



Royal  
Pharmaceutical  
Society  
of Great Britain

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

## **The Society's Headquarters**

In September 1841, the Council of the newly-formed Pharmaceutical Society began to look for a suitable building to serve as the Society's headquarters. They acquired the house at 17 Bloomsbury Square in December 1841 at an annual rent of £240. It was a seventeenth century building that had been remodelled in the fashionable neo-classical style by architect John Nash in 1778. The first meeting, of the Council, was held there on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1842.

During its 135 year residency in Bloomsbury Square, the Society made significant changes. As early as 1859, it occupied the complete building on the north-west corner of Bloomsbury Square and Great Russell Street by taking over numbers 72 and 73 Great Russell Street. Alterations to the premises included adding a porch, having the name of the Society carved below the building's architrave (which you can still see today), and even adding a complete floor for laboratories to accommodate 100 work places in 1861. The Society also expanded into the surrounding areas. From 1886, it leased Pied Bull Yard behind 15 and 16 Bloomsbury Square and built new premises containing research laboratories, an examination hall, offices and stores. It was re-named Galen Place in 1888. In 1889, it also took over 15 and 16 Bloomsbury Square.

However, in 1927, still expanding, it had seemed likely that the Society would be moving. It bought a block of houses in Brunswick Square, the plan being to demolish them and build a new headquarters and school of pharmacy in its place. The work began in 1935, but stopped at the outbreak of the Second World War. By 1945, the escalating costs of the project meant that the plans had to be reconsidered. The school of pharmacy had become a school of the University of London in 1925, although the Society continued to provide virtually all of its funding. In 1948, the University took over the school completely, and in 1949, they bought the partially completed building. Construction work re-started in 1951, and in 1960, the Queen Mother officially opened the building as the home of the independent School of Pharmacy of the University of London.



17 Bloomsbury Square in the 1930s

The Society stayed at 17 Bloomsbury Square until the building was compulsorily purchased in the early 1970s, when this stretch of Bloomsbury was going to be demolished to make way for a new British Library. The Society opted to build a brand new headquarters. Its original requirement from architect David Hodges was for an eleven-storey building on the site in Lambeth. However, a Greater London Council height restriction and the Society's decision to transfer its medicine testing laboratories to Edinburgh, led to Hodges producing a revised, five-storey design. The Museum has the architect's models of both the original and revised designs.

Work began on site in February 1974 and Society staff moved into the building on 1 September 1976. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother opened the building on 22 February 1977.

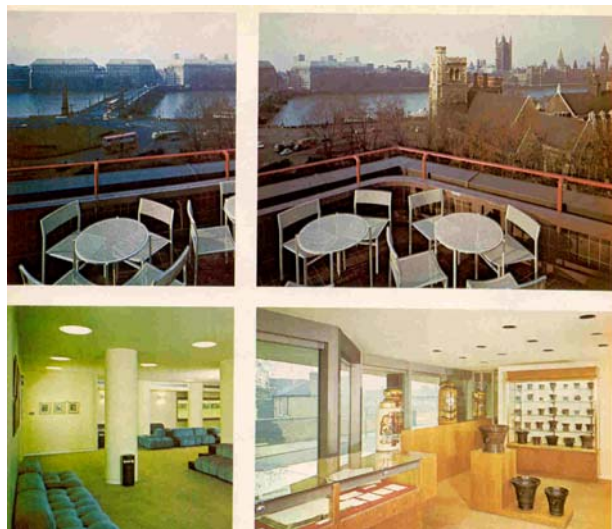
The editorial of a special edition of *The Pharmaceutical Journal* noted that:

*The sober, not to say sombre external appearance of the building is itself appropriately functional, and belies to some extent the internal splendours...Some indeed, may feel that the handsome interior, if not inappropriate to the purposes of the building, may be out of keeping with the times in which we live. While such a view might reflect the national mood, we do not think that it will be shared by the vast majority of pharmacists... .*

David Hodges described his design in the Royal Institute of British Architects Journal in March 1977:

*The site which the Society had already bought before we were appointed is less than half an acre in extent. It is very constricted. The constraints were such that it was by no means clear at the outset that a satisfactory planning solution would be possible which would give the Society all the required accommodation in an acceptable form.*

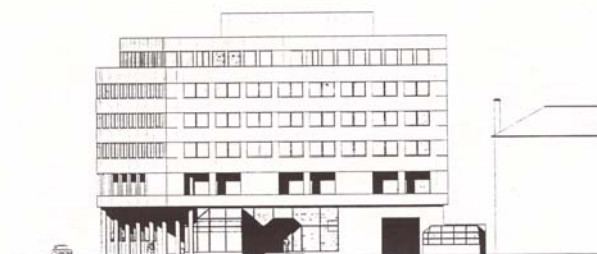
*The accommodation requirement derives from the Society's many activities. In finding the solution I had in mind the need to respect certain important features of its situation. It forms, for instance, a terminal feature of the view when crossing Lambeth Bridge. Moreover, by adding a further element to that well-known group of buildings, it significantly affects the view of Lambeth Palace and St Mary's Church when seen from the north bank of the river in Victoria Gardens. I was conscious that whereas the new building should have a quality and a definition suitable to the long approach towards it across the bridge, nevertheless it should not seem to dominate the scene.*



Images of 1 Lambeth High Street from the souvenir supplement to the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, 22 February 1977

Hodges' solution included using anodised aluminium cladding in a subdued bronze colour and designing a building which conformed with the existing frontages.

The furniture and fittings were carefully selected for the new building. In the reception area alone there are five classic Charles Eames lounge chairs. Elsewhere in the building much of the furniture was supplied by the manufacturers for whom Eames designed, Herman Miller. Many of the major spaces still retain their original furnishings today. However, the building has been, and continues to be, adapted in various ways since 1977 in order to accommodate the increased number of staff that work for the Society.



**This information sheet is also available in a large font size.  
Please contact us on 020 7572 2210 or email [museum@rpsgb.org](mailto:museum@rpsgb.org).**