

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

Franklin's biographer – that he and James Watson had stolen Franklin's data on DNA, he responded: 'As to the theft issue, I will make no comments, or you will accuse me of feeling guilty about it – which I don't' (p. 439).

On many occasions in the book, Olby masterfully exposes many aspects of Crick's life worthy of interest. Amongst them are Crick's role as 'molecular evangelist' – he broadcasted many BBC radio programmes and intensively lectured worldwide between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s – his crucial role in the cracking of the genetic code, his controversial views on eugenics and religion, and his flirtation with two highly speculative subjects such as the origin of life and consciousness.

A key aspect from Crick's scientific life that Olby rescues outstandingly is that of his years working for the Admiralty during World War II (Chapter Four). As a naval scientist, Crick, alongside other scientists, began to work first on the development of sweeping mechanisms to destroy the sea magnetic mines that the German Navy was using to blockade the traffic of vessels through the English Channel. Later, his work shifted towards the design of mines able to neutralise the very same sweeping mechanisms, in case the Germans had also developed them. This was a very intense, working-around-the-clock period, one that allowed for the emergence of a well-defined working culture (weapon development) that would, in Crick's hands, prove determinant for the establishment of a highly competitive science, such as molecular biology. There is no doubt about how precious this culture of fast response and the delivery of results, of the constant strive for getting ahead of the competition's ideas and work, was for Crick and his colleagues at Cambridge when competing with Linus Pauling on the determination, first of protein, and shortly after, on DNA structures. This transfer of war culture into the biosciences, as revealed by Olby's account of Crick's early days of scientific development, certainly deserves

further assessment. It would be interesting to know, for instance, the precise number of army scientists relocated in bioscience laboratories after the Second World War, and the form and qualities that this war working culture took into the laboratories to which it was transferred.

In the preface of Olby's book (p. xvi), he states that he hopes for his work to 'make an additional contribution'. Needless to say, he largely achieves this and in so doing, proves wrong those who, like myself, thought that enough was known about Francis Crick's life. Olby's book is written in a lucid style with an impressive display of sources and a smart and engaging narrative. Definitely a pleasurable read.

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Alex Mold and Virginia Berridge, *Voluntary Action and Illegal Drugs: Health and Society in Britain since the 1960s*, Science, Technology and Medicine in Modern History, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. x + 242, £55.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-230-52140-7.

Voluntary action in British welfare provision is not new: an early form being the religious guilds of the mediaeval period. As I write, it is being praised as an activity that 'makes lives better' by a British Prime Minister – this time, David Cameron; and not for the first time 'claimed' as a key plank of the government's plan to deliver improved welfare services.

In their first co-authored monograph, Alex Mold and Virginia Berridge explore the meaning, importance and roles of contemporary voluntary service centred around illegal drug use in Britain from the 1960s. They illustrate that since the 1980s, the key players in the mixed economy of