

# book reviews

## Angel of death – the story of smallpox

By Gareth Williams. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 448 pp.  
£18.99

A visit to any museum focusing on the history of medicine will quickly make clear to any visitor how important infection has been, and continues to be, to mankind. How appropriate it is to have a new book published which coincides with the 30th anniversary of the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) of the eradication of smallpox, arguably the greatest coup of medicine of all time, which is probably the only true victory of man over microbe.

This book is written by a professor of medicine whose specialist expertise is in diabetes and obesity, though you would not know this from the detail and thoroughness of the contents. It is written for both medical and lay readership; for those interested in medical history and social history. But equally the book will be enjoyed by someone who just likes to read a good story. The book not only covers the science but introduces the reader to the characters of the story and their relationships with their family and peers in considerable detail. Gareth Williams writes with a great command of the English language and in a style which is comfortable and easy to read and it is no surprise to find that he is an accomplished author of many books, as well as general and humorous articles.

The book initially introduces the disease and epidemiology of smallpox and the variola virus. It leaves the reader in no doubt of the scourge that variola was to mankind over many generations; variola major killed about 30% (sometimes up to 50%) of those infected and left many survivors scarred for life. The pictures in the book also give testimony to the terrible nature of this disease.

The next section is on variolation, the use of infected material from a patient with smallpox to inoculate and hopefully induce immunity in a non immune person, which was still used in some parts of the world in the last century. The reader is introduced to some powerful characters involved in introduction of this technique including Lady Mary Wortley Montague whose drive and passion, having herself suffered and been scarred from smallpox, brought variolation into the UK from Turkey. The Reverend Cotton Mather was similarly a key person in promoting variolation in Boston. Variolation was not without its problems and had a small but significant mortality.

The section on vaccination focuses on Edward Jenner who recognised the protection against smallpox by a person who had had cowpox. The author does mention others who may have used the technique, though from the balance of evidence presented it is appropriate that it is Jenner's name which is associated with this intervention. The spread of vaccination to different parts of the world using a 'human chain' and the progression to a more standardised production and the development of a freeze dried prepa-

ration to enable live vaccine to reach areas without a 'cold chain' are described. Throughout the chapters on variolation and subsequently vaccination, the constant and powerful tensions between the protagonists and antagonists of these interventions, driven by professional rivalry, financial self interest or scientific concern, are described. This persisted over the decades driven by people with strong and passionately held views – indeed there is an analogy with the situation of antagonists to immunisation against other diseases in current times, though the risk-benefit ratio of current immunisations is clearly very different.

The section on eradication of smallpox under the WHO programme led by the determined and dynamic DA Henderson illustrates a truly remarkable achievement and the sceptics were truly put in their place by its success. This will hopefully be the final chapter on smallpox, but the comments towards the end of the book about a weaponised virus and the possibility of lack of full containment of any residual virus introduces the reader to the potentially horrifying picture of re-release of the smallpox virus into a non-immune world with potentially devastating consequences.

A good test of any book is whether it is a good holiday read, and whether completing the book is a duty or a pleasure. Having taken it with me to Italy this summer I can truly say that it is an excellent holiday read.

Having read again of the remarkable success of mankind controlling and eradicating smallpox there would seem to be a strong argument for the statue of Edward Jenner, which initially graced a plinth in Trafalgar Square before it was moved in the 19th century, to regain its original position. Jenner may not have drawn all the correct conclusions from his observations, but the introduction of vaccination and the success achieved through this technique will always remain a major achievement for this country doctor from Gloucestershire.

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## Jerwood. The foundation and the founders

By Matthew Sturgis. Unicorn Press, Norwich 2009.  
303 pp. £30.00.

One of our favourite outings used to be to Witley Court in Worcestershire. Its spectacular ruins, huge fountain and extensive gardens were being restored by English Heritage, and when we visited in September 2000 the Sherwood Sculpture Park had just been opened. A dozen sculptures by the likes of Elizabeth Frink, Michael Ayrton and Antony Gormley were scattered 'in a treasure trail of artistic elegance'. We were intrigued.

John Jerwood (1918–91), the son of a Hatton Garden jeweller, went to Japan where he made a fortune with one of the largest dealerships in cultured pearls in the world. On trips to England he would discuss with his lawyer and friend, Alan Grieve, how best he could use his money for charitable purposes. A foundation was set up in 1977, at first to provide generous benefactions to his old school, Oakham, and prizes and bursaries for young artists and musicians. Jerwood's unexpected death in 1991 forced Grieve to take over the running of the foundation, and he spent three years sorting out Jerwood's assets around the world. *Jerwood. The foundation and its founders*, enthusiastically written by Matthew Sturgis with the help of six scrapbooks compiled by Karen Grieve and full of stunning illustrations, is a tribute to the way in which a small private charity has become an internationally recognised foundation under an inspired (and inspiring) leader.

Grieve is one of those rare people who combine the visionary with a bent for action. His success has depended on an uncanny feeling for initiatives that are likely to succeed and an ability to spot first class professionals to help run the outfit. The number of requests for support has grown exponentially over the last two decades, and it has become necessary to split the foundation in two. Jerwood Charity continues the revenue grants and prizes with a yearly subvention of £1.4m, particularly 'to encourage, empower and reward young talent in the arts and other disciplines'. Not only are these what might be called the usual candidates – fine art (from which has spawned the Jerwood Art Collection), crafts, dance, music, literature, education, medicine, social and environmental issues – but it has given money, for example, to script writers and stage designers, circus artists, poets, jazz musicians, and letter cutters in stone. Anything good, it seems, goes.

At least 20 major capital projects, for concert halls, theatres, especially the Royal Court, studios, rehearsal venues, libraries, museums, exhibition spaces, and even a training ship for Sea Cadets, have been funded by the rather confusingly named other half, the Jerwood Foundation. The first was the highly

successful conversion of a derelict Victorian building in Southwark into the Jerwood Space, completed at a cost of £3m in 1998. It provided five rehearsal studios, art gallery, sculpture courtyard and café, and revolutionised dance facilities in the capital. More than 300 companies used the space in the first six years, so it had to be extended. In 2002 the foundation provided £2m for the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) to build the Jerwood Medical Education Centre, carefully designed to blend with the surrounding Nash architecture. This, the largest charitable sum the RCP had ever received, arose because of the friendship of Alan Grieve with Michael Tibbs, former RCP secretary, who introduced him to the then president, Sir Bill Hoffenberg. Grieve, who was already funding medical schemes, was made a fellow, and now serves on the board of trustees. Other major initiatives have been completed in Aldeburgh, Hastings, Ipswich, West Sussex and the Lake District.

In the last two decades the Jerwood Foundation has dispensed nearly £80m. Such largesse has been fired not only by financial expertise, but by a love of the humanities, a respect for education and faith in the young. Unfortunately practical matters sometimes get in the way. For instance, recipients of grants from national bodies like the Lottery Fund may have to raise a sum of money themselves before the project can be completed. Grieve recognised that this could cause difficulties in finding the money, so he immediately responded by starting a rapid response to provide money at short notice. I often wondered why the Jerwood Sculpture Park had moved to Ragley Hall in 2004. 'English Heritage [insisted] that planning permission be applied for in respect of the siting of each individual sculpture...' 'There was meeting after meeting' recalls Grieve, 'and miles of red tape. It certainly wasn't the Jerwood way of doing things'.

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