

## Book Reviews

her perspectives to offer a broader account of the disease which provided the vehicle for her investigation. Did other American cities follow New York's example? How widespread were such concentrated preventive campaigns against the disease? How did the anti-diphtheria campaign intersect with preventive action against smallpox? Was such an apparently intense focus on one disease really achieved within a department which had multiple public health concerns? Were there costs to this concentration?

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**Anne Borsay, *Medicine and charity in Georgian Bath: a social history of the General Infirmary, c. 1739–1830*, History of Medicine in Context series, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, pp. xxii, 484, £55.00 (0-7546-0060-2).**

Founded in 1739 to provide lepers, cripples and other “indigent strangers” access to the healing waters of the spa, the General Infirmary dominated the landscape of Georgian philanthropy in the stylish resort of Bath until at least the 1830s. In this meticulously researched monograph, Anne Borsay uses the hospital as a prism through which to view English society in the long eighteenth century, approaching it as an organ, emblem and microcosm of the tensions and transitions which characterized the period. Successfully liberating itself from the straitjacket of an institutional history, this is an ambitious book which seeks to relate the internal dynamics of the Infirmary to a wider set of shifts and developments: to the growth of commercial prosperity and the diffusion of wealth down the social scale; to the gradual eclipse of paternalist ideals by a new moral economy of giving shaped by Evangelical religion, *laissez-faire*

economics and Benthamite utilitarianism; to the professionalization of medicine, the ascendance of the middling sort, and the movement to police and “improve” the lower orders.

This breadth of vision is one of the greatest strengths of Borsay's study. Systematic analysis of the accounts, minute books and admissions registers is integrated with a sophisticated discussion of the changing material and intellectual conditions of a Britain buoyed up with Enlightenment confidence and then buffeted by the challenges of the Industrial Revolution. Borsay shows how the application of the joint stock company to philanthropic ends “sanitized” (p. 94) the business ethos infecting Georgian society. She demonstrates that medical practitioners slowly withdrew from active governorship of the hospital as they consolidated their occupational status and simultaneously tightened control over both their patients and the therapeutic programmes to which they were subjected. She explores the growing divide between staff and inmates and the manner in which, both architecturally and administratively, the Infirmary became an “icon” of the traditional hierarchy and “a reassuring symbol of the obedient poor” (pp. 368, 386). And, above all, she charts the processes by which charity became “an optional badge of civility” (p. 185), a mechanism by which the newly rich “laundered their wealth” (p. 195) and assimilated themselves into the aristocracy and gentry. In short, medical philanthropy is seen as “a route to gentility” (p. 272), a key feature of the making of a middle class.

At times, however, Borsay's attempt to weave the hospital and its governors, doctors and patients into a broader national canvas is a little over-strenuous. For instance, her suggestion that the charitable provision of medical care offered a neutral cause around which Anglican and Dissenter, Tory and Whig, could unite, thus defusing political, factional and sectarian conflict,

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seems rather too neat. And in her eagerness to identify the mixed motives of the medics who voluntarily proffered their services and the middling sort benefactors whose subscriptions kept the institution financially afloat, she may underemphasize the role of pure human compassion. Certainly a genuine desire to assist the sick poor was not incompatible with “a shrewd calculation” (p. 115) of the social capital one could accrue, but to conclude that “far from being disinterested Good Samaritans . . . Georgian patrons of the Bath Infirmary were able to follow a series of economic, social, political and ethical goals” (p. 387) is perhaps to end on slightly too cynical a note. Borsay is apt to belabour her points and the comprehensive summaries which preface every chapter become somewhat formulaic: one suspects that some of the detail in the book might have been sacrificed without diminishing its overall impact. Even so, there are one or two gaps. The author comments that at Bath the holistic assumptions which underpinned balneology helped preserve “a degree of meaningful consultation” (p. 128) between doctors and their clients at a time when scientific knowledge and terminology was widening the gulf between them and erasing the patient’s narrative from hospital records. And yet there is relatively little consideration of clinical encounters between practitioners and patients, of the reactions of the latter to the philanthropic endeavours of the élite, or indeed, of the medical techniques which physicians and surgeons employed. Nor is much room made for discussion of the relationship between the regimen of treatment experienced by the inmates and the fashionable practice of taking the waters which centred on the Pump Room.

These reservations aside, *Medicine and charity in Georgian Bath* is a model contribution to Ashgate’s History of Medicine in Context series: deft, perceptive and carefully crafted, it takes us beyond the imposing portico of the Infirmary to a

nuanced understanding of the values and preoccupations at the heart of eighteenth-century society itself.

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**Martin Gorsky,** *Patterns of philanthropy: charity and society in nineteenth-century Bristol*, Studies in History, New Series, vol. 15, Woodbridge, Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1999, pp. xiv, 274, illus., £40.00, \$75.00 (hardback 1-086193-2455).

In the past twenty years, the espousal of a mixed economy for contemporary welfare has encouraged increasing historical interest in voluntarism. *Patterns of philanthropy* is a valuable addition to the literature. Based on a meticulous study of the primary sources for Bristol, the book opens with a useful overview of the historiography, from the Whig/liberal tradition of the early twentieth century to the new social history of the 1960s and 1970s. Martin Gorsky’s aim is to challenge the “underlying assumptions” of state welfare and class conflict that these approaches generated, turning to economic theory for “a more dispassionate guide to research questions” (p. 10). Though why this methodology should be any less value-free is unclear, the subsequent deployment of concepts like state failure, market failure, and contract failure does yield a series of nuanced interpretations which offer fresh insights on endowed charity and the role of voluntary associations in urban politics.

After a first chapter on the Bristol context, the book is divided into two sections. Endowed charities are the subject of Part I. Chapter 2 gives sound empirical backing to a chronology of decline from the mid-eighteenth century, previously evidenced only by “general inference or ahistorical assertion” (p. 39). Chapters 3 and 4 put forward explanations for this