

Book Reviews

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The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London: A History, 1617–1967, by W. S. C. COPEMAN, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1968, pp. xiii, 112, illus., 63s. 0d.

Dr. Copeman's short history was published to mark the celebrations of the 350th anniversary of the Society's Royal Charter, granted by James I on 6 December 1617. On that day it at last gained the separate incorporation from the Company of Grocers to which it had a just claim as far back as 1525. The author, as much a purist in English as he is a learned medical historian, follows the Society's struggles to assert its rights and proclaim its sincerity of purpose in the face of the acrimonious opposition of the College of Physicians, the Corporation of London, and the Royal Society, many of whose members grouped it in scurrilous tirades with fraudulent quacks and mountebanks.

We read about the Hall: its original building on the site of the former Hospice of the Black Friars; its rebuilding with advice from Wren's assistant after the Great Fire; the establishment of its Chemical Laboratory and its Physic Garden; and the ceremonial of its Masters' Day. We follow the honourable ambition of its members to progress from compounders of pills and potions to accredited general practitioners; an ambition that was fostered by the Rose case of 1704, by the refusal of Parliament to grant the monopoly of retail drug trading in 1748, and the introduction of qualifying examinations after the passing of the Apothecaries' Act in 1815, which produced the gratifying result that most of the 30,000 practitioners on the middle-class electoral roll that followed the Reform Act of 1832 were Apothecaries.

The story continues with a chapter on eminent apothecaries from Gideon de Laune and John Parkinson to John Keats, John Hughlings Jackson and Sir Charles Dodds, and ends with a description of today's Hall and its treasures.

Every medical library should have a copy of this fascinating, well-illustrated book.

R. R. TRAIL