



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Object 16: Cork



What is it?

Cork is the bark of the tree *Quercus suber*. It is soft, light and impermeable, making it ideal for bottle stoppers and wall tiles. The reason that cork is important in the history of pathology is that its microscopic examination led to the first description of cells.

History

English scientist Robert Hooke published his work on observations made with a primitive compound microscope in 1665. He coined the word 'cell' to describe the units that make up a slice of cork, likening the microscopic compartments to monks' cells. Hooke's cell theory inspired scientists to explore microscopy and led to advances in both microscope design and understanding of the microscopic appearance of different materials.

Pathology

All plants and animals are made up of cells similar to those identified by Hooke. Histopathologists and cytopathologists diagnose disease by examining cells under the microscope.

Find out more

See Hooke's drawing of cells and other images in the history of cell imaging on the [Wellcome website](#).