

**MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY**  
1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN

## **The History of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society**

The Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain was founded on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1841 by a group of leading London chemists and druggists.

### **Early history and foundation**

In the early 1800s, some chemists and druggists had already worked collectively to protect the profession's interests. They successfully argued for an exemption from the Apothecaries Act of 1815, formed a committee to monitor the progress of a proposed Sale of Poisons Bill in 1819, and created a short-lived General Association of Chemists and Druggists to promote protection against the Medicine Stamp Duty Act.

In 1841, a group of chemists and druggists convened a public meeting in London to discuss a proposed medical reform bill. Although this bill failed at its second reading, the trade felt vulnerable. It was unregulated and unrestricted. Anyone could operate under the title of Chemist and/or Druggist.



**William Allen, the Society's first President, by H.P. Briggs**

Jacob Bell, the son of a Quaker pharmacist John Bell, emerged as a spokesman for those concerned. The group agreed that the best foundation for a permanent independent association was membership based on a recognised qualification. William Allen proposed the formation of the Pharmaceutical Society at a meeting on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1841 at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the corner of Arundel Street and the Strand in London. John Bell seconded it. Allen went on to become the Society's first president. A committee of forty was appointed as the first Council to frame laws and regulations. It served until elections in May 1842, when a Council of 21 members was formed.

The Society's founding aims were to unite the profession into one body, to protect its members' interests and to advance scientific knowledge. The Royal Charter of Incorporation, granted to the Society in February 1843, gave the purpose of "advancing chemistry and pharmacy and promoting a uniform system of education" precedence over "the protection of those who carry on the business of chemists and druggists."

In September 1841, the Society took a yearly lease on a house at 17 Bloomsbury Square (see Information Sheet *The Society's Headquarters*).

The Society published a list of its founder members, in its *Pharmaceutical Journal*, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1842. There were 23 honorary members, 665 full members, and 263 non-voting associate members (assistants and apprentices). 30% of members and 40% of associates were based in London. Despite an initial surge, and the establishment of 29 local associations, further recruitment of members was slow.

A School of Pharmacy, library and museum of materia medica were established at Bloomsbury Square in 1842 (see Information Sheet *The History of the Society's Museum*). Jacob Bell, Theophilus Redwood, and Jonathon Pereira led the Society's educational and scientific projects. Pereira was appointed Professor of Materia Medica in 1843. Redwood pioneered the establishment of a laboratory for teaching practical chemistry in 1844.

(For more information about qualifications and membership of the Society, see Information Sheet *Tracing People and Premises in Pharmacy*).

### Some significant milestones

- 1850 **Jacob Bell** became MP for St Albans, primarily to push for a Pharmacy Act.
- 1851 **The Arsenic Act** could not restrict the supply of arsenic to chemists & druggists, as there was no legal definition of the role.
- 1852 **Pharmacy Act**, June 30<sup>th</sup>. Established a Register of Pharmaceutical Chemists, restricted to those who had taken the Society's exams. However, the Act did not restrict the practice of pharmacy to examined and registered people, nor provide a legal definition for the trade and practice of pharmacy. Bell lost his parliamentary seat on 1<sup>st</sup> July when the St Albans constituency was disenfranchised following a revelation of bribery.
- 1859 **Jacob Bell** died, aged 49.
- 1859 **The Chemist and Druggist** was launched.
- 1861 The **United Society of Chemists & Druggists** founded. It supported the Pharmaceutical Society's general aims, but accused it of being elitist and unrepresentative. Agreement was reached when the Pharmaceutical Society settled that chemists & druggists in business at the time of a proposed Pharmacy Act would be eligible for membership and election to its Council.
- 1864 The first **British Pharmaceutical Conference** (BPC) was held in Bath.
- 1868 The **Pharmacy Act** set up a register of people qualified to sell, dispense and compound poisons. The Pharmaceutical Society would examine and register pharmacists, and prosecute them in cases relating to poisons. Regulations in other areas was left to the Society.
- 1879 Isabella Clarke and Rose Minshull, already Pharmaceutical Chemists, were elected Society members, the **first women** to be accepted.
- 1898 The **Pharmacy Acts Amendment Act**. Apprentices became 'student associates', and Chemists & Druggists became full members of the Society with the same rights as Pharmaceutical Chemists, except from exemption from jury service.
- 1901 **Supplementary charter** granted. It increased the limit on the Society's properties and rents.
- 1908 The **Poisons and Pharmacy Act**. The Society gained further powers relating to education and training. Corporate bodies could only use the term Chemist & Druggist if the business' qualified pharmacy superintendent was on the board of directors. The title of Pharmacist was extended to all registered persons.
- 1918 Margaret Buchanan became the **first female member of Council**.
- 1924 The University of London's **Bachelor of Pharmacy degree** was the first to be approved by the Pharmaceutical Society.
- 1920 Formation of the **Retail Pharmacists Union** (now the National Pharmaceutical Association), after the Jenkins case proved that the Society could not act as a trade union, and regulate hours, wages, prices or conditions of employment. Shortly afterwards the **Guild of Public Pharmacists** (now the Guild of Hospital Pharmacists) was founded.
- 1922 Formation of the Society's regional **branches**.
- 1926 The Society's **pharmacological laboratories**, established to research and standardise remedies, were opened by Neville Chamberlain, then Minister for Health.
- 1933 The **Pharmacy and Poisons Act**. Privy Council became pharmacy's central authority and 3 Privy Council nominees were to serve on the Society's Council. Membership, with an annual fee, became compulsory for all registered Pharmaceutical Chemists, and Chemists & Druggists. Statutory Committee was established as a disciplinary body, and the inspectorate was set up. Registration of premises was proposed, and was first published in 1936.
- 1937 **King George VI** became the Society's patron.
- 1941 Statement upon Matters of Professional Conduct, the first simple **code of ethics**, was published. The idea had first been proposed in 1866.
- 1947 Mrs Jean Irvine was elected as the Society's **first female president**.
- 1948 The Society's North British branch became its Scottish department.
- 1953 **Supplementary charter** granted. Its primary focus was to widen the Society's objectives to cover all pharmacists, and to bring more of its actions under the control of its own Byelaws.
- 1976 Foundation of the Society's Welsh Executive.
- 1988 The Queen agreed that the title "**Royal**" should be granted to the Pharmaceutical Society.
- 2004 **Supplementary Charter** granted.

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