

The Buildings and Treasures of the Society of Apothecaries

Anniversary Address 1988

by

JAMES F. FISHER

Apothecaries Hall in Blackfriars Lane was the only livery hall in the City to escape substantial damage in the Second World War. Built on the site of the former religious house at Blackfriars, it remains essentially as it was when rebuilt after the Great Fire. The exterior appearance and the sash windows are the result of a major face-lift in the 1780s. The Society gave up its pharmaceutical and manufacturing activities in 1922, but remains a medical licensing body in addition to being fifty-eighth in rank among the City livery companies. The warehouses and former staff residential quarters have been converted into high-class accommodation allowing these historic buildings to be maintained in a smart condition. The Master gives a non-technical account of the buildings and their major contents set against the history and development of the Society.

As Master of this Society I would like to welcome members of the Ancient Monuments Society to our Hall and tell you something of the heritage of which, until August of this year, I am the custodian. I make no claim to be a historian, merely that as Master it behoves me to have learnt something of the place. I make no apology for drawing very heavily on a paper written by Mr Roger White for the Greater London Council and on the work of one of my predecessors, Dr Will Copeman, whose history of the Society can be bought at our office.

First let us fix where we are. As you sit you are facing south towards the river (Fig. 1). To your right is the Fleet River, the natural western boundary of the City, even though it is now in a culvert under New Bridge Street. So we are in the south-western corner of the City, just as the Tower marks the south-eastern corner. Black Friars Lane outside used to be known as Water Lane, running down to the bank of the Thames, remembering that in medieval times the river was not embanked as we know it now. Rather the river bank was shored up with timber so as to present some sort of quay or 'hithe' for long distances, interspersed with small docks where a ship could be pulled in. As the tide rose and fell it would leave a muddy foreshore extending up to about where the Mermaid Theatre stands today in Puddle Dock. This corner of the City was dominated by the King's tower of Baynard Castle, now

Dr J. F. Fisher was Master of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, 1987-8. This Anniversary Address was read before the Ancient Monuments Society in Apothecaries Hall after the Annual General Meeting on Monday 13 June 1988. Dr Fisher's Address is printed as delivered on that occasion.

marked by a pub of that name and giving its name to a Ward of the City. Near here, conveniently near the river, the King kept his stores or Wardrobe. Hence the dedication of our local church, Saint Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe. Finally, to the north lies Ludgate, the main western gate of both the Roman and medieval city. Our relation to the city wall as we sit here is more complex. The Roman wall ran straight south from Ludgate which stood halfway up Ludgate Hill as we now know it. It thus ran to the left of us as we sit, roughly following the line of Church Entry.

This was the situation until 1275 when the Dominicans bought the whole Baynards Castle site from the King, who formally made it over to the Order in 1279. Saint Dominic had founded his order of Friars Preachers (known from the colour of their habit as the Blackfriars) in 1216. This was the first religious order in the medieval church to abandon the centrality of manual work and devote itself primarily to study and preaching. These energetic and learned men first reached London in 1224 when they were given a site in Shoe Lane outside the City wall just to the north of the present Fleet Street. Fifty years later, such was their wealth and power, that they were able not only to buy this Royal fortress that had so long dominated the busy wharves and cranes on the waterfront, but also to get permission to pull down the adjacent section of the Roman city wall and have the City build a new wall considerably nearer the Fleet River. They thus created one of the largest estates within the city and changed its walled line for the only time. The wall as rebuilt by the City, aided by the King, now stood further west, or to the right of you as you sit. Blackfriars was only one of the sizeable precincts within the medieval city created by religious houses and noblemen, which swallowed up the available space in gardens and orchards and large churches and forced men to build houses outside the walls so that the best-known boundary mark of the city, Temple Bar, is nearly half a mile west of the site of Lud Gate.

In addition to their preoccupation with preaching and academic learning the Blackfriars were a very political order and were used for their special skills by kings and emperors as well as by the Inquisition. They were also involved in printing from the earliest days and it is significant that The King's Printing House—later Printing House Square, for so many years the home of *The Times*—lay just behind me.

Now the Apothecaries come on the scene. We trace our origins to the Pepperers Guild. It is recorded that the Guild was fined eighteen marks in 1180 for operating without Royal Licence, so they must have been founded some time before 1180. Apothecary wardens are first mentioned in 1328. We read that, in 1345, twenty-two Pepperers joined to form the Fraternity of St Anthony, and of these at least two were apothecaries. This was probably a tax dodge in the hope that Edward III would not raise forced loans from a religious guild, as he did from the trade guilds, to support his wars against France and Scotland. Anyway, thirty years later the Guild became the Grocers' Company and the apothecaries remained a section of it. The name Grocer was derived from the fact that they dealt with imports *en gros*, or in unbroken bulk, and had charge of one of the standard weighing beams on the quayside, the Great Beam or King's Beam. Some Pepperers and Apothecaries however had charge of the Small Beam of the City.

The Apothecaries eventually became discontented at being under the domination



Fig. 2

Grant of arms of 1617 bearing the signature of William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms and author of *Britannia*

of the Grocers, whom they regarded as inferior in knowledge and skill, even though they were second only to the Mercers in the City. They made determined efforts to gain their independence. Eventually in 1617 King James VI of Scotland, who had become James I of England in 1603 and whose portrait you see behind me, granted them a Charter. In the King's words 'Grocers are but merchants, the business of an Apothecary is a Mistery, wherefore I think it fitting that they be a Corporation of themselves'.

The speed at which the Society strove after respectability is shown by their Grant of Arms, dated six days after the Charter had been sealed. The Arms show Apollo

the god of Healing overcoming the Dragon of Disease. The Unicorn supporters were King James' 'special beasts' and so a mark of royal favour. But the Latin *unicornis* becomes the Greek *monoceros* or (seeing that the horn was borne on the nose and not the forehead) 'rhinoceros' and so this ugly animal with its magical horn becomes our crest, so different from the elegant supporters on either side of it. The motto *Opiferque per orbem dicor* is a quotation from Ovid's first book of *Metamorphoses* and follows an episode where Apollo had slain a python. It translates as 'I am spoken of all over the world as one who brings help'.

You can see the original grant of arms on the staircase, easy to read and beautifully preserving its original colours (Fig. 2). To historians like yourselves the signature of William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms, must be a special bonus. This learned man became Headmaster of Westminster School while still young and went on to compile his massive topographical work *Britannia* by which he is best known, becoming Clarenceux King of Arms in 1597.

When I stood on the stairs last week looking at Camden's signature my mind was taken back over fifty years to an episode during one of the holidays from my prep school. You may think it wholly irrelevant to this subject, especially as of all of us in this Hall I am the least likely to be described as a historian. I was baffled at a Monday lunch when my host, a very learned priest, presiding over the remnants left over from Sunday dinner, asked (indicating two objects on the dish in front of him) if I favoured Percy or Camden. I thought that like most adults he was probably potty, but seeing I was at a loss he explained that it was an allusion to Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* and Camden's *Remains concerning Britain*. Immediately I felt I had been treated as an adult and had been let in on the private-joke language of the family. How often do we in the professions with our jargon, and in learned societies with your profundity, make an unnecessary gulf between our lay audience and ourselves? If we explain our jargon jokes to children of all ages they grow up and the gulf yawns less widely. Years later, when I was a Boy Scout Commissioner about to address a very large audience, another wise old priest said to me 'talk to the Cubs and hope the parents understand'.

Although it was the King's Physician, Sir Theodore de Mayerne, who impressed on the King the desirability of giving the Apothecaries their Charter, there is no doubt that it was Gideon de Laune, apothecary to Anne of Denmark, the Queen, who was the driving force. We always regard de Laune, a wealthy Huguenot, the inventor of de Laune's Pill, as our true founder. De Laune, like Beecham 300 years later, used a fortune based upon this nation's unending concern with its bowels to achieve a lasting fame. You can see his bust behind me, done posthumously by Nicholas Young in 1676 in lieu of rent he owed the Society (Fig. 3).

When the Apothecaries left the Grocers' Company they were without a hall of their own—just as are many city companies today. They had no accumulated funds as their minimum expenditure exceeded their income, and the Grocers had retained all the capital. They were in no position to build a hall worthy of the status to which they aspired. Had not the Court of Aldermen 'In the fifth year of the reign of King Charles the First' (as I regularly recite on the promotion of yeomen) granted the Society the right to clothe those who had made sufficient progress in the 'art and mystery'



Fig. 3

The south end of the Great Hall with its seventeenth-century woodwork and bust of the Founder, Gideon de Laune

with a special clothing? The King could give a charter to found a guild, but only the City could allow members of that Guild to wear a Livery. Our picture of Charles I is a copy by Snelling of the Van Dyck in Windsor Castle—but even this copy is venerable in its own right as it was given to the Society in 1676 by a Mr Jones in lieu of his Livery and Steward's fines. However by 1631 they were out of debt and this fashionable site in the west end of the City came up for sale. I compare this initiative with that of the infant College of General Practitioners who, on leaving their temporary quarters in this Hall with no money, no history but vast enthusiasm, bought the house of Pierpoint Morgan, the American banker, in Princes Gate. We have the original title deeds here and it is clear that Gideon de Laune, who had some property of his own nearby, was able to be of considerable assistance; you will actually be able to see his signature on the deeds displayed on the staircase as you go down.

For £1,800 they got Cobham House, until 1603 the town house of Lord Cobham, from Anne Lady Howard of Effingham, together with some surrounding land which included the Blackfriars Theatre in Playhouse Yard—the street just behind me. Shakespeare had been a shareholder of it only thirty years before and several of his plays had had their first nights there. Indeed one of the only three existing signatures of the Bard relates to a house he bought for his daughter on the eastern boundary of the monastic site. The house was the Monastery's eastern gatehouse in St Andrews Hill, around where the Cockpit pub now stands on the corner of Ireland Yard and which you will pass on your way back to St Andrew's.

The buildings they had acquired were arranged, then as now, around a courtyard. On the east side of this, running north-south, was a large apartment that had been the Guest house of the monastery; on the north a structure consisting of the old porter's lodge of the priory and a gallery forming part of the covered way built over the Fleet in 1522 by Henry VIII, to connect Bridewell Palace with the Parliament chamber he had created out of the monastery's upper Frater. Bridewell Palace, like St Bride's church from whose parish its name was derived, lay outside the City wall on the west bank of the Fleet. This bridge had been originally erected to allow the King and his guest, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, free access to one another. It was across this also that the King, Catherine of Aragon, and Cardinals Wolsey and Campeggio crossed for the hearing of the Queen's trial in the Hall in Blackfriars. On the south, the Apothecaries got two houses, one of which had been a tavern; on the west, a wall separated the courtyard from Black Friars Lane. Out of these pre-existing components the Society in 1633-4 created the familiar elements of Hall, Court Room and Gallery, all more or less in their present positions. The gallery seems to have been raised up over some form of colonnade, while the space below the Court Room was partitioned off into rooms for the use of the Clerk. Gradually, furnishings and ornaments for the new Hall were contributed or purchased, and by 1666 the Society's inventory shows that they owned a considerable quantity of ornamental gold- and silver-ware in addition to portraits and much handsome furniture.

It was early in the morning of Sunday, 2 September 1666, that the Great Fire of London broke out in Pudding Lane, although it did not reach Blackfriars until Tuesday. It proved impossible, however, to preserve many of the Society's possessions, although luckily the Charter and records were salvaged from the burning hall. The



Fig. 4
The Great Hall from the Gallery

portrait of Gideon de Laune, who had been Master in 1628-9 and again in 1637-8 (even though initially he had, as a foreigner, been ineligible for the post) was thought to have been lost. Attributed to Cornelius Janssen it had been presented to the Society in 1642; it found its way back more than a century later and was hung in the Court Room, where it still presides, showing evidences of slight charring. The only reference to this disaster in the Court Minutes, is to 'the recent conflagration'.

A survey of the area devastated by the Fire, taken in December 1666, shows the site, bounded on the north by Shoemakers Row (i.e., the western part of Carter Lane) and on the east by Church Entry. The north-east corner of the site was then occupied by the church of St Ann Blackfriars, which was not rebuilt after the fire although the churchyard remains to this day and has given us no end of complications with the Consistory Court over our recent rebuilding. Sir Christopher Wren's ideal scheme for rebuilding the City would have drastically rationalized the tangle of narrow



Fig. 5

The Court of Assistants assembled in the Great Room 1986. The Master's Chair is made of wood from one of the original cedars in the Physic Garden. The portrait of James I hangs behind the Master

lanes and alleys, squaring them up into neat grids. Indeed, a new city wall would have run due south from St Martin's Church on the site of the Lud Gate and straight across the Apothecaries' site, with the area between the wall and the River Fleet taken over by a new wool market. In the event, rebuilding here, as elsewhere in the City, took place with only minor adjustments to the pre-Fire boundaries and frontages.

Although the Fire had almost completely destroyed the buildings formerly on the site, the Apothecaries showed a conservatism entirely characteristic of the City livery companies not only in going for the design of their new Hall to a local craftsman-architect rather than to more nationally prominent figures such as Christopher Wren or Hugh May, but also in deciding to recreate, on what was virtually a *tabula rasa*, the layout of those earlier buildings.

In 1669 subscriptions had been collected for rebuilding the Hall. They finally engaged Thomas Lock, a carpenter who was already working on the rebuilding of Fishmongers Hall and had experience of working under Wren on three of the city

churches. He was paid £40 for his services at Apothecaries Hall. Large quantities of bricks had been laid in during the previous year and work started immediately. In September men were being paid to clear the ground and cart away rubbish. All that can now be seen on our property of the magnificent monastic complex is the well in the middle of the courtyard (it still had water in it this century) and the pile of mixed ecclesiastical stonework you can see under the lead tank on the south side of the courtyard. A year later the building was sufficiently complete for the glaziers to move in. The heraldic glass on the staircase, formerly lit by a light well, but now artificially, dates from this period.

Work on fitting up the interior proceeded more slowly; in 1673 there were accounts for panelling the Hall and Court room (Figs 4 and 5). Because the society has never been rich enough to indulge in any fancy restorations or so-called improvements the panelling you see now is basically as it was in 1673. A Mr Phillips—probably Henry Phillips, the King's Master Carver—supplied the splendidly carved Royal and Company arms which still hang at each end of the Hall today. It was not until 1682 that the gallery was panelled in Spanish oak and fitted out with bookshelves for use as a library.

The Apothecaries were scarcely re-established when in 1685 James II came to the throne with political powers undreamed of by his immediate predecessors. In order to establish his influence firmly in the City he revoked the Charters of all the companies, including the Apothecaries'. Thus they became unwillingly political machines of the Court until, as a result of the revolution three years later, William and Mary succeeded James, and all the original charters and privileges were restored. You can see contemporary portraits of the king and queen above the Court Room door, and, on the stairs, a picture presented by Reuben Melmoth, Master in 1749, of the entry of William of Orange into Exeter in 1689 after his landing at Torbay in November 1688.

The land to the east of the hall has had a chequered history. Originally the society had a neat little garden on the site of the cloisters, separated from the hall by a little terrace and a low wall. This was just for ornament and pleasure as it was not big enough for the serious culture of herbs. Nor was it necessarily as pleasing as the plan, drawn in the early eighteenth century, at first suggests. The plan shows 'the Back Yard wherein the Stills belonging to ye Elaboratory Stand'. I like the word elaboratory; while the shorter, and oddly enough older, word laboratory suggests 'labor', mere work, the archaic elaboratory gives the sense of transmuting raw materials into a developed product. In January 1672 the Court of Assistants had resolved to set up a laboratory in order to vindicate the Society's reputation against the slander of being 'pseudo chemists' and to assure the College of Physicians of a supply of skilfully prepared medicines. The business of producing and retailing drugs was carried out as a joint stock venture, under the name of 'The Proprietors of the Laboratory Stock'. The shop was slotted into the colonnade beneath the gallery 'unto the first pillar & further if there bee occasion'—and there it remained until 1922, acquiring in the eighteenth century the handsome bow-fronted shop front you can see on your right as you leave the courtyard.

The laboratory itself was just below this Hall, the rest of the ground floor being

used for the kitchen and the clerk's rooms. Part of the laboratory equipment was a sulphur furnace. As early as 1677 tenants of the nearby houses had been complaining of the fumes from it. Though the 'chemical' work was done in Blackfriars the Society bought in its raw materials on the open market; it is significant that the Master had (and still has) to be elected in August to be in post as the harvest was gathered and to be in charge until the season's produce had been made up into tinctures and galenicals and sold. In two months I shall have to give an account of my stewardship and make way for a new master and a new harvest. Though we are no longer in the drug business we are still, like the universities, tied to the seasons.

In 1673—what an incredibly active decade this was—four acres of riverside land at Chelsea were rented from Lord Cheyne. I gather they were originally looking for a bit of river frontage on which to build a boat-house for the Society's state barge and came upon this site upon which, second only to Oxford, they then decided to establish a Physic Garden. While Oxford, following the pioneering garden established by the medical school at Padua, provided essentially a reference collection, the Chelsea Garden also looked to the commercial development and production of herbal remedies. Within three years a wall had been built round the garden providing security and a very desirable microclimate. Beside the river gate they planted the first four Cedars of Lebanon in England, and when these died of old age some of the wood from them was used to make the Master's chair behind me. The river gate, rebuilt in 1871 when the river was embanked, remains with our coat of arms above it, even though we no longer own the garden and the gate now opens on to the Embankment rather than on to the river itself. If you want to visualize the area as it was, there is a scene in the film 'A Man for All Seasons' showing Henry VIII coming ashore from his barge across the muddy river bank to visit Sir Thomas More at his riverside house in Chelsea.

William Gape, who was Master 1672-3, had his own Herb Garden in Westminster and transferred many of his plants to form the basis of the Chelsea operation. The first of a line of distinguished gardeners was appointed, but forty years later the project was virtually bankrupt. However the estate had passed into the possession of Sir Hans Sloane who let the Society have the garden at a nominal rent provided it produced for the Royal Society fifty plants a year, grown in the garden, every year until 2000 were achieved. The challenge was accepted. Sir Hans Sloane suggested Miller as director and it was he who, after a visit by Linnaeus, laid out the garden on the Linnaean system, and it is still laid out with regard to systematic botany rather than visual effect (Fig. 6).

At the request of the Society Miller in 1732 sent a gift of cotton seeds to the Governor of King George's new Colony for poor debtors called Georgia, thinking they might acclimatize well and afford their struggling economy some assistance. The political consequences of the cotton trade, the import of negro slaves and eventually the American Civil War can never have then been imagined—and the introduction of cotton underwear from the Lancashire mills was probably the greatest advance ever made in the personal hygiene of the working classes.

The shrub *Forsythia* was named after Miller's deputy Forsyth, and a later director William Curtis introduced *mignonette* and *heliotrope* into the country. Buddle



Fig. 6
The Apothecaries Hall frontage in Black Friars Lane



Fig. 7
The Apothecaries Hall. Entrance to Courtyard



Fig. 8

The Courtyard in 1814 showing the open Colonnade with bulk deliveries of raw materials and manufactured goods awaiting distribution



Fig. 9

The Courtyard during World War II, showing minimal damage. The doorway of 1929 encloses the former Colonnade

of the Buddleia had been an apprentice in the 1780s. However, by the end of the nineteenth century the Society was more concerned with medicine and surgery than with botany, and the Embankment had ruined the drainage and the microclimate of the garden. The Society had also found that the maintenance costs had become unacceptable. So we gave up control of the garden, though we are still represented on its management. Duncan Donald, its present director, is a brilliant young man. Next week he will be with us on a herborizing expedition up the river by boat, just as the Society's apprentices were taken upstream in the seventeenth century to learn about and gather medicinal plants.

The Courtyard as you now see it is essentially the result of a major refurbishment in the late eighteenth century, commemorated by the oval plaque which you can see over the archway as you go out (Figs 7 and 8). To put this 1782 development into perspective it is useful to remember that from Roman times there was only one bridge over the Thames—London Bridge—the prime reason for the site of the city. It was not until 1750 that Westminster got a bridge, and ten more years before the City at long last got its second bridge—the New Bridge here at Blackfriars, named at the time in honour of William Pitt the Elder. The approach to this much needed structure which stood for the next hundred years was made by roofing over the Fleet—hence New Bridge Street. If you lean over the Embankment under Blackfriars Bridge you can see where the Fleet still flows into the Thames, with great iron doors to stop the high tide flooding up into the City.

Over the archway and to the right of it were 'The Houses' (Fig. 9). The Bedel had the house next the archway, and the door in the passage from which he controlled access to the courtyard (Fig. 10) now leads up to our new kitchens. The other houses were used by the Clerk, the Chemical Operator and other members of the staff. The rest of the courtyard was occupied by 'The Warehouses' accommodating not just the goods of 'The Laboratory Stock', but also those of the new joint stock venture 'The Navy Stock'. The ships that sailed for Australia 200 years ago had all their drugs supplied from the stocks of the Society, which had the monopoly of supplying the East India Company and also the Navy from 1702 to 1805 (Figs 11, 12 and 13). At this same time the restrained but elegant frontage on Black Friars Lane was completed; it is not an Adam façade, but in June 1785 when we were considering stuccoing the street front we summoned 'a person from Messrs Adam' to give an estimate. It was at this time that the sash windows were put in this Hall and all round the Courtyard and this Hall was given its new ceiling—just over a hundred years after the panelling. The fine central chandelier had been presented fifty years before together with an endowment for candles 'for ever' by Sir Benjamin Rawling whose portrait you can see halfway down the Hall on your left. The other two candelabra are French and were found in a Chelsea junk shop and presented to us in the 1930s. We still have the receipt for £30.

This was the Indian Summer of our life as manufacturers of drugs. The Society became more and more medical and less pharmaceutical. In 1815 the Apothecaries Act gave the society the oversight of medical practice throughout England and Wales, a burden which was too much financially and organizationally for the Society and which was lifted from our shoulders by the establishment of the General Medical

Council in 1858. Even before that some of our traditional pharmacist members, not liking the way their craft was being subjugated in the Society to medical interests, linked up with a group of chemists and druggists in 1841 and formed the Pharmaceutical Society which last month became the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. We still have some pharmacists in our Livery, and in 1982 Douglas Whittet, Chief Pharmacist to the Department of Health and Social Security, became our first non-medical Master for over 200 years. His successor, Brian Wills, is now a valued member of our Court.

The glass in this Hall is interesting but not distinguished. Only one coat of arms is of any age—a sixteenth-century fragment from a redundant church at Ayot St Lawrence showing the coat of arms of the Bristow family; it was brought here comparatively recently to commemorate the Mastership of Uriah Bristow 1803-4. The others are the arms of Masters and Honorary Freemen. One can see the Arms of Lord Nuffield, a great benefactor of Medicine who was an Honorary Freeman, and also of Sir Charles Dodds, the great biochemist whose arms incorporate the

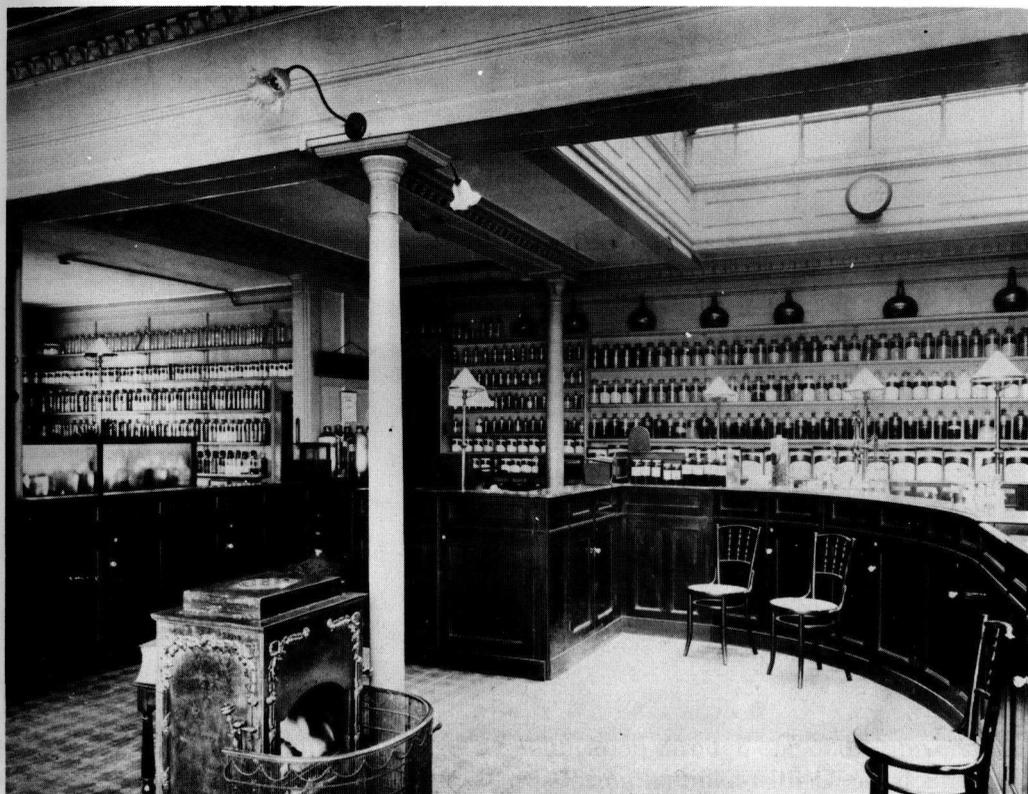


Fig. 10
The Pharmacy of Apothecaries Hall in 1911

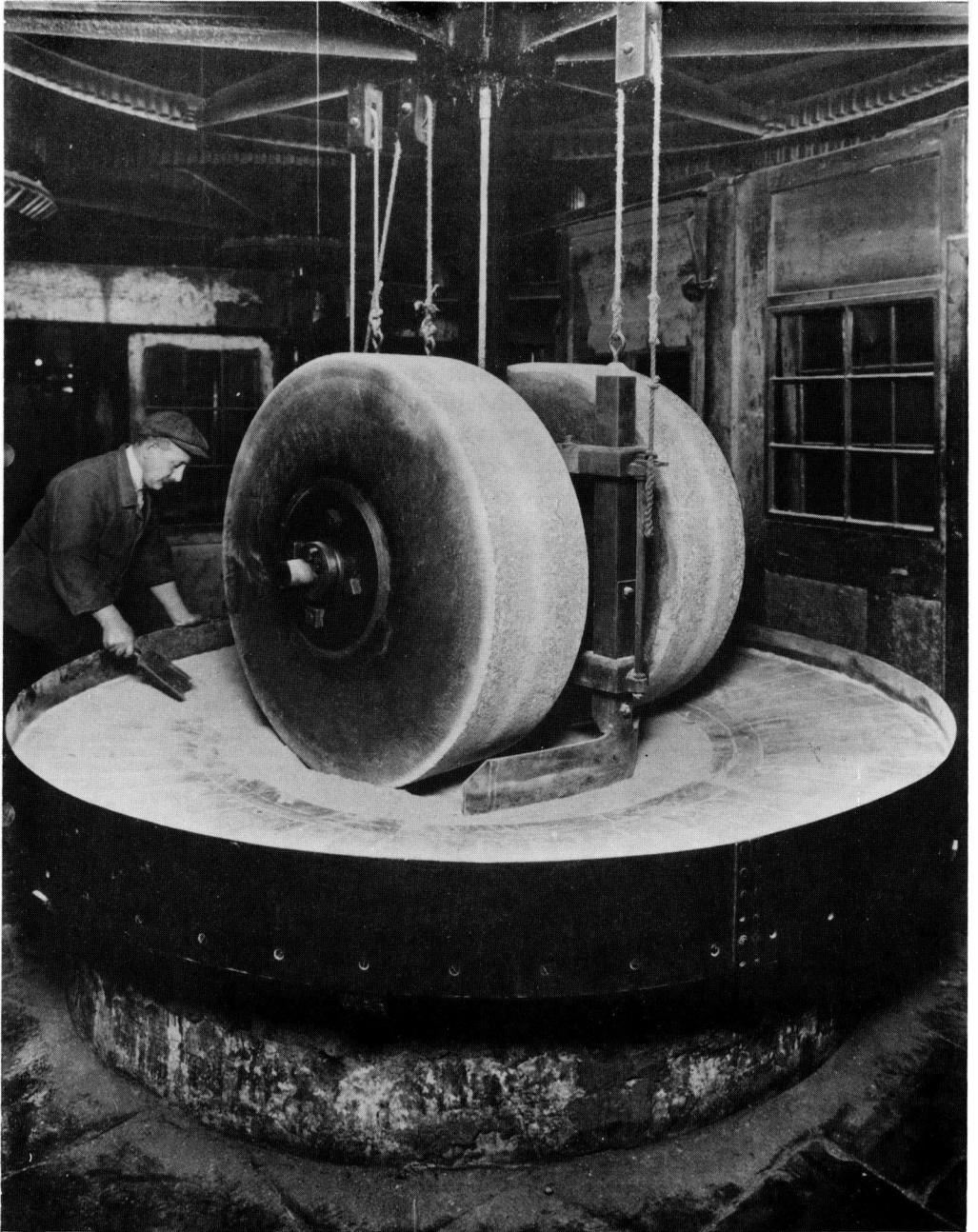


Fig. 11

The mill at Apothecaries Hall, c.1911, showing the scale of the powder-grinding machinery



Fig. 12

The Factory of Apothecaries Hall, *c.* 1911. Note the boilers and stills and the operator rubbing material by hand through a sieve. But for the electric light this scene could have been seen at any time in the nineteenth century

formula of Stilboestrol—the only chemical formula I know to be represented in a coat of arms. As you look round after this lecture you may see some names you may recognize.

By the beginning of this century the Society, though very much alive, had become a club for London consultants, a typical city Livery Company—even though it was actively and profitably continuing its work as an examining and licensing body through which people unable or unwilling to get a qualification through one of the universities could get on to the Medical Register. It was losing its links with General Practice and the development of the pharmaceutical industry had overtaken its technology. Even as early as 1827 some of the buildings had become surplus to the Society's true needs and were sublet to printers and others. In 1911 the Society advertised other



Fig. 13

The Physic Garden showing cultivation in narrow plots for the systematic cultivation of the Garden's collection. The tree in the picture is a specimen of *Koelreuteria paniculata* or the Golden Rain tree. Of Himalayan origin this tree is the largest specimen of its kind in Britain, and is believed to have been planted by Robert Fortune. It is traditionally held to have inspired the 'Willow pattern' design

surplus accommodation, comprising: the retail Drug Dispensary and premises (basement and three upper floors) with a fifty-foot frontage to Water Lane; a warehouse fronting Water Lane, of basement and three floors, with two dwelling houses; and six distinct buildings of varying heights, now used as a Wholesale Drug Dispensary, with a frontage of 220 feet to Playhouse Yard and Church Entry.

These surplus buildings, the advertisement in the City Press averred, were of no historical or architectural importance 'and it does not matter much whether they are retained by the prospective lessees, modified, or pulled down altogether'. Taken at its face value it appeared that as the Society was going out of the drug trade it was parting with all its buildings except the Staircase and this suite of Hall, Court

Room and Parlour—the original 1671 block. This *carte blanche* invitation to destroy the fabric of this courtyard may not have been as Philistine as it sounds; it may only have been referring to Lot 3—the disorderly group of buildings on the site of the old monastic cloister to the east of this building—but it shows the state into which the Society had got a mere seventy-seven years ago. In the long term Lot 2 was refitted at a cost of £1,250,000 last year; the plaque over the lead cistern in the courtyard commemorates the visit of the Lord Mayor last Christmas to celebrate the completion of our modernization. Lot 3 was torn down in 1927 and made way for the wholly undistinguished Nestor House, yielding a ground rent of £750 p.a. for ninety-nine years. If ever there was a building without historical or architectural importance this is it—even though it does stand on the site of the Blackfriars' cloister and the line of the Roman city wall. We got a lump sum of £8,000 for this lease; we could buy it back today for £3,500,000 or wait till it falls in to us in 2026. Persons charged with the care of our ancient monuments—and here I am not just delivering a historical paper but speaking directly to you—need not only to have compassion, sensitivity, historical perspective and architectural expertise, but common sense and hard-headed business advisers.

Anyway we did not waste the £8,000. In 1929 we had decided to build a lavatory for the use of the Court halfway up the stairs. This work revealed that the woodwork was in a dreadful state as the result of worm, and the structure was laced together with a frame of Dorman Long steel girders, which may have helped us considerably in the 1939 war from which, alone among City companies, we emerged without damage. They also filled in the last bay of the open Colonnade with a carved classical doorcase and so created the entrance hall, now handsomely panelled and providing display cases for part of our collection of drug jars and also some examples of the work of the Turners' Company who use our Hall for their meetings. At the same time the staircase was rebuilt and enlarged, and a more spacious landing formed on the first floor by taking in the east end of the Gallery. This is why the pediment of the library bookcases appears out of centre.

So fifty years ago our Hall at last got a worthy entrance and with the addition of a lick of paint three weeks ago this is Apothecaries Hall as you see it today and where the Ancient Monuments Society are most welcome guests. Our main rooms are open, so before you leave you are welcome to look at them, although with the numbers here this afternoon a guided tour pointing out individual items would not be practicable.