

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Bloody Brilliant! A History of Blood Groups and Blood Groupers** *by Steven R Pierce and Marion E Reid*

Hardback, 633 pages  
AABB Press  
October 2016

This engaging book records how the blood groups were discovered and shows how these findings underpinned the ability to perform blood transfusion safely and to set up effective blood banks. The authors are both well known and respected in this field.

The history is told in five sections. The first lays out the discovery of antigens and antibodies in blood, the definition of the ABO groups, and the initial working out of their chemical structures. Section two focuses on Rhesus factor and haemolytic disease of the newborn. This is the most exhilarating part of the book as the text reads almost like a detective story. Section three describes how blood groupers set up blood banking organisations, especially in the US, and highlights the importance of medical technologists and scientific programmes. Section four discusses technical aspects of blood grouping. The final section delves into the structures and significance of the many antigens found on the red blood cell surface.

Towards the very end of the book the authors "*remind the gentle reader that this book is a history and not a comprehensive scientific treatise on blood groups*". That said, they do provide thorough reference lists for each section. The joy of the book, however, is the way in which it is structured. Footnotes on virtually every page succeed in creating an informal feel; never intrusive and often very amusing, they bring interest to even the most worthy topics.

It was always the authors' intention to bring their subject to life. By concentrating on the people involved, they have done this supremely well. There are photographs on most pages, in which the individuals are nearly always smiling, and biographies in boxes that in no way disrupt the main text. In addition, diagrams explaining key aspects of technology and historical product advertisements nestle alongside the text to add further exuberance.

*Bloody Brilliant!* took ten years to write. The authors have succeeded magnificently in clarifying often elusive and contradictory areas of scientific and medical advancement: from Landsteiner's original thoughts and experiments, through the recognition and characterisation of multiple blood group systems, to today's safe transfusion systems. It will undoubtedly be the reference book of choice for many years to come and – most importantly of all – it is a great read.

**Derwent Swaine**  
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