

BOOK REVIEW

Bodysnatchers: Digging Up The Untold Stories of Britain's Resurrection Men by Suzie Lennox

Paperback, 144 pages
Pen and Sword History
July 2016

Suzie Lennox is a historian, blogger and former archivist and in this short book she successfully outlines the history of bodysnatching before and after the Anatomy Act of 1832.

In the 18th and 19th Centuries, the "Paris system" of medical education began to be adopted in England and Scotland. The system required active participation by the student and hands-on dissection of the human cadaver became a *sine qua non* for medical training. However, the legal supply of cadavers from judicial executions was totally inadequate for the burgeoning anatomy schools and alternative sources were sought.

In the early days, amateur groups of medical students, petty criminals and corrupt sextons augmented the supply of anatomical "subjects" by robbing the graves of the recently interred. Later, when the rewards of the "resurrection" trade became even more attractive, professional gangs conspired with the surgeons to provide bodies to order. The so-called Resurrection Men employed sophisticated removal techniques and even had the benefit of "family support" (funded by their anatomist clients) when they were in prison.

The author has used court records and newspaper reports as her main primary historical sources and her wide-ranging account covers prosecutions in both England and Scotland. The techniques for raising a body and the ways in which the newly interred were protected from snatching are described. The book also has a chapter on cases where graveyard raids did not go according to plan and another on punishment of the perpetrators.

Lennox identifies the strong and mixed emotions that human dissection and bodysnatching generated and presents her evidence succinctly. She also pays tribute to Ruth Richardson's scholarly account *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, which is more reflective on this subject.

Most of the tales that Lennox relates are macabre, many are humorous and a few are somewhat shocking. This book should appeal to both medical historians and general readers with strong stomachs though it may not be suitable as a Christmas present for the squeamish.

Christopher Derrett
October 2016

Published online at www.bshhm.org.uk.