

**L.17**

**BRITISH APOTHECARIES AND THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE 1650 TO 1807**

Anderson S.C.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, WC1E 7HT, London, UK

This paper explores the relationship between British pharmacy and Atlantic slavery, from its origins until abolition in 1807. Apothecaries were involved in slavery in many different ways. The most lucrative opportunities lay in supplying medicines to the slave ships. Between 1698 and 1807 almost 11,000 ships were fitted out in England, transporting around three million Africans into slavery. The Royal African Company alone sent out more than 500 ships between 1672 and 1713. Each included at least one surgeon, each of whom had a medicine chest, and each chest cost between £80 and £90 to fit out. The contract to supply the Company with medicines was much prized.

The slave trade was very important to Britain, and the slave ships were heavily protected by the West Indies Fleet. These ships also carried surgeons with medicine chests, and supplying the Navy became another much sought after contract. In time the supply of medicines extended to the forts and settlements on the African coast where slaves were embarked, and plantations in America and the Caribbean where they worked. Several apothecaries and druggists went out to work on the plantations, and a few became plantation owners. In later years, some prominent Quaker apothecaries played a part in bringing about the abolition of the trade.