

Abstract presented at the meeting British Society for the History of ENT  
Held December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015  
In the Toynbee McKenzie Room, at the Royal Society of Medicine, London

### **The Friars and their Balsam**

Daniel Edwards, Amir Farboud

Friar's Balsam, or Tincture of Benzoin, has been widely used in medicine for centuries. In Otolaryngology it is used as an expectorant, a treatment for pharyngitis, a lip protector, an antiseptic and a dressing adjunct. Despite this, its constituents, history and efficacy remain a mystery to many otolaryngologists. We aim to explore the background, formulation and useful application of Friar's Balsam in the twenty-first century.

Medline, Pubmed and the Wellcome Collection were searched using the terms 'Friar's Balsam' and 'Tincture of Benzoin'. Articles and sources were assessed subjectively for relevance and reliability.

Articles from 1811 – 2014 revealed much anecdotal report of the use of Friar's Balsam in medical practice with little evidence of objective, rigorous or comparative study. The paucity of knowledge of the product characteristics was confirmed by a lack of information available for impartation by the United Kingdom's licensed importer. However, knowledge was gained of the formulation, potential adverse effects and postulated inventor of the tincture, a Dr Joshua Ward. He died in 1761, is buried in Westminster Abbey and seems not to have enjoyed any association with a mendicant Christian order, despite the name of his creation.

Whilst an evidence-based recommendation for the application of Friar's Balsam in Otolaryngology is not provided, a comprehensive and interesting overview of the tincture and its history may be presented.