

survival of an infant whose own mother was unable to breastfeed. However, as detailed historical examination has shown over the past thirty years, the practice of wet-nursing was once widespread and by no means limited to emergencies. George D. Sussman's ground-breaking work in France brought out both the economic contribution that routine wet-nursing made to both nurses and mothers and its association with different attitudes to infants; interpretations taken up by other authors, particularly by Valerie Fildes in her comprehensive overview of the topic from classical Greece to the present. However, although there is currently increasing interest in medical involvement in wet-nursing, there has been little examination of a small but significant aspect, the transfer of infection between nurse and nursling, the theme of Joan Sherwood's new book. *Infection of the Innocents* uses detailed examinations of the records of the Vaugirard Hospital in Paris, and of nineteenth-century legal cases, to focus on a failed experiment to treat congenital syphilis by mercurialising breastmilk and its long-term impact on French medicine.

Infection of the Innocents falls into two parts. The first locates the establishment of the Hospital in 1780 within contemporary understanding of venereal disease and its management. Government-sponsored, it was founded specifically to discover whether infants with congenital syphilis could be cured by being fed the milk of syphilitic nurses treated with mercury, then believed to be an effective treatment. As such, it was envisioned primarily as a 'clinical workshop', and displayed a stark attitude towards its patients, in contrast to contemporary British voluntary hospitals. Outside, women typically enjoyed an independent role in both healing and childcare, but inside Vaugirard, Sherwood stresses they were seen only as the 'technology' of cure, under strict medical control and following an almost military regime. Nonetheless, she argues that some moral rehabilitation was still expected; citing the Hospital's belief that supervised wet-nursing would encourage maternal feelings

and high-quality care. Sadly, the extremely high mortality among foundlings led rather to despair and even suicide among their young nurses, feelings presumably compounded by their own ill health. Detailed analysis of all patients from the first and final years of the Hospital's life in fact demonstrates wide variation in outcome – there was a contrasting higher-than-average survival rate among children cared for by their own mothers. However, this reader would have appreciated both a firmer guiding hand through the data, and the making of closer connections with events outside the Hospital.

By 1790, the revolutionary government considered the experiment a failure, and Vaugirard Hospital was closed. Yet its unsuccessful treatment lived on, and the second part explores the changing attitudes among the medical profession revealed through a number of compensation cases brought against their employers by wet-nurses infected with syphilis by their nurslings, some of whom had also been treated with mercury without their knowledge or consent. Here, Sherwood illustrates developing medical ethics, arguing that, although initially the doctor felt loyalty only to the family that retained him, and thus might not inform the wet-nurse either of the infant's condition or the nature of any medicines she was asked to take, by 1870, he was considered to have an over-riding duty of care towards public health in general. Such arguments combine with the earlier exploration of the Hospital to suggest that, while on the surface *Infection of the Innocents* describes a minor aspect of both wet-nursing and venereal disease, it nevertheless makes a much deeper contribution to the history of medicine.

Alison Nuttall,
The University of Edinburgh

Brian Vale and Griffith Edwards,
Physician to the Fleet: The Life and Times of Thomas Trotter, 1760–1832 (Woodbridge:

Book Reviews

Boydell Press, 2011), pp. xii + 235, £60.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-84383-604-9.

Of all the surgeons who served with the Royal Navy in the long eighteenth century, none is better known to medical historians than Thomas Trotter, who played a major part in the defeat of scurvy in the 1790s. Yet this is the first proper biography. The two authors pay due attention to Trotter's career outside the Navy – the year he spent on the notorious slave ship, the *Brookes*, in 1783–4 and his long after-life as a physician in private practice in Newcastle. However the meat of the book, as is understandable, deals with his service in the Navy as surgeon's mate on the *Berwick*, and other vessels during the War of American Independence, then in the years 1789–1802 as surgeon afloat, assistant physician at Haslar, and for eight years physician to the Channel Fleet, where he chose to be based on the hospital ship *Charon* rather than with the admiral, until forced on shore by injury. Trotter in the 1790s is depicted as an energetic, determined but cantankerous reformer, anxious to tackle all manner of naval scourges, including drunkenness, through hygiene and regulation as much as the discovery of effective therapies. His specific role in the introduction of citrus fruits to combat scurvy is carefully reconstructed from the missives that he fired off to the Admiralty and honestly assessed. Trotter's importance, the authors conclude, should not be exaggerated. He was pushing at an open door in that a number of serving officers, if not the naval medical establishment, were already convinced of the efficacy of limes and lemons. Moreover, Trotter, unlike his allies amongst the naval commanders, never championed the use of citrus fruits as a prophylactic, only as a cure.

This is a well-written and well-paced book that is essential reading for any historian of Nelson's Navy. Some of the scene setting – such as the account at the beginning of the book of the intellectual life of Edinburgh at

the time Trotter studied there – suggests limited acquaintance with the secondary literature, but this does not detract from the book's overall impact. If the book has limitations as a biography, it is that Trotter as a private man lies largely hidden from view. What we chiefly learn about are the ideas he chose to place in print: his early medical works; his three-volume *Medicina nautica* (1797–1803), built around his surgeon's logs; his works on drunkenness (1804–5); his 1807 study of nervous diseases; his play, *The Noble Foundling*, performed at Newcastle in 1813; and his poetry (published at the end of his life with the wonderful title of *Sea Weeds*). This is an impressive publication list for a busy professional man, and the authors demonstrate that his collected works repay close reading: his study of alcoholism was pioneering. But beyond a picture of a man who was appalled by his experience on the *Brookes* (as evidenced by his testimony before a select committee of the House of Commons in 1790) and quick to take offence with superiors as well as colleagues, the book offers no insights into what made Trotter tick. This is not the authors' fault: Trotter left no diary or private letters, and the information about his naval career contained in the Admiralty series of the National Archive primarily reveals his public face. The present reviewer found a similar problem in co-writing the life of Nelson's surgeon, William Beatty, for the Trafalgar bicentenary, and Beatty only left one publication. It remains unclear, therefore, how exceptional Trotter's experiences in and out of the Senior Service, as an author, reformer and doctor, actually were. This will hopefully become a little clearer when this reviewer and his colleagues, Professor Moss and Dr Cardwell, finally complete their ongoing prosopographical study of naval surgeons during the French Wars.

Laurence Brockliss,
Magdalen College, University of Oxford