The Chemistry Department at Imperial College London

A History, 1845–2000

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This is the first comprehensive history of the chemistry department at Imperial College London. Based on archival records, oral testimony, published papers, published and unpublished memoirs, the book tells the story of this world-famous department from its foundation as the Royal College of Chemistry in 1845 to the large department it became by the year 2000.

It covers research, teaching, departmental governance, students and social life. It also highlights the extraordinary contributions made to the war effort in both the first and second world wars. From its first professors, A. Wilhelm Hofmann and Edward Frankland, the department has been home to many eminent chemists, including, in the later twentieth century, the Nobel laureates Derek Barton and Geoffrey Wilkinson.

New information on these and many others is presented in a lively narrative that places both people and events in the larger historical contexts of chemistry, politics, culture and the economy. The book will interest not only those connected with Imperial College, but anyone interested in chemistry and its history, or in higher education in the sciences.
About the Authors

Hannah Gay was a professor in the history department at Simon Fraser University before joining the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine at Imperial College London in 2001. Now retired, she is an honorary research associate in the chemistry department. Her earlier work includes The History of Imperial College London, 1907–2007: Higher education and research in science, technology and medicine (2007) and The Silwood Circle: A history of ecology and the making of scientific careers in late twentieth-century Britain (2013), both published by Imperial College Press.

William P (Bill) Griffith is an Emeritus Professor and Distinguished Research Fellow of the IC Chemistry Department. He was an undergraduate in the Department, and went on to complete his PhD there with Geoffrey Wilkinson. He then went to Chicago under the Fulbright scheme as an assistant lecturer and postdoctoral fellow with Henry Taube, who, like Wilkinson, later became a Nobel laureate. He then attended Stanford, and finally returned to IC as a staff member. He has written eight books on platinum metal chemistry, some 300 research papers, and several publications on historical subjects.