

BOOK REVIEW

Crusader with Compassion: Dr Walter Hadwen, Gloucester GP 1854-1932 *by Michael Till*

Hardback, 194 pages

Hobnob Press, ISBN 1906978786

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This is a biography of a notable Gloucester GP, Dr Walter Hadwen, who was a strong advocate of the anti-vaccination movement from 1896 and also a leading anti-vivisectionist. First trained as a pharmacist, he retrained as a medical doctor and led a campaign against smallpox vaccination in Gloucester, where several outbreaks occurred during his time there. He was vegetarian and for a time operated a vegetarian convalescent home. In 1924, he was charged with the murder of a girl who died of diphtheria when in his care but he was acquitted. His force of oration and prolific pamphleteering made him a national and international force. He wrote extensively with strong opinions on most things, including the dangers of premature burial and his travels through the United States.

This biography is written by a GP who worked in the practice Hadwen founded. As such, Dr Till had access to patient anecdotes, family archives and a wealth of other primary sources. His biography describes a compassionate and passionate man, unpopular with many doctors but with a large cohort of loyal patients. The book has the hallmark of a clinician writing history, in setting Hadwen in the environment of his time, but not attempting any further thematic analysis or interpretation. However, what Hadwen said then is little different from the arguments espoused nowadays by anti-vaccinationists and makes us wonder how their questions will ever be answered effectively and finally.

This well illustrated book is an entertaining and thought provoking read. It is aimed primarily at a general audience and fulfils this well. The book throws a spotlight on a little studied area of the anti-vaccination movement. Even though it does not contain footnotes and only a relatively short list of sources, it is a good resource for anyone researching the Edwardian anti-vaccination movement, as well as the anti-vivisection movement.

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