

George Claridge Druce

My Lord Mayor, Professor Evans, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I should like to thank the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board for inviting me here today and allowing me to say a few words on behalf of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, in tribute to my fellow pharmacist, George Claridge Druce. I will deal with his life as a pharmacist, rather than his parallel careers as a local politician and an eminent botanist.

We have heard from Professor Evans that Druce was born at Pottersbury, Northamptonshire on 23rd May 1850. Robert has also told us about Druce's parentage and early education. In my own research, I have found two different accounts of this. In Druce's obituary in the Biographical Memoirs of the Royal Society, it states, "The early death of his father and the incompetence of trustees meant straitened circumstances for his widowed mother, to whose unselfish devotion Druce pays tribute. The family moved to Yardley Gobion in 1855, where his education began under his guardian". The website about Oxford City Mayors is more forthright in its comment; "George Claridge Druce was born at Pottersbury Northamptonshire on 23rd May 1850, the illegitimate son of Jane Druce. His father is unknown, but his surname is likely to have been Claridge. When he was four years old, his mother took a position in Yardley Gobion, where two ministers at the independent chapel helped the boy in his education."

Druce's own version of this, writing in the Chemist & Druggist magazine of 25th January 1902, is: "My early days were spent in a quiet country village where, brought up by an indulgent mother and under private tuition, I acquired an intense love of natural science. I devoured with eagerness such scientific books as I could lay my hands on, practising such chemical experiments as lay within the compass of my attainments. (an indulgent mother indeed!) This led to selection of the business of chemist and druggist as the one for me to adopt."

In order to qualify as a pharmacist today, it is necessary to take a four-year Master's Degree course, followed by one year pre-registration training and the registration examination of the General Pharmaceutical Council. In the 19th century, it was a four year apprenticeship leading up to the Minor and Major examinations of Pharmaceutical Society, usually without formal tuition.

Thus it was that in June 1865, Druce commenced his apprenticeship with Philadelphus Jeyes & Co, Northampton, at a premium of £100, paid for by his aunt. The firm was a well known manufacturing, wholesale and retail pharmacy. John Jeyes, the brother of Philadelphus, became famous as the inventor and manufacturer of Jeyes Fluid. There is still a Jeyes Pharmacy near Northampton and I am delighted that David Jeyes, great-grandson of Philadelphus, and his wife Georgina are with us here today.

Druce's first year was spent in the laboratory, manufacturing liquid medicines by the gallon and preparing large quantities of powders, which were the

forerunners of tablets. The good people of Northampton must have been very concerned about the state of their gastro-intestinal systems, because Druce mentions regularly making 6 gallons of Syrup of Red Poppies, which would have been for diarrhoea, and preparing Senna Powders by the gross, for the treatment of constipation. The good people of the Belfast suburb of Knock, where I did my apprenticeship a century later, had similar concerns, because I spent most Saturday afternoons making a half-gallon bottle of Mist Cret Aromat cum Opii, for diarrhoea, and we sold lots of Senna tablets.

Druce was very interested in manufacturing and set himself the daunting task of making everything in the London Pharmacopoeia, as well as what he was required to make for the business, but after a year, he moved to the retail department as Senior Assistant.

Without attending any formal lectures, he passed the Minor Examination of the Pharmaceutical Society with honours in 1871, winning a prize of books to help in his further studies. This allowed him to register as a Chemist & Druggist, and gain further promotion in the firm. In 1874, he passed the Major Examination, again with honours, and registered as a Pharmaceutical Chemist, and this led to his appointment as manager with Jeyes & Co.

However, his ambition was to have his own pharmacy, and by 1879, he had saved enough money to purchase the pharmacy of Burbidge and Upjohn, at 118 High Street, Oxford, a business said to have sunk to its lowest ebb. Here Druce built up a successful business, serving both town and gown, and by 1901, he had dispensed 100,000 prescriptions. His advertisements stated "English and foreign prescriptions dispensed with accuracy and despatch and forwarded to all parts of Great Britain post free." Was this Britain's first mail-order pharmacy? His manufacturing activities continued, and he made "Smoko" - an antiseptic tooth powder for smokers, according to the advertisement "found on toilet tables wherever Englishmen and Americans go". It sold at 1/6d per ounce, which was quite expensive for the time. The business also had a flourishing photographic department. However, it is still a bit of a mystery how he managed to become such a rich man in a relatively short space of time.

Druce had little interest in the politics of pharmacy but was very involved in its scientific and educational aspects. For example, he never became a Member of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society, but he served as member of its Board of Examiners for 10 years from 1881.

He was very involved in the British Pharmaceutical Conference, which at that time was a separate organisation from the Pharmaceutical Society, and dealt with the scientific, rather than the business aspects of pharmacy. Druce hosted the Conference in Oxford in 1894, and was its President in 1901 in Dublin and 1902 in Dundee, delivering a lengthy presidential address on each occasion. He

continued to attend the Conference for many years, and last spoke at it in 1930, when he was 80 years old!

According to the Chemist and Druggist magazine, in 1906, Druce sold his pharmacy to Mr Bellamy. I found this interesting, because when I first worked for Oxfordshire Health Authority in the 1970s, there was a Mr Bellamy, who owned several pharmacies in Oxford, and I think he may have been the grandson of the Mr Bellamy who bought Druce's pharmacy.

Following the sale of his pharmacy, as well as his work in the University here, about which we will hear more from Serena Marner, Druce travelled extensively in the UK and abroad on botanical expeditions and published lengthy accounts in the Chemist & Druggist magazine and the Pharmaceutical Journal. Although there is no record of his continuing to practise pharmacy, he remained on the Register of Pharmaceutical Chemists until his death in 1932, and in his will, he left £100 to the Benevolent Fund of the Pharmaceutical Society, not quite as generous as his bequest to the University of Oxford.

In conclusion, Lord Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, I can do no better than quote from the Pharmaceutical Journal of 30th May 1930, commenting on Druce's 80th birthday celebrations, which Robert has already mentioned. "Members of the Pharmaceutical Society, who are proud to know that Dr Druce is one of themselves, will unite in adding their felicitations to those tendered by his wider circle of admirers in the world of science, in which he holds so commanding a rank."

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