

WALKER AND NUSSEY—ROYAL APOTHECARIES, 1784–1860

by

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INTRODUCTION

ATTENTION has recently been drawn to the fact that the partnership begun before 1750 by John Truesdale and Joseph Partridge provided Royal Apothecaries for the unusually long period of 152 years, the last partner in the firm to hold a royal appointment being Sir Francis Laking, who died in 1914.¹ It is perhaps also worthy of note that for half of this period the firm was very much a family concern, since from 1784 to 1860 the partners—and except for one short break the senior partners—were supplied by two closely-related Yorkshire families—those of Walker and Nussey.*

FAMILY BACKGROUND

These two families were closely associated not only professionally in their London practice, but also by marriage and business ties in their Yorkshire homeland—the village of Birstall, near Leeds. The district, one of the main woollen cloth manufacturing areas of the West Riding, was remarkable in several ways. It attracted the special notice of Daniel Defoe in his travels through Britain in the 1720s², and it produced more than one celebrity, of whom Joseph Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen, is perhaps the most widely known.

The Walkers were well established there as cloth manufacturers at the beginning of the eighteenth century and the Nusseys were associated with them as dyers, there being a tradition that the latter introduced improved methods of dyeing on emigrating from the Netherlands at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In those days only natural dyes were used, so that the family would have a practical acquaintance with botany which no doubt proved useful to those later members of it who took up the study of *Materia Medica*. By 1760 the dyeing side of their business was confined to a branch of the family which had moved to Leeds, whilst the cloth mills at Birstall had been taken over by a younger son who married one of the Walkers.

RICHARD WALKER, SENIOR (1749–1817)

This take-over was facilitated by the fact that Richard Walker, the younger of two sons who might have carried on in the woollen trade, was apprenticed instead to a Leeds apothecary, William Hey. The story of how Walker subsequently went to London and rose to be senior partner in the Truesdale firm is given by William

* A similar example of long family service to Royalty is provided by the Brande family, the first of whom came over from Hanover shortly after George I's accession. Four successive generations provided Apothecaries either to the Queen and her Household or to the Person from 1723 to 1833, although there were periods (1749 to 1762, and 1820 to 1830) when they appear to have been without an official appointment. The Brandes remained closely connected with the Society of Apothecaries until the 1860s.

Wadd, Surgeon Extraordinary to George IV, in a series of biographical notes on medical men whose portraits he had collected.³ Since Wadd's book, published in 1824, is not readily available today, his account is combined here with information from other sources so as to cover Walker's career as evenly as possible.

Richard Walker was the son of William Walker, cloth manufacturer, of Birstall Smithies, and Mary Newsome of Castlow Hill, a hamlet just south of Gomersal. He was baptised in the parish church of St. Peter's, Birstall, on 1 April 1749, and from later references to his age was presumably born earlier that same year. Although the district was a country one there was within one and a half miles, at Batley, a first-class grammar school, which the young Richard duly attended. It was at this same school that Joseph Priestley is generally assumed to have been educated under the Rev. Thomas Rhodes, but in Walker's day Rhodes had been succeeded by Joseph Hargreaves, 'a very excellent master', who gave Walker a good grounding in classical knowledge.

On leaving school at the age of fourteen, i.e. in 1763, Walker was apprenticed to William Hey, Surgeon Apothecary in Leeds, then only twenty-seven and but two years married.⁴ Having served his time, Walker went to London for further study, as Hey had done earlier, and worked hard for two years attending lectures and gaining practical experience in the hospitals. At the end of this time he had every intention of returning to Yorkshire to set up on his own, when by chance he came across one of the partners in the firm of Truesdale, Partridge and Halifax, 'old established Apothecaries in St. James's Street'. John Truesdale, who had been appointed one of two Apothecaries to the Person by George III in 1762,⁵ was then nearing sixty years of age and had already handed over the responsibility of running the firm's shop and premises to Robert Halifax.⁶ Halifax himself was set on further achievements; he was actively extending his practice and was later to become a Licentiate of the College of Physicians.⁷ Richard Walker was just the young man they were looking for to run the day-to-day business of the firm. He became their superintendent and performed his duties with such skill and attention that they decided, one year later, to admit him to the partnership.

Unfortunately the dating of these later events remains uncertain. Family records suggest that Walker was made a partner in 1773, which would just allow him the seven years' apprenticeship, two years' study, and one year's probation that Wadd's account requires of him. On the other hand he did not apply for the freedom of the Society of Apothecaries until 3 September 1776,⁸ and without such freedom apothecaries were not normally suffered to practise within the City or seven miles of it. However, he was already a partner at the time of his application,⁸ and it is possible that the Society was not too curious about a junior member of an established firm whose senior partners had long been Freeman.* Walker was thus certainly a partner

* Some years earlier, when there had been a dearth of journeymen, the restrictions had in fact been lifted for a time and foreigners (i.e. men not having the freedom of the City) had been allowed to work without having taken the freedom. The normal state of affairs seems to have been re-emphasized only three months before Walker's application by a resolution passed by the Court of Assistants to the effect that 'foreign Apothecaries on bringing due proof of their having been educated in the Art by the space of seven years and passing an examination of their skill and ability therein be admitted to the freedom of the Company by redemption on payment of a fine' (Guildhall Library, Ms 8200/8, unfol.). Walker may have taken advantage of this to regularize his position.

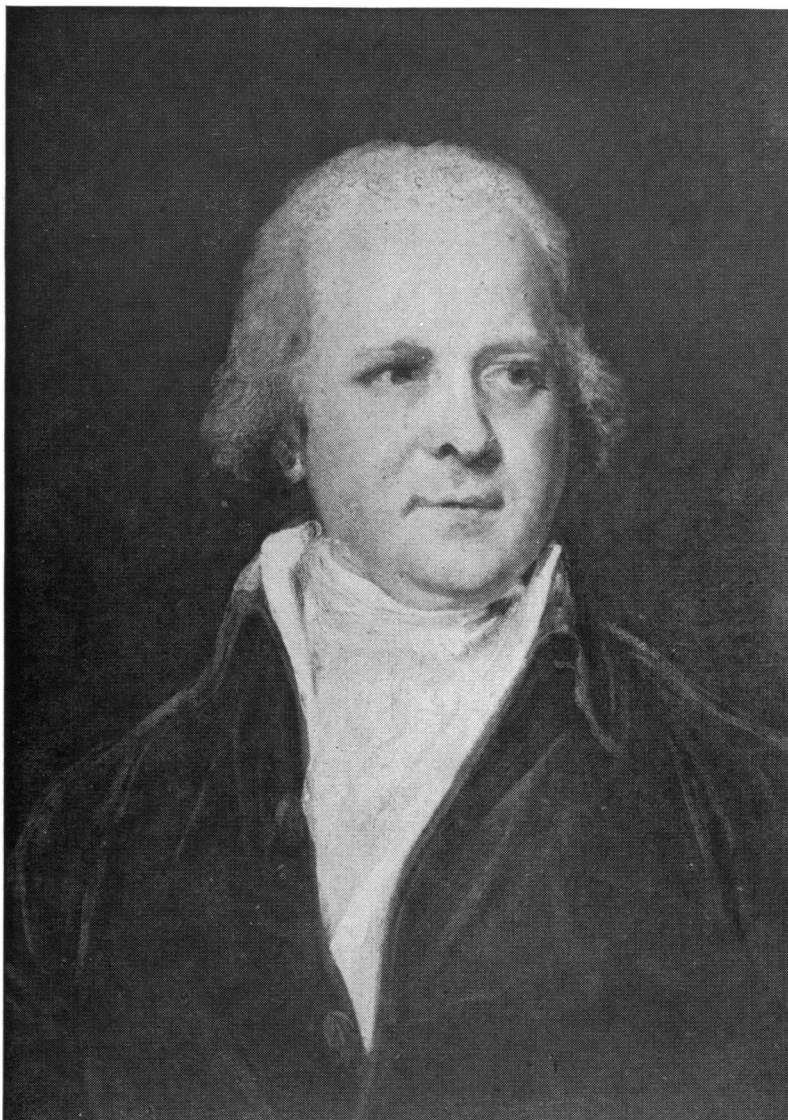


Figure 1
Richard Walker (1749–1817). Portrait by John Hoppner, in possession
of the author's family.

1770 to 1780	1783	1780 to since Jan: 1782 1 st 1782	Total
11 11 10	Waldegrave Ladies	16 14 0	17 16 1 46 2 7
	Walker Mr.		2 10 4 2 10 4
	Wrottesley Sir John	23 10 2	29 19 4 53 9 6
	Wade Mrs		7 16 3 7 16 3
	Worsley Lady		19 10 4 19 10 4
	Wagner Geo. Esq ^r	2 2 -	16 15 6 10 17 6
	Walker Tho. Esq ^r	6 - -	17 6 1 3 6
	Wyndham Hon Cha ^s	27 10 6	9 11 7 37 2 1
	Hon W ^m	2 1 0 13	2 16 15 4 6
	Williams Miss		1 11 9 1 11 9
	Wonen Mr.		4 17 - 4 17 -
	Wallinger J. A. Esq ^r		7 11 10 7 11 10
	Wyndham Mr. Percy's Jan	1 1 -	0 0 0 1 4 -
	Mr. Percy		1 2 6 1 2 6
	Winder Captain	10 10 6	+ 5 - 14 15 6
	Wade Mrs		10 3 5 10 3 5
	Wade Mrs		4 4 11 4 4 11
	Wagner Mr. M		4 0 - 4 0 -
	Wales Prince		7 6 - 7 6
	Servants		23 1 0 23 1 0
	Wagner Geo. Esq ^r		15 5 6 15 5 6

Figure 2

Page from the firm's account book for 1783, the first year in which entries for the Prince of Wales and his Household appear. Entries in succeeding years include an increasing number of national and political celebrities—for the most part Whig supporters—who were possibly attracted by the connection with his Royal Highness. The entries are in the handwriting of the elder Richard Walker. Original in possession of Mrs. Porter, of Woodbridge, great-granddaughter of John Nussey.

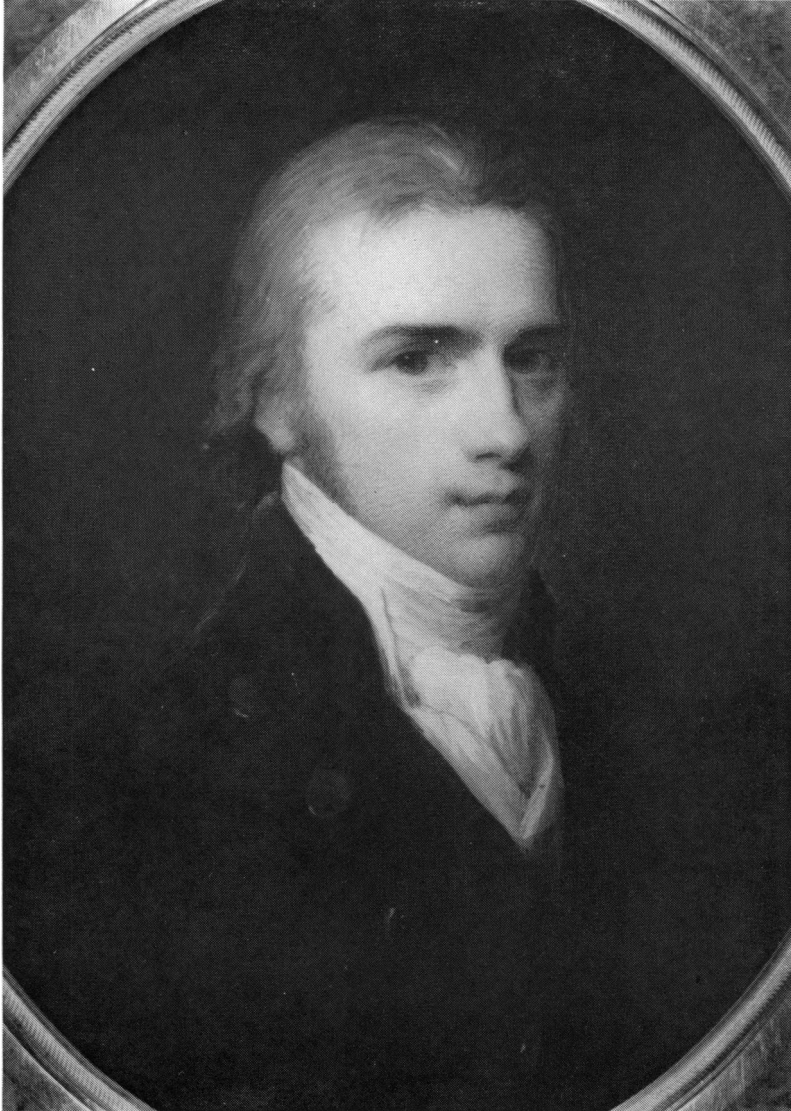


Figure 3
Joseph Nussey (1758–1802). Miniature in oils by François Ferrière,
signed and dated 1798, in the author's possession.

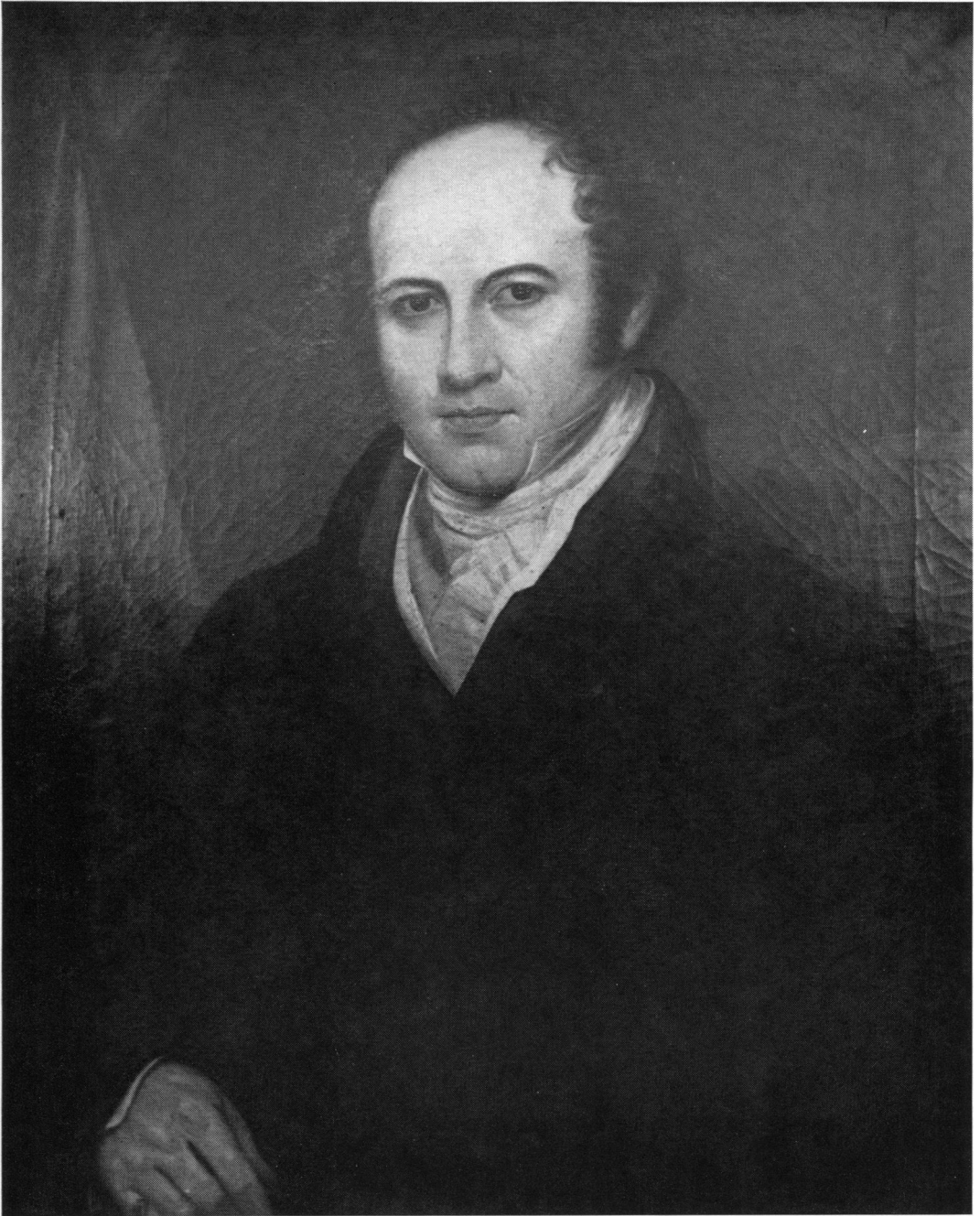


Figure 4

John Nussey (1794–1862), when Apothecary-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria. Portrait by unknown artist, in the author's possession.

Walker and Nussey—Royal Apothecaries, 1784–1860

in the firm in 1776 and may well have been one as early as 1773.* Walker's freedom by redemption was granted on 24 October 1776,⁹ and he subsequently became a Liveryman of the Society.¹⁰

It was not long before the whole management of the firm devolved on Richard Walker. Truesdale died in 1780, and Halifax, who had been appointed Apothecary to George III's Household in 1776, was disenfranchised by the Society of Apothecaries at his own request so that he could practise as a physician.† Just before this occurred, however, he seems to have been appointed Apothecary to the Prince of Wales. This appointment was transferred to Walker in 1784, when Halifax is presumed to have left the firm,¹¹ and it was to remain with one or other of the partners, changing its style with the Regency and on the Prince's accession, until George IV's death in 1830.

In 1784 also Walker took on his first full-term apprentice. This was Michael Underwood, who was bound to him on 3 August of that year.¹² He was possibly a descendant of the Underwoods who were connected with the Society of Apothecaries around the end of the seventeenth century,¹³ but the apprenticeship records give no indication of this. Michael Underwood later practised as a physician, and in 1811 held the appointment of Physician to the Princess of Wales.¹⁴

Referring to the nigh thirty years of Walker's practice as apothecary, Wadd describes his character and attainments, which were not confined to his profession, in the highest terms. He finally retired, in or about 1801, to Birstall, where he had already bought a fine dwelling called Rydings,¹⁵ within a quarter of a mile of the house where he had been born, and other property. Here he lived for some fifteen more years in comparative quiet but by no means unoccupied. He was made magistrate for a wide area of the West Riding and had to deal with the Luddite riots of 1812. Nor did he entirely give up medicine; besides holding his magistrate's courts at Rydings he made it his custom to receive the poor of the parish there every Sunday before church service and give them, free of charge, the benefits of his medical skill. He suffered in his last years from a complaint of the legs but, under the care of his nephew Richard, continued to visit London. It was on such a visit in the autumn of 1817, at a house in Beaumont Street, that he died. He was buried in the vaults of the then newly-built church of St. Mary-le-Bone on 4 October, and a tablet to his memory was erected over the family pew in Birstall church. This tablet was probably lost when the church was rebuilt between 1865 and 1870, for the writer did not find it two or three years ago; the words of the inscription, however, can still be read in Wadd's book.**

* These dates are of interest in another connection. The *Dictionary of National Biography* names 'Messrs Walker of St. James's Street' as the firm with which the celebrated Thomas Wheeler (1754–1847) served his apprenticeship, and it has been inferred from this that Wheeler was bound to Richard Walker. In fact Wheeler was bound apprentice on 5 July 1768 to his own father (Guildhall Library, Ms 8207, fol. 47r.). However, his father died before the end of the seven-year term (Ibid. Ms 8206/2, p. 165) and it is conceivable that Wheeler completed his servitude with the Truesdale firm. In this case he may have worked for Walker for two or three years.

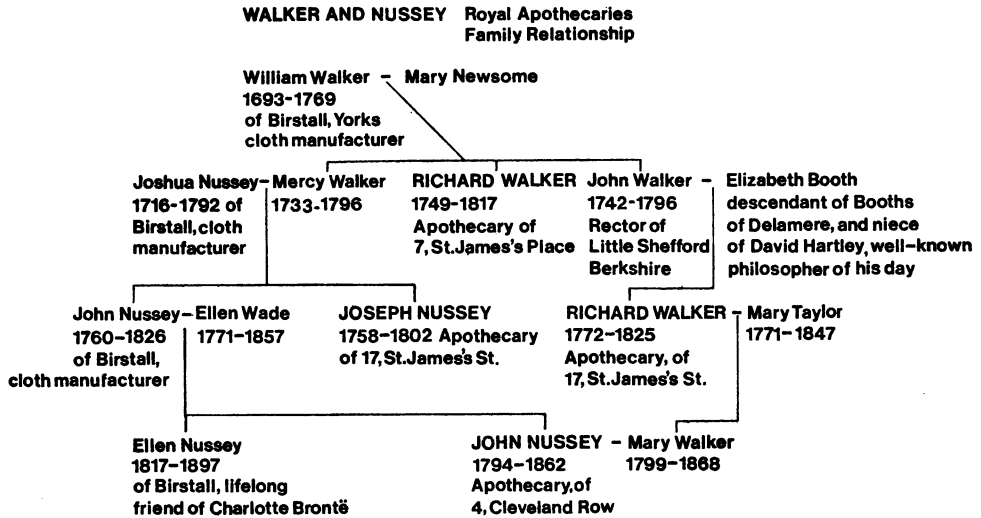
† Halifax later obtained the appointment of Physician to the Prince of Wales, which he held until 1810 (Imperial Calendar, 1809 to 1811).

** It is curious that, during the time that Walker was practising in London, a Richard Walker held the appointment of Apothecary to the Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford (Alexander G. Gibson, *The Radcliffe Infirmary*, London, Humphrey Milford, 1926, p. 251). All that seems to be known of the Oxford Richard is that he published, in 1796, a book reporting the results of some experiments on improved freezing mixtures (*An Account of Some Remarkable Discoveries in the Production of*

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JOSEPH NUSSEY (1758–1802) AND RICHARD WALKER JUNIOR (1772–1825)

Some years before he retired, Walker senior took into partnership two of his nephews. Details of their relationship are given in the accompanying diagram.



Joseph Nussey obtained the freedom of the Society of Apothecaries on 23 June 1790 by redemption, having produced ‘testimonials of his education in the Art of an Apothecary’.¹⁶ He was only nine years younger than his uncle and is likely to have been bound apprentice before the latter took his decision to remain in London with the Truesdale firm. It is thus quite possible that Joseph too served his apprenticeship with William Hey in Leeds, but no record of this has been found nor is it known where he practised during the ensuing years up to 1790.

He was made a partner in the firm in 1799, and in the same year was appointed Apothecary to the Prince of Wales,¹⁷ holding this office until his death on 30 January 1802 at the age of forty-three.¹⁸ This early death possibly accounts for the apparent lack of any further published information about him. Family records state that house was kept for him at 17 St. James’s Street by his sister Anne, whose lady’s maid, one Mary Mills, was witness of a visit which the Prince of Wales, in evident sorrow, paid him there during his last illness. The only other remark about Joseph is that ‘he was

Artificial Cold etc., Oxford, 1796), which he had earlier written in the form of four communications to the Royal Society. The dates of the Oxford appointment—1781 to 1805—agree so nearly with the London Richard’s most active years that it is tempting to suppose that the two Richards were one and the same person.

However, no mention of an Oxford appointment is made by Wadd, whose biographical sketch of the London Richard is quite the longest and most detailed in his book, nor does he refer to any published work other than a book *Memoirs of Medicine* which the London Richard produced at his own expense in 1799. Surviving Walker records are equally silent about any Oxford episode. When in addition allowance is made for the full-time nature of the duties of the apothecary at the Radcliffe Infirmary (he was required to live in, and in practice often stood in for the physicians and surgeons —Alexander G. Gibson, *Ibid.*, pp. 249–51), it is fairly clear that the duplication of names and dates must be regarded as a coincidence, though the odds against such a remarkable one must indeed be high.

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held in high esteem by all who knew him, both high and low'. He was buried at Birstall, where the inscription on his tombstone can still be read.

The other nephew, Richard Walker junior, was considerably younger. On 6 March 1787, at the age of fourteen, he was apprenticed to his uncle;¹⁹ he served his seven years, and obtained the freedom of the Society of Apothecaries on 7 April 1795.²⁰ He married three years later and lived at 17 St. James's Street, together with his cousin Joseph Nussey, and this was also the address of the firm, his uncle living apart at 7 St. James's Place. In 1802 he appears to have been appointed Apothecary to the Prince of Wales,²¹ no doubt in the place of his cousin, and he was some time, possibly together with Everard A. Brande, Apothecary to the Princess Charlotte.²²

When the elder Richard Walker retired about 1801, the next senior partner was William John Yonge (or Young), who was not a relative. Very little is known about him. He appears to have been a partner in the firm almost as long as the elder Walker, having been admitted Freeman of the Society by redemption on 21 December 1781,²³ and he is believed to have been appointed Apothecary to the Prince of Wales, with Walker, in 1784.²⁴ He was apparently still with the firm in 1808 but not in 1809.²⁵ In 1812, the beginning of the Regency, only Richard Walker junior is mentioned in connection with the consequent change in the description of the appointment, the words 'to the Prince of Wales' being replaced by 'to His Majesty at Carlton House'.²⁶

On the accession of George IV at the end of January 1820 Richard Walker was immediately appointed Apothecary to the King and at the same time—jointly with John Nussey, now the other partner in the firm—Apothecary to the King's Household.²⁷ As King's Apothecary Walker claimed, and after much deliberation was granted, the next vacant seat on the Court of Assistants of the Society of Apothecaries.²⁸ He must already have been a Liveryman, for he is recorded as being one of the four Stewards when on 6 December 1817 the Court and Livery were entertained to a dinner in the Great Hall in celebration of the bicentenary of the Society's existence.²⁹ Walker took part in the coronation procession on 19 July 1821, and his second daughter was one of the Herb Maidens.³⁰ This was the last exercise of an ancient custom going back to days when the strewing of sweet-scented flowers and herbs in the king's path and in the royal apartments fulfilled a useful purpose.

For the remaining few years of his life Walker was in constant attendance on the King and accompanied him on his travels to Ireland, Scotland and Hanover.³¹ During the royal visit to Ireland, on 24 August 1821, he was voted the Freedom of the Corporation of Apothecaries of the City of Dublin and as a memento was presented with a silver snuff box.* He is mentioned as travelling together with Sir William Knighton, the King's Physician, in one of four carriages which accompanied His Majesty's coach on the road from Calais to Hanover in October of the same year.³² Sir William Knighton must have known Walker well, and it is disappointing that he made no reference to him in his memoirs. As it is, only two comments about Walker's professional activities seem to have survived. One is that he 'neglected as his Majesty's Apothecary to look after his right of embalming the members of the Royal Family' and on three occasions allowed the duty to be undertaken by others, thereby occasioning his successor some trouble in subsequently recovering this

* Now in the keeping of the Society of Apothecaries, London.

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privilege.³³ The other is that he was apparently the only man who knew how to reach the vein in George IV's arm, seemingly no easy task.³⁴

Richard Walker died on 21 February 1825 and was buried at St. James's, Piccadilly, where his children had all been baptised.

JOHN NUSSEY (1794–1862)

John Nussey, the fourth and last of the family partners, is believed to have been born at Birstall on 4 February 1794, but no official record of this has been found. He was the eldest of thirteen children of whom the youngest, Ellen, is known to a wide circle as the lifelong friend of Charlotte Brontë. His father was a partner in the family's cloth-manufacturing business in Birstall, but also acted for a time as magistrate's clerk to the elder Richard Walker when the latter retired to Rydings. John's mother was the daughter of John Wade, corn-factor and maltster, of Carlinghow Mill, Batley.

Nussey is believed to have received his education, like his brothers, at the school kept by the Rev. W. M. Heald, M.A., then Vicar of Birstall.³⁵ On 3 January 1809 he was apprenticed to the younger Richard Walker,³⁶ served his seven years, and was admitted Freeman of the Society of Apothecaries on 7 May 1816.³⁷ Two years later, on 3 December 1818, he became a Licentiate.³⁸ On the accession of George IV in 1820 he was appointed, jointly with Richard Walker, Apothecary to the Household, and when Walker died in 1825 he became the King's Apothecary in his place.³⁹

From the beginning of his apprenticeship, John Nussey lived with the Walkers at 17 St. James's Street, and was treated as one of the family. There were ten children (his second cousins) and when, as happened occasionally, Mr. and Mrs. Walker visited their Yorkshire relatives, the household affairs were left in the hands of the eldest daughter, Mary, while John Nussey looked after the practice. Thrown thus together, the two cousins found their mutual regard ripening into a deeper affection and they were married at the church of St. James in January 1825, shortly before Richard Walker's death. Nussey went to live at 4 Cleveland Row, facing St. James's Palace, which remained the address of the practice until his retirement in 1860.

The years following Walker's death provided John Nussey, then in his early thirties, with many cares. He seems to have been for a time without a partner, and the practice would have demanded his constant attention. His official duties too had their problems. When the Duke of York died in early 1827, there was a difference of opinion on the question to whose care the task of embalming should be entrusted. This difficulty arose from the younger Richard Walker's neglect on earlier occasions to assert the right which was his by virtue of his appointment as Apothecary to the King, but Nussey stood his ground, won his point, and then characteristically shared the task with the other man.³⁹ His own father died in 1826 and there were his mother's affairs to see to in Yorkshire. Nor was he entirely free from disappointment at home, for although his own family was eventually a large one his first two sons, born at this period, died in infancy.*

Yet through all these early difficulties he had at least one good friend. However

* John Nussey did not, as suggested by one writer, marry a second time. The confusion probably arises from the size of his family and the consequent wide difference in age between the eldest and the youngest child. His wife survived him by six years.

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much George IV may have been open to criticism on other counts, he had the reputation, among those who had the best opportunities of knowing him intimately, of being 'the kindest of friends and the most affectionate of masters',⁴⁰ and his treatment of John Nussey was no exception to this. He had, it may be noted, been attended by one or other of the Nusseys and Walkers since within a year of coming of age, but he seems to have developed a special attachment to the last of the four, whom he had known as quite a young man. When George IV died Nussey felt the loss as a personal one. In a letter to his wife, away at the time in Yorkshire, he wrote:

You have heard no doubt of the sad event at Windsor . . . I sat up with the poor King on Tuesday and Thursday nights. I thought he would have died during the latter night. I returned home on Friday so completely exhausted and worn out that I could hardly support myself . . . and on Saturday morning was called up by Sir Astley Cooper, who communicated the sad tidings of what had happened in the night . . . We have both indeed lost a great friend in every sense of the word . . . the kindly and considering interest he took in all that belonged to me can never be forgot.⁴¹

The death of George IV marked the end of a stage in the firm's existence. William IV brought in several new Apothecaries to the Person and John Nussey was appointed Apothecary to the Household jointly with Charles Craddock.⁴² It is interesting to note that the remuneration for this duty—'attendance or prescribing for the sick in every Department of his Majesty's Household'—was a yearly salary of £204 odd and £341 10s. for medicines. In contrast, David Davis's yearly salary as Apothecary to the Person was £371 10s. but he was presumably free to charge his own price for medicine.⁴³ The changes introduced with the new reign were possibly an encouragement to John Nussey to take part in the affairs of the Society of Apothecaries. He served the Society in various capacities, including that of Master (1833/4), and later was its first representative on the General Medical Council.

With the accession of Queen Victoria, Nussey was appointed Apothecary to the Person. He held the office jointly with Edward Duke Moore until October 1857, and then alone until his retirement in 1860.⁴⁴ On 31 May 1838, shortly before the coronation, he was instructed by the Lord Chamberlain to prepare the oil to be used at the anointing ceremony. Enclosed with the official document was a private note from the Duke of Sutherland, hastening to inform him that the Queen would dislike both musk and jessamine and would prefer the mildest kinds of perfume. The warning was timely, for Nussey was intending to prepare an oil of some richness; he had already found and copied out a prescription used at the coronation of James II and his Queen in 1685, 'exceeding rich and fragrant and highly approved of by their majesties'.⁴⁵

Except for such special occasions, there was now little in the character of the firm's business to recall the Apothecary's Art as the term had once been understood; the word Apothecary was to survive for formal use, but the men themselves were fast developing into general practitioners of medicine. Nussey attended the Queen in several of her confinements, including the birth of the future Edward VII,⁴⁶ and one of his sons used to recall being present with his brothers outside the Palace when his father held the infant prince up to a window for them to see. Besides his appointment to the Queen, Nussey was also, from May 1840, Apothecary to the Prince

Consort and his Household⁴⁷ and, for a time, Visiting Apothecary to St. George's Hospital,⁴⁸ his private practice included many of the nobility.

In November 1828 John Nussey had taken on C. F. Du Pasquier as apprentice,⁴⁹ and the ladies of the latter's family gave Nussey valuable assistance at the time of George IV's death, when his own wife was away in Yorkshire: Nussey received very short notice to go to Windsor with the materials for embalming the body, but Du Pasquier's mother and sister 'bought the cloth and silks and had them made in 6 hours'.⁴¹ Du Pasquier was taken into the partnership and ultimately succeeded Nussey as Apothecary to the Person. It had always been Nussey's hope that the family interest in the firm would be continued after his retirement, and his second son, Thomas, was trained in the profession, became a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries, and is even recorded as practising from the Cleveland Row address.⁵⁰ However, to his father's bitter disappointment, Thomas found the work unsuited to his temperament and emigrated to Australia. Partly because of this perhaps, and partly because his financial resources had been depleted by the needs of a large family and by help given earlier to his brothers in Yorkshire, who had fallen on hard times, John Nussey declined Queen Victoria's offer of a baronetcy. In the event it was his partner Du Pasquier who was knighted.

By 1860 John Nussey's health was showing signs of the strain to which a constant devotion to arduous duties had long exposed him, and he retired from practice at the end of the year to Chislehurst, in Kent, where he already had a country house.* He died on 14 April 1862 and was buried at the parish church of St. Nicholas. His services to the Society of Apothecaries and to the cause of medical education have been generously acknowledged and recorded elsewhere.⁵¹ He lived in an age of reform and the emergence of new institutions, but through all the changes with which he was faced the principles instilled into him in his youth stood him in good stead. In the words of a contemporary who came to know him intimately, 'he was a man deservedly esteemed; he had that gracious manner which comes often from enjoying the confidence of the great'.⁵² He handed on the firm's practice, in family hands since his great-uncle's day almost ninety years earlier, with its standing amply maintained.

* Among the many letters of regret and good wishes that he received on this occasion was one from Professor William Thomas Brande, who for many years had been in charge of the lectures given at Apothecaries Hall as part of the course for those seeking the Licentiatehip of the Society. Two occasions are known when Nussey was of help to Everard Augustus Brande, the Professor's brother, and it is pleasing to be able to record this combined evidence of friendly relations between two houses which had shared the privilege of long service to the Royal Family.

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