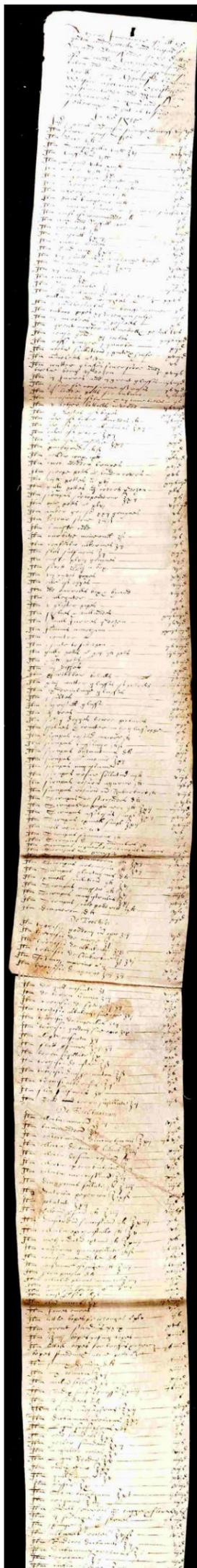


An Apothecary's Shop, 1607



This extraordinary document is a probate inventory – that is to say, a list and valuation of a deceased person's property.

Most probate inventories are nowhere near as large as this. Most consist of a single sheet of parchment, sometimes extending to two sheets sewn together. This wholly exceptional example is only 5 inches wide, but 14 feet long (13cm x 425cm).

It records the stock in the shop of Richard Beresford, a Lincoln apothecary, made on the 1st April 1607, soon after his death. (The nearest modern equivalent of an apothecary is a pharmacist.)

Usually, with stock in shops, the probate inventory valuation would be a single round figure for the whole stock, with perhaps another round figure for the shop furniture.

In this case, however, every single item of stock has been individually valued. The valuers were three other apothecaries named Henry Webster, Christopher Westmoreland and Mark Fenn.

We can only speculate as to the reason for this very detailed valuation, but it may have been that Mr Beresford's widow intended to sell her husband's business, and that Messrs Webster, Westmorland and Fenn were prospective purchasers.

Among the stock and fittings of the shop are:

[A] gold balance & all the other balance[s] and weightes	25 shillings
Tabaco pipes, 11 dozen & a halfe	4 shillings
2 glister pipes [for administering enemas]	15 pence
1 counter	13 shillings, 4 pence
1 seate to sitt upon	2 shillings, 8 pence

There are then hundreds of listed drugs or ingredients, many with Latin names, some in English:

Angillico rootes	6 pence
Carrawaye seed	9 pence
Coriander seedes	16 pence
Borax	2 shillings, 6 pence

Finally, the household furniture, room by room, is itemised, with separate headings for linen, pewter and brass. The sum total of the valuation of the goods is £294, 15 shillings, 4 pence (which is roughly £30,000 by current values).

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