This book presents a history of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers in England and various tidbits of information about its members culled from its archives. The Spectacle Makers Company started as a trade organization in 1629. The author was clerk to the company from 1966 to 1998.

By 1628, the number of spectacle makers in London was at least 18. The Spectacle Makers Company received its charter from King Charles I in 1629. Most of the early history of the company has been lost because its records were destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666. Some of the late 17th century spectacle makers were also makers of scientific instruments. Making the latter was more difficult than making spectacles, but more lucrative.

Part of the purpose of the company was oversight of the trade. The charter of 1629 authorized the search of premises of spectacle makers, and if any goods were of inferior quality, they were destroyed. The last record of such a search in the company minutes was in 1695.

The master of the company in 1720 and 1721 was Edward Scarlett Sr., who was inventor of, or at least first to advertise, “temple spectacles.” The book includes a few pages discussion of the Dollond family of opticians and their work on refracting telescopes. Peter Dollond set up shop as an optician in 1750. His father, John, who was working as a silk weaver, but always had interest in mathematics and optics, joined him in 1752. Later their business was conducted under the sign of “Golden Spectacles and Sea Quadrant.” John Dollond Jr., became a partner in the business in 1766. The term optician was first used in the Spectacle Makers Company records referring to a man named John Berge, who was Peter Dollond’s first apprentice.

In 1809, there were 237 members of the company, with 24 reaching liveryman status. In 1853, there were 1928 members, with 374 being liverymen. At that time, not all members were spectacle makers. In 1875, the company presented a gold medal to Astronomer Royal George Biddell Airy, who was credited with designing the first lens for the correction of astigmatism.

The British Optical Association (BOA), which was more nationally based than the London-based Spectacle Makers Company, was formed in the 1890s. The BOA started giving examinations in 1895 and added sight testing to their exam soon after that. The Spectacle Makers Company started giving examinations in 1898 and added sight testing to their exams in 1904. In 1928, there were 2,398 fellows of the Spectacle Makers Company, and 1,856 fellows of the British Optical Association. By 1980, the testing of optometrists had become a function of the British College of Ophthalmic Opticians, now known as the College of Optometrists.

This review is a brief sampling of the extensive details in this book. In the preface, the author of the book states: "Whilst the work of the Company did not end in 1929 that story is more the remit for the Company history, due out to commemorate the 400th anniversary."