

BOOK REVIEW

Benjamin Jesty: Grandfather of Vaccination *by Patrick J Pead*

Hardback, 280 pages
Timefile Books
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This book tells the fascinating story of Benjamin Jesty, a dairy farmer from Yetminster who vaccinated his wife and two of his children against smallpox in 1774, twenty-two years before Edward Jenner's first vaccination in 1796.

In 1985, Patrick Pead stumbled across the gravestone memorial to Jesty in a Dorset churchyard. This marked the beginning of over thirty years' worth of painstaking research, culminating in this book, which was written to commemorate the bicentenary of Jesty's death.

Readers do not need to be experts in the history of vaccination as Pead helpfully divides the book into three parts. The first provides an adequate chronology of the history of smallpox and variolation. The second focuses in detail on Jesty but does also include a chapter dedicated to Edward Jenner. The third offers a helpful and fresh analysis of other figures involved in the origins of vaccination. Pead also aims to cater for readers from a non-scientific background by helpfully including an appendix on the subject of basic vaccinology. There are six additional appendices designed as extra reading on various subjects covered in the book.

Pead is good at setting the scene and you do get a true feel for the yeoman's life. No stone is left unturned, including determining the exact location of Jesty's vaccination in 1774 and visiting Jesty's old homes in Yetminster and Purbeck. A substantial proportion of the book is dedicated to the author's astounding discovery of Jesty's lost portrait, which, as a result of his research, was relocated from South Africa to the Wellcome Library in London.

Overall, this book is well written and is a true labour of love, providing an extremely thorough account of Jesty's role in the discovery of vaccination. Pead's meticulous attention to detail can at times seem excessive and perhaps unnecessary. However, being easy to read as well as informative, the book is suitable for both the amateur and professional historian of medicine.

Lydia Thurston
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