



Royal  
Pharmaceutical  
Society  
of Great Britain

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

## The History of the Museum

The Society's museum was created in 1842, a year after the Society. It was intended as a reference collection for the students of the newly formed School of Pharmacy. Jacob Bell, the Society's founder, wrote in the first edition of *The Pharmaceutical Journal* that the School should be equipped with a laboratory, a library and a "complete museum of materia medica comprising specimens of good and bad drugs."

Bell described the museum soon after it was set up:

*The museum is a front room on the ground floor, 26 feet by 20, containing not a vestige of furniture. The bare boards are well-scoured, the ceiling and walls are in a perfect state of repair, but there is not even a chair or table to invite the student to sit down and contemplate what alterations are likely to take place in the apartment within the next six months. On the floor at one corner is a small heap of brown paper parcels, containing a few donations from two or three members, and on the mantel-shelf are about a dozen glasses and bottles, in which are sundry crystals, roots and other substances. These objects form the nucleus of the MUSEUM OF MATERIA MEDICA OF THE PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN.*

Theophilus Redwood (1808 –1892) was the first museum curator. He was also the first librarian, the professor of pharmacy at the Society's School, and the sub-editor of *The Pharmaceutical Journal*. Along with a museum committee, Redwood encouraged donations from Council members, officers, Society members and pharmaceutical businesses to build up a collection.



Jacob Bell around 1841

By 1863, the museum had expanded to occupy three rooms of the Society's headquarters. According to *The Pharmaceutical Journal* in 1858, "many of the early supporters of the Society vied with each other in presenting the most rare and curious specimens, as well as others varying in quality to make the collections as complete as possible." The museum was principally used as a source of lecture specimens by Professors Redwood and Bentley, and increasingly as a collection of examples that could be used as a comparison with others to assess their purity. However, in the early days, it did not see regular use by students:

*The approach of these [Society's] examinations could always be predicted from the group of eager students gathered around the drawers. But at other times, and except for the occasional visit of one or two of Dr Pereira's class bent on verifying some point in his morning's lecture, the Museum was not much frequented by us. R.W. Giles, Session of 1847-48*

Unsurprisingly, in view of his many roles, Redwood admitted that he neglected the museum. After his retirement in 1867, the Society agreed to a full-time curator post, at an annual salary of £150. Between 1867 and 1872, there were three museum curators.

The appointment of Edward Morrell Holmes in 1872 was a significant turning point in the museum's history. Holmes (1843 – 1930) was curator for 50 years until his retirement in 1922. He built up

