

## Book Notices

**Harold Ellis**, *Surgical case-histories from the past*, London, Royal Society of Medicine Press, 1994, pp. v, 235, illus., £20.00 (hardback 1-8515-222-6).

There is a perennial fascination in a "First", whether it is building a steam engine, climbing the Matterhorn or excising the gall bladder. The details of the preparation for any of these feats are perhaps for experts in the field, but the character of the pioneer, the boldness of his approach and the indispensable element of luck in his achievement can fire the imagination of the general reader as well as exciting the interest of the historian. Professor Ellis has assembled an intriguing collection of surgical "firsts" ranging from Ambrose Paré in 1537 to Charles Dubost in 1951, and has thrown in an assorted collection of emergencies and disasters which are the stuff of surgical nightmares. He gives a brief biography, with a portrait, of his heroes and sets the scene but the case reports are extracts from the original publications.

This is not a history of surgery, and makes no pretence to be one but it provides some invaluable illustrations of its evolution. Eponyms abound and surgical lecturers will find this a most useful source book for exemplary anecdote. It is largely concerned with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when general surgery was truly general, and when a small number of skilful surgeons were able to command the field with a display of panache. At times this account borders on hagiography but perhaps with the justification that for much of the period advances in operative technique, in hospital care and in the social structure of medicine were heavily dependent upon individual personalities. Professor Ellis has given less attention to the dazzling efflorescence of specialist surgery in the twentieth century when, although so many impersonal factors were involved in its advance, there have been some charismatic figures worthy of hero status so perhaps we

shall have a second volume of case histories from the more recent past.

**Carolyn Pennington**, *The modernisation of medical teaching at Aberdeen in the nineteenth century*, Quincentennial Studies in the History of the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1994, pp. ix, 116, illus., £8.95 (1-85752-215-X).

Now that universities have been forced to sell themselves, they have turned to the past as well as the present for suitable copy. The University of Aberdeen is celebrating its quincentennial in 1995, and Carolyn Pennington's volume is one of a series commissioned on aspects of the University's long history. Until 1860, there were rival medical schools in Aberdeen at King's College (the original "University") and Marischal College (founded in 1593). Their amalgamation as part of the modern University of Aberdeen provided the opportunity for a stronger medical school, and Pennington's well-researched volume examines in successive chapters the professoriate in the basic sciences and clinical disciplines. Several late-nineteenth-century teachers, including John Struthers, Alexander Ogston, and J T Cash, were men of national importance, and the new medical school was successful in increasing student numbers. Pennington also offers a useful discussion of the consequences of national medical politics on the local scene. Much of her material is drawn from the University's own archives, which gives her little volume an immediacy and freshness sometimes lacking in local histories.

**Anne Mortimer Young**, *Antique medicine chests*, Brighton, Vernier Press, 1994, pp. vi, 77, illus., £25.00 (hardback 1-898825-03-3), £18.00 (paperback 1-898825-02-5).

While still a student, Anne Young was given an antique medicine chest. This was the seed

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from which grew first a collector's passion and then a historian's interest in these antiques, and in medical history more generally. This book's value to historians must be measured in terms of how much historical insight she squeezes from her hobby.

The early development of medicine chests occurred in sixteenth-century continental Europe. Their contents' great value gave them a certain affinity with cabinets of rarities, serving their owner's social as well as their bodily needs. English examples first appeared in the eighteenth century, by which time this initial showy exuberance had largely given way to pragmatic, standardized designs, modelled more on tea caddies. It is the two-hundred-year history of these wooden boxes that forms the core of Young's book. Here she describes in detail the changes in their style and content (medicines, accessories and manuals), while also offering hints on such matters as to how to extract recalcitrant bottle stoppers. Unfortunately, the reader learns far less about the light all this sheds on practices of self-medication: who used them, when, how and why?

From the middle of the nineteenth century, Young plots a decline in medicine chests, in part contributed to by the fashion for homeopathy. Somewhat contradictorily, however, homeopathic medicines were also kept in chests. Young's "decline" was curiously accompanied by the development and proliferation of first-aid boxes and bathroom cabinets. The real decline it turns out is in the connoisseur's fondness for these clearly less collectable modern developments. Thus while hinting at insights that the study of medicine chests could yield, the conclusion to Young's story betrays the fact that her book is ultimately destined for the shelves of collectors, not historians.

**Judith M Hughes**, *From Freud's consulting room: the unconscious in a scientific age*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. xiii, 235, £22.25, \$33.50 (0-674-32452-8).

Judith Hughes sets out to correct what she perceives as the undue concentration of historical attention on Freud's theories as opposed to his clinical practice. Using his published case histories, she argues that it was through dealing with problems that were raised by his practice that Freud displaced and revolutionized traditional philosophical problems, such as the mind-body problem. She claims that this led to the establishment of psychoanalysis as an autonomous discipline. However Hughes neglects to consider sufficiently the questions posed by recent biographical reconstructions of the lives of Freud's patients, which have cast doubt on the veracity of his accounts, or the extent to which his theoretical leanings shaped the resultant material, which has been at the centre of the debate concerning his seduction theory. She also does not contextualize Freud's clinical practice in terms of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century private practice psychiatry, neurology and the hypnotic and suggestive therapies from which it emerged.

**Lilia V Oliver Sánchez**, *El Hospital Real de San Miguel de Belén 1581–1802*, Universidad de Guadalajara, Mexico, 1992, pp. 326, no price given (968-895-385-7).

In this interesting and detailed account, Lilia Oliver Sánchez traces the history of the Hospital Real de San Miguel de Bélen (now the Hospital Civil) in Guadalajara, Mexico, during the two centuries of its colonial existence. Founded in 1581 as a religious institution to provide succour (principally religious not medical) to the sick poor of the town and surrounding district, in the majority Indians, the hospital had its ups and downs and it was not until the end of the eighteenth century when epidemics and famine caused such great distress and loss of life that the need for a new and bigger hospital was felt. Cruciform in design, it took six years to build and was finally opened in 1793. With 775 beds, it was the largest in New Spain at the time.

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The author has used archival material to good effect in her descriptions of the day-to-day running of the hospital, the treatment of patients, architectural layout, and the medical personnel employed. She also sets the changes within the hospital—moves from one building to another, its administration under different authorities—within the context of clashes between local civil and religious authorities, as well as of those between central government officials and the hierarchy of the Church. The book provides some useful insights into Mexico's history from both a medical and a social point of view.

**Soranus D'Ephese**, *Maladies des femmes*, vol. 3, bk. 3, translated into French by P Burguière, D Gourevitch, and F Malinas, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1994, pp. xxx, 179, FF 245.00 (2-251-00442-4).

The third volume of the Budé Soranus is largely concerned with gynaecological practice. The co-operation between a medical historian, a philologist, and a medical man works a little better here than in its predecessors, see this journal, 1989, 33; p. 501, but many problems still remain. The typographical layout does not always make it clear that the text on the page derives from Aetius rather than from the unique manuscript P of Soranus, and the explanatory notes are not always as helpful as they might have been. Those familiar with the Ilberg text and Temkin translation will thus be surprised to find some new sections firmly attributed to Soranus. The ending, ch. 18, is supplied from the Latin of Caelius and Mustio, although no hint is given that this suggestion was made by others before this. There is a useful additional bibliography, to which must now be added A E Hanson and M H Green, 'Soranus of Ephesus, *Methodicorum princeps*', in W Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Band 37, 2, 1994, pp. 968–1075. But, for all its weaknesses, scholars will be glad to have again an accessible Greek text of a major ancient medical author.

**Elisabeth Bennion**, *Antique hearing devices*, Brighton, Vernier Press, 1994, pp. vi, 58, illus., £25.00 (+£2.30 p&p) (hardback 1-898825-01-7), £10.00 (+75p p&p) (paperback 1-898825-009), postage outside UK and EC is £6.00 for the hardback, £2.70 for the paperback. Copies are available from D F Wallis, Unit F015, 13–25 Church St., London NW8 8DT.

Deaf historians of medicine especially will appreciate this short monograph in which the many, often entertaining illustrations helpfully speak louder than the text. The author is a dealer in antique medical instruments, on which she has published two earlier standard works. As more and more old hospitals are demolished, the increasing numbers of early plastic ear trumpets and the like now becoming available has opened this up as a promising new area for less affluent collectors to specialize in.

Homer mentions a speaking trumpet in the *Iliad*, but the earliest known description of a hearing device in actual operation dates from only 1624. Six broad categories can be distinguished, ranging from speaking tubes to electrical aids, while the material used for these—anything from animal horn to gold, but most often the less expensive metals—has introduced a further layer of diversity. A brief bibliography is appended along with a list of makers and the dates at which these changed their addresses and/or names.

### BOOKS ALSO RECEIVED

(The inclusion of a title does not preclude the possibility of subsequent review. Items received, other than those assigned for review, are ultimately incorporated into the collection of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.)

**Udo Benzenhöfer** (ed.), *Anthropologische Medizin und Sozialmedizin im Werk Viktor von Weizsäcker*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1994, pp. 175, DM 25.00 (3-631-47572-1).