

Book review. Michael Rowe

The Bath Dispensaries: Health-care for the Poor before the NHS

Author:- Michael Whitfield.

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RRP £2.50. Obtainable on line.

This is a fine addition to the excellent series of publications by Avon Local History and Archaeology.

The Dispensary movement and the dispensaries themselves are largely forgotten as they were finally made redundant by the provision of free healthcare by the NHS in 1948. Previously only those who could pay had any health care at all unless admitted to voluntary hospitals or the workhouse. The dispensaries were set up by voluntary subscription and paper tickets or metal tokens were issued that subscribers could give to the needy poor who could at least be seen once and be given a prescription. Inpatient care required a written submission by a supporter.

This booklet, which is well illustrated, describes three such dispensaries in Bath the Eastern, Western and Southern of which only the rather grand version, The Eastern, survives in Cleveland Place.

In a few pages staff names are recorded, plans of interiors and elevations of the facades, working practices and case histories are described.

This is a succinct record of a nugget of Bath history and based upon an article which won the Rose Prize given jointly by the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries.