

Jentzen's advocacy injects his narrative with an admirable sense of purpose, yet it also results in some oversimplification and a lack of analytical symmetry in his treatment of the examiner–coroner debate. As he himself notes, some of the most notable twentieth-century coroners were active and successful scientific modernisers, yet they are treated with suspicion, their support for medical reform described as 'disingenuous' (p. 57), and their innovations as driven by a 'hunger for media fame' (p. 54). Moreover, and despite his assertion that medical examiners and coroners represented alternative visions of democratic accountability, Jentzen declines numerous opportunities systematically to explore this latter vision on its own terms. His analysis thus reads as a rather one-sided lament, in which the forces of good fail through a combination of largely exogenous circumstances – personalities, internecine bickering, manipulation and misunderstanding – rather than through any form of historical logic, however problematic that logic might be.

In the end, this is an informative and engaging account of long-standing and on-going debates over the American way of investigating death, albeit told from only one of the warring camps' perspectives.

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Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *Fatal Thirst: Diabetes in Britain Until Insulin*, History of Science and Medicine Library, Vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. xii + 195, €99.00/ \$158.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-90-04-17250-0.

Before the isolation of insulin in the early 1920s, the lives of people afflicted with Type 1 diabetes tended to be nasty and short, usually less than a year or two after the onset of their disease. This was true wherever diabetes struck, not only in Britain. If there

had been a distinctive British approach to the treatment of diabetes in the pre-insulin era, if its incidence in Britain had been unusual, or if there had been exceptionally rich British sources describing diabetes and the diabetic life, Professor Elizabeth Furdell's use of a national approach to her study would have made better sense than it does in this meandering, short, expensive, and not very enlightening monograph.

The British were not different and the sources for studying diabetes in Britain before the twentieth century are not especially rich. Drawing on a wide variety of primary and secondary works, the author tells us more about British medicine, popular health manuals, and uroscopy than about diabetes and its treatment. Her attempt to 'reconstruct' diabetic life in early modern England boils down to this summary (p. 103): 'Healers advised sufferers. . . to consume all kinds of alleged medicines: corn, wheat, balsam, candied nutmeg, gum Arabic, opium and its alkaloids, and mineral salts like lithium, arsenic and uranium. The afflicted were bled, blistered, purged, doped, sweated, belted tightly around the waist, submerged in various liquids, and rubbed with disgusting ointments. None of these remedies proved of value to patients. . . and any improvement in a diabetic's condition, even temporary, was due to a dietetic regime that accompanied those therapies.'

A more rigorous approach to chronology and precedent would have helped the author convey the growing emphasis on diet and the developing understanding of the endocrine system in the years before insulin emerged from Canada from the laboratories of the University of Toronto. The fact that the history of the approach to diabetes was evolving entirely on an international basis, rather than a British one, confounds Professor Farrell (who teaches at the University of North Florida), as do problems of accuracy. The book suffers from many minor errors. I found nine of these in the

author's account of the coming of insulin on pp. 150–1, for example, and earlier had been amused at Farrell's belief that the American Diabetes Association's Banting Lecture memorialises William Banting, the obscure London diet propagandist, rather than the Canadian Frederick Banting, who shared the Nobel Prize for the discovery of insulin.

It is not evident from this book that its publisher subjects manuscripts submitted for its history of science and medicine series to serious scholarly review. There is so little useful material here – particularly considering the book's soak-the-libraries price – and so many problems with the author's approach and execution that *Fatal Thirst* probably should not have been published, or perhaps should only exist online. Diabetes and its treatment generally still await full-scale scholarly analysis. In the meantime, the best short history of the disease, with appropriate attention to British experience before and after the coming of insulin, is Robert Tattersall's *Diabetes: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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Robert Olby, *Francis Crick: Hunter of Life's Secrets* (New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2009), pp. xix + 538, \$45.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-87969-798-3.

In a period of eighteen years, two biographies on Francis Crick (1916–2004) were published: his autobiography, *What a Mad Pursuit* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), and that of Matt Ridley, *Francis Crick: Discoverer of the Genetic Code* (New York: Atlas Books, 2006). Despite seeming that enough was known about his life, it turned out that there were many

aspects of it in need of further exploration. That was the feeling of Robert Olby, historian of molecular biology, 'admirer' and almost personal biographer of Crick, who, in the spring of 2001, began to write *Francis Crick: Hunter of Life's Secrets*.

Olby's biography could be considered the product of an open conversation with Odile Speed Crick – Crick's wife – and others that extended for almost forty years. What is more, Crick himself read and critically commented on the first fourteen of the twenty-one chapters of the book, with only one condition imposed on Olby, for it to be published after his lifetime.

One of the key aspects of Francis Crick's life motivating Olby's biographical writing was an alleged personality change in Crick, from a 'wayward spirit, somewhat flippant and frivolous, with a rather immature sense of humor, and not the world's best listener' into the 'serious and committed person he was to become' (p. xii). Olby's motivation, interesting and genuine as it might sound, is unconvincing. The reason being that all of these attributes of Crick's personality identified by Olby, were with him all his life, even on occasions when he wanted to be serious and committed at expressing his thoughts and convictions, both on scientific and non-scientific issues. Olby's book offers many instances where this apparent contradiction between flippancy and seriousness in Crick's character could be identified. In 1951, for instance, in a seminar at Cambridge, Crick eloquently dismissed as hopeless the approach followed by Lawrence Bragg, his boss, and Max Perutz, his mentor, on their work on haemoglobin (p. 109). In the early 1970s, when Peter Medawar suggested to Crick to recast an essay he and Leslie Orgel wrote on life's origins for the fashion magazine *Vogue*, Crick immediately evened up Medawar's score by telling him that 'they had originally considered *Playboy* magazine' (p. 360). In 2001, facing an allegation from Brenda Maddox – Rosalind