had descended in many cases to using this for their own advantages and not for the benefit of the suffering poor.

On the gold side panels are two sprays of Rosemary, chosen as a Symbol of Love and Fidelity to those we serve in our daily work and in Memory of those faithful fellow workers, known and unknown who have left their imperishable legacy of natural medication for a World that can have it in increasing measure if they but make known their needs to those who can introduce the necessary Legislation to allow trained workers to use their skills in this form of healing — under the same State Laws as other medical Practitioners. The Rosemary is shown in natural form and colour.

Above the Shield we have the Helm in steel blue and crimson to remind the holders of their Knightly Office, for it can only be that, as they are worthy of it. The Mantling is in green and gold contrasted.

Above the Helmet is a Chaplet of Oak leaves and acorns, a symbol of the enduring strength of our Cause. Emerging from the Chaplet is a pair of hands uplifted in prayerful attitude to the Master Physician under Whose Power all true healing proceeds. The hands hold aloft the great healing herb the Marigold, "herb of the Sun and under Leo".