

long before “Evidence Based Practice” was invented. His published observations from practice, for example, helped to debunk the whole fashion of Tonsillectomy, demonstrating a twenty-fold difference in tonsillectomy between richer and poorer communities.

This book will appeal to the student of medical history and would be of interest to those entering general practice to obtain some insight into how their specialty evolved in modern times. The book is well written and scholarly and gives the reader a real sense of the evolutionary processes affecting general practice in the mid twentieth century with the foundation of the College of General Practitioners, the emergence of departments of General Practice in medical schools and the establishment of a programme for doctors in training. Tracing Fry’s career one gets a glimpse of health care pre NHS, the establishment of the NHS and its impact on practice and the mysteries of the GP contract.

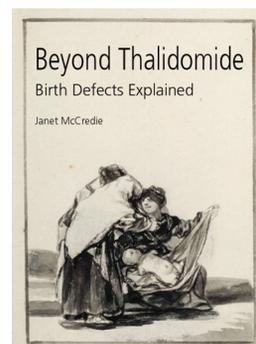
Even among those who knew of John Fry many will be unaware of his origins. Born Jacob Freitag in Poland he came to England in 1929 at the age of seven with his family. His father was also a general practitioner. The author paints a vivid but economical picture of Fry’s private life which tends to concentrate on his early years; his academic and sporting successes at school, living above the “shop” with his parents and his medical school days. I was struck by the almost surreal image the author painted of the period when Guys Hospital, where Fry was a medical student, had decamped to Kent during the war years and the Battle of Britain being waged in the skies above them - “dogfights over Sherwood Park”.

The work is well documented and there are extensive notes and references to the main text. Apart from the usual index, there is a subject index, a list of John Fry’s extensive committee work for the Royal College of General Practitioners and a Bibliography detailing some 65 books authored or co-authored by Fry, various reports and a long list of research and discussion papers published by year.

Perhaps this book describes a bygone age of the solitary practice-based researcher, but Fry’s capacity for work and the sheer extent and breadth of his research output is truly inspirational and the book is an enjoyable and informative read.

Kieran McGlade

**Beyond Thalidomide - Birth Defects Explained.** Janet McCredie. The Royal Society of Medicine Press. October 2007. Hardback, 432pp. £35.00. ISBN: 978-1-85315-741-7



This is a fascinating read. We all think that we know all there is to know about the Thalidomide tragedy: a relatively unregulated drug industry developed a new drug; they promoted it lavishly; doctors, lulled by its apparent lack of toxicity even at doses over 100fold, uncritically prescribed it to many patients as a panacea for many conditions; pregnant women used it for morning sickness and the rest is history.

This book represents the distillation of a lifetime’s work dedicated to researching the history, aetiology, pathogenesis and pathology of the birth deformities associated with this drug. Janet McCredie is a clinical radiologist by trade. However, she has led an internationally recognised research group including neurologists, neurophysiologists orthopaedic surgeons and embryologists. She has been much honoured by the profession for her work.

In her preface she apologises for the fact that that she “...lapses into (the) first person singular...”. But it is this very act that makes the book so accessible. It becomes a personal story of discovery and she has a knack of explaining her hypotheses and the evidence of her own team and others in language that is completely accessible to the professional and interested lay person alike.

The book begins by detailing the history of the drug and then chronicling the deformities seen. Subsequently she reproduces a series of landmark papers with explanations. For example, in Chapters 11 and 12 she reproduces two papers on the Neural Crest theory of congenital abnormality. She does so without updating the references significantly which helps put them into better context in the development of her theories. Penultimately, she puts into context those syndromes that produce similar abnormalities to Thalidomide and draws them into her hypotheses that Thalidomide’s actions are primarily neuropathic and that the birth defects are due to its neuropathic effects on the developing neural crest.

I would commend this book as an invaluable text to those who deal with Thalidomide cases and to those engaged in teratogenic studies. However, it is also a book that should be read as an elegant exposition of a lifetime’s work and one that demonstrates how an active intellect coupled with knowledge and persistence can move forward the boundaries of knowledge. It is also a reminder that we do not know and we cannot say that what we do is ever safe in medicine.

Neil McClure