James Fenn Clark was born in 1823 in India, where his father, Hezekiah, was head of the military hospital at Dum Dum. He was brought up by relatives in Blackheath, London, while his parents remained in India, and as a boy witnessed the burning of Parliament when a fire destroyed the Palace of Westminster on 16 October 1834. His parents later returned to England and the family moved to Leamington Spa, where Hezekiah promoted the laying out of Beauchamp Square. On finishing college, James toured India for a while before exploring the world. According to his son, Erland, James was “the first British Sportsman to ‘discover’ Norway. Even on his second visit in ’42 there was only a steamer to Copenhagen”[[1]](#endnote-2). Norway was his favourite destination and he advertised its virtues to his friends. In the collection at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum are three wooden bowls that James collected from India and an oil painting he produced of the North Cape in Norway, which is considered the most northerly point of mainland Europe.

It would seem that even after settling in Leamington and establishing a medical practice, James continued to travel widely, taking in much of Europe as far as Moscow, Canada and the United States of America. It would have been on these journeys that James collected the ethnographic items that were eventually donated to Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum. He was, it would seem, an avid collector and as well as ethnographic material, he collected bygones, geological material and coins.

During his life James contributed a great deal to Leamington society. He was on the building committee for St Paul’s Church, which was built in 1874, and was an active and generous member of the congregation there as well as serving ten years as the vicar’s warden. James was also one of the founder members of the Leamington Provident Dispensary which was established in 1869. Provident dispensaries were like insurance schemes, whereby subscribers paid a weekly fee, which entitled them to medical treatment should they become ill.

James died in Leamington in January 1910, and such was his position in the town that the proceedings of his funeral were recording in *The Leamington Courier.* In accordance with his wishes, his coin collection was sold and the funds were given to St Paul’s School. His widow donated his collection of ethnographic and natural history items to the fledgling museum in Leamington. While many of the ethnographic items remain in the collection, the natural history material has been dispersed.

James was from a family of collectors, as ascertained by his son Erland, who began the introduction to his book *Truncheons: Their Romance and Reality*, with, “I am afraid ‘collecting’ has always been in our blood”[[2]](#endnote-3). As a boy, Erland collected birds’ eggs and butterflies before progressing to stamp collecting. After seeing a truncheon in Leamington museum, he was inspired to collect these and his book was a catalogue of them. James’ father Hezekiah was also a prolific collector; apparently choosing flora and fauna while in the naval division of the East India Company and Geology when he transferred to the artillery. Indeed, some of the old museum labels on the items in the collection state that they were collected by H. C. or H. Clark, and a paperback book of Chinese Moral Essays was presented to Hezekiah by his servant whilst in Canton, China.

1. Erland Fenn Clark, *Truncheons: Their Romance and Reality* (London: Erland Fenn Clark, 1935), p.13 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. *Ibid.* p.11 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)