

BOOK REVIEW

The Road to Modern Surgery: A Historical Journey Through Surgical Landscapes *by Saleh Abbas and David Watters*

Hardback, 480 pages, Springer
December 2026

The authors are both general surgeons in Geelong, Australia.

The two-page preface outlines the ambitious aims of this book: to take the reader on a journey through the key developments and highlights of surgical history. In addition, the authors set out to address some of the weaknesses in previous authors' accounts by including more detail of the contributions of Sumerian, Babylonian and Arabic surgeons and, in a chapter entitled 'Daring to Dream of Equal Opportunity in Surgery', providing an account of the pioneering female surgeons of the last two centuries.

The first chapter of 19 pages is a somewhat superfluous summary of the remaining 10 chapters. All the main aspects of surgical history are outlined in these 10 chapters, including anatomy, military medicine, radiology, anaesthesia, antiseptics, surgical sub-specialties and a useful final chapter about surgical research, ethics and informed consent. Interestingly, the landmark legal cases mentioned in the section about consent are all American cases that will probably be unfamiliar to British readers.

Perhaps inevitably given the authorship, there is an imbalance in the text coverage of the various surgical specialties such that the chapter on abdominal surgery (strangely including thyroid surgery) has a generous 90 pages, whereas organ transplantation receives just 11 pages and orthopaedics/trauma only 16 pages. This results in, for example, the history of laparoscopy being well covered but that of arthroscopy, with the pioneering work of Masaki Watanabe in the 1950s and 60s, is omitted. Pioneering Russian surgeons including Nikolay Pirogov and Gavriil Ilizarov are also notably absent.

In summary, this book is something of a curate's egg. There are some very good chapters, including the ones on abdominal surgery and female surgeons but there are also a number of errors and omissions which detract significantly from the value of the book. Although a small number of references are included at the end of each chapter, these are incomplete. There are 5 tables and 125 illustrations but many of the latter are tiny and 9 are of particularly poor quality. There are no additional annotations and there is no bibliography. Most surprisingly for such a book, there is no index either. I hope that these defects can be corrected in an improved second edition

Bryan Rhodes
July 2026

Published online at www.bshh.org.uk.