

Book Reviews

of various manufacturers including Thomas Corbyn, Allen and Hanbury, May and Baker, and the London Society of Apothecaries. T Corley in his essay discusses the British pharmaceutical industry since 1851, bringing the story up to 2000 with the impact of genome research, new developments in biotechnology, and the mergers of companies to create massive international corporations, the latest, at the time the guide went to press, being Glaxo SmithKline.

The core of the work consists of guides to the records of business, trade organisations and pharmacy schools, and to minor collections (the latter alphabetically described within counties). There is a massive amount to digest. Records range from advertisements, ailment lists and apprenticeship indentures to prescription lists, photographs and poison registers. The background material puts this into context and is valuably supplemented by short histories of each firm with further reading suggestions.

A company's records can be found in several locations. Take Howard & Sons of Ilford for example. Started by Luke Howard in the 1790 in Fleet Street, Howard entered into partnership with William Allen. Had the partnership not dissolved in 1807 we might have had Allen & Howard rather than Allen & Hanbury. The Howard records are to be found in six locations: the London Metropolitan Archives, Redbridge Central Library, Laporte plc, Manchester Central Library, the Society of Friends and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. Allen & Hanbury's records are scattered between five locations including the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew and the Museum of the History of Science Oxford: the main holding is now the Wellcome Library and not Glaxo Wellcome as it was in 2000.

Inevitably some details such as this have changed since the survey closed. Until such time as an update can be undertaken the onus is on the user to double check contact details and note the clear advice that there should be no expectation of automatic access to business records still held by the business, since these are private. The address of the BAC has also changed since publication; contact details are now: The Hon Secretary Fiona Maccoll, Records

Manager, Rio Tinto plc, 6 St James's Square, London SW1 4LD.

At £55 this guide is excellent value and will assist as well as generate ideas for research in this area. Congratulations to the surveyors and editors whose efforts have provided such an invaluable work.

Julia Sheppard,
Wellcome Library

Iain Bamforth (ed.), *The body in the library: a literary anthology of modern medicine*, London and New York, Verso 2003, pp. xxx, 418, £20.00 (hardback 1-859874-534-7).

Medicine and literature criss-cross one another many times over and in many forms in western history. Iain Bamforth's anthology, *The body in the library*, offers a rich selection of such moments. Drawing upon examples of poems, stories, journal entries, Socratic dialogue, table-talk, clinical vignettes and aphorisms, Bamforth demonstrates how medicine and literature of various forms come together to produce telling, humorous and sometimes painful accounts of what it is to be human.

The bringing together of two disciplines calls into question how each is defined. Judging by the variety of literary styles included, Bamforth considers modern western literature in its broadest sense. Democratic in his selection, canonical works sit next to lesser-known writers in a manner which is both provocative and refreshing. There is, one could argue, a geographical bias to Bamforth's choices, with the greatest proportion of authors included being English, French, German, American and Russian, in that order. It is also notable that the female voice is scarce, with only six of the seventy-one excerpts written by women.

Bamforth is much more specific in his definition of modern medicine. He understands the French Revolution to be the political and geographical moment of modern medicine's inception, and thus all the passages included date from after this event. In his introduction he argues that 1800 marked a turning point in the history of medicine, where for the first time, state

Book Reviews

intervention saw that medical services were introduced on a grand scale and humoral medicine gave way to a “dual between doctor and disease”.

Bamforth also makes explicit his avoidance of what he refers to as “literatorture”, the language of patients describing their illnesses. This then accounts for an emphasis on doctor as opposed to patient perspective accounts of medicine. Nevertheless, he includes Fanny Burney’s excruciating 1812 description of her mastectomy without anaesthetic, which leaves one reeling with empathic agony and astonishment at what the body and mind can endure. Bamforth argues that the majority of doctor-writers in the book are “writers who just happen to have been doctors”. This assertion perhaps oversimplifies what can certainly be considered an intriguing genre in modern western literature. The many famous examples of doctor-writer literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are specific to the period and deserve further exploration.

It is all too easy when reviewing an anthology to discuss what has been left out, and indeed, Bamforth makes explicit in his introduction the difficult choices he has had to make in his final selection. Lacking from his compilation however are some examples from literature that address medical themes other than doctor centred scenarios, such as science fiction writing, which offers up utopic and dystopic visions of medicine. Also missing are the myriad examples

of insanity and asylum related narratives and the many instances in literature that deal with public health issues such as venereal disease, from syphilis to AIDS.

Nevertheless, these absences do not detract from the riches that have been included. An impressive amount of research and thought is evident in the making of this book, and the diversity of writings within it should ensure its appeal to a wide audience. Aided by Bamforth’s sharp and pithy introductions to each extract, the reader can for example discover how Laënnec’s ability as a flautist led to his revolutionizing invention of the stethoscope; then dip into the poetry of W H Auden and enjoy his wonderful description of a physician, “that white-coated sage, never to be imagined naked or married”; or read a letter from Chekhov to his sister, written on his life-changing journey across Siberia to the penal colony of Sakhalin. If that does not appeal, there is a passage from Camus’ metaphorical *La Peste* or the daily record of Gael Turnbull’s dealings as a GP in Worcestershire in 1980, which reads like surrealist verse.

Not many books can boast such eclecticism and offer the reader such a varied diet. *The body in the library* successfully threads together unexpected and disparate texts with the protean cord that is medicine.

Helga Powell,
The Wellcome Trust Centre for the
History of Medicine at UCL