



Faculty of the History and Philosophy of Medicine & Pharmacy

Course Insights: The History of Medicine



This course provides a substantial introduction to the history of medicine from ancient times to the present. On selected Saturdays from October to June participants enjoy expert lectures from around 50 different historians, clinicians and curators. Topics range from Egyptian and Islamic Medicine, Medieval and Renaissance Medicine, through to psychiatry, epidemics and public health. The course also draws on the rich history of the Society of Apothecaries and its splendid livery Hall. Those taking the course come from a range of backgrounds and locations, but all share a passion for learning more about the history of medicine.

Our aim for the course is that participants are equipped to fulfil their personal objectives and interests in medical history, whether that is following a specific curiosity into a particular specialty, time period or theme, enabling them to feel confident to carry out their own research for personal or professional satisfaction, or to immerse themselves in a new discipline with a group of like-minded people.

Matthew Scudder, Academic Training Officer, asks Anna Simmons, Course Director some inside questions.

MS: Tell us a bit about yourself.

AS: I'm a historian of science and medicine, who has worked extensively on the history of this unique and multifaceted institution. I first visited the Society of Apothecaries' archives twenty-five years ago in my final year of a Chemistry Degree at the University of Oxford! I went on to complete a PhD on the Society's pharmaceutical and chemical trading activities before working for various universities. I have published widely on the early history of pharmaceutical manufacturing in London, the social and economic history of British chemistry and pharmacy and the development of chemical careers and professional organisations, within which the Society of Apothecaries and its pharmaceutical trade have always been a particular focus. This role as course director enables me to bring together my expertise on the Hall's rich collections with my passion for encouraging engagement with the history of science and medicine, something I have worked on particularly in the context of professional learned societies.

MS: Share with us how you programme the courses?

AS: The course is programmed to provide a comprehensive overview of medical and healthcare practice from ancient to modern times through lectures from historians, curators and clinicians. Through wide-ranging lectures, collections-based sessions and practical guidance, the course supports the study of medical history, especially for those new to the subject. In bringing together lecturers from different institutions and disciplines, the course provides participants with a unique insight into medical history, which can be accessed in-person and online. Each year the course evolves with recent changes including the introduction of a learning platform and new 'How to' sessions on research and writing skills. The next course runs from October 2024 to June 2025 in a blended format with a mix of in-person sessions held at Apothecaries' Hall and live online course days. Lecture recordings and course materials are provided via the Society's learning platform, Brightspace.

MS: What do you hope people will gain from taking these courses?

AS: I hope participants will gain the skills and knowledge to journey through the history of medicine and be inspired by hearing the different approaches and perspectives presented by the fifty lecturers involved. Through learning about research methodology and the many resources available in libraries, archives and online, they will be enabled to undertake appropriate reading and research in the field, with the opportunity for their learning to be validated through the associated diploma (DHMSA – Diploma in the History of Medicine of the Society of Apothecaries). With many of the in-person sessions taking place in the splendid surroundings of Apothecaries' Hall, there is also the opportunity to learn more about its history and collections and also those of other medical museums in London, with which there are strong links and visits. By connecting participants from a range of backgrounds, career stages, interests and locations with each other and with a range of experts from across history, medicine and museums, we hope all involved will gain new insights into medical history and how it is studied.

MS: What are you working on next?

AS: There are many answers to this question due to my multiple roles in different organisations! For the History of Medicine Course in 2024-25, I am working closely with the new Academic Training Officer, Matthew Scudder, on how the history of medicine course is integrated into our new learning platform, Brightspace. We are also working on developing new audiences to learn about the history of medicine with the Society of Apothecaries. With my colleagues on the Course Development Group, we are focussed on providing a course and associated diploma which are accessible to participants joining worldwide, but which also draw on the unique resources of Apothecaries' Hall in terms of its history, location and collections. I'm also working on various historical research projects which utilise the Society's collections. With Frank James, our focus is on William Thomas Brande (1788-1866), a multiple post holder in nineteenth-century scientific London who during his lifetime tended to be strongly linked with his contemporaries and colleagues, Michael Faraday and Humphry Davy, yet is now seen as a somewhat marginal figure. With Tilli Tansey, we are researching the physiological testing of drugs which took place at Apothecaries' Hall under the guidance of the pharmacologist (and First World War spy!) Walter Ernest Dixon (1871-1931). I've also spoken recently about women's involvement in the apothecary shops of London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Later in the year I will be speaking about Royal Apothecaries, especially the Brande family and John Nussey. And that is in addition to my roles with the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry and its journal, *Ambix*, and the Royal Society of Chemistry Historical Group

Thank you to Anna for the interview find out more about registering by clicking [here](#)