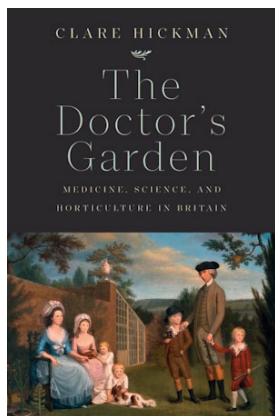


## The Doctor's Garden: Medicine, Science, and Horticulture in Britain

By Clare Hickman

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021. Pp. 288, 32 colour + 44 b-w illustrations. ISBN-13: 978-0-300-23610-1. Hardback, £30. Also available Open Access at the National Library of Medicine: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK584349/>.



Reviewed by Mark Nesbitt

At the heart of this original and beautifully produced book are the suburban gardens of prominent physicians in eighteenth century Britain. Clare Hickman, Reader in Reader in Environmental and Medical History at the University of Newcastle, uses these gardens to explore how “these men transformed, experienced, and used the landscape, and consider what that tells us about botany, medical practice, and scientific horticultural and agricultural endeavors during the late Georgian period.” Taking the Grove Hill, Camberwell, garden of John Coakley Lettsom as its central case study, Hickman explores how large domestic gardens functioned alongside other structures often located within them, such as museums, libraries and experimental plots. As such, this book is an important counterpoint to the many studies that focus purely on the role of gardens for ornament or pleasure, or on scientific centres such as Kew Gardens.

Several of the names of the other wealthy gardener-physicians will be familiar to readers: John Hope, botanist, and lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, and Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh at its Leith Walk site; apothecary William Curtis (of the eponymous magazine), who founded the London Botanic Garden (if only this had not been lost!); and John Hunter, whose Earl’s Court estate was home to some of the collections that survive today at the Royal

College of Surgeons. John Fothergill of West Ham and William Pitcairn of Islington were new names to me; a single rural case study is given by the garden of Edward Jenner in Gloucestershire.

Two main strands of research inform the book. The first is exemplary garden history, drawing on a wide range of maps, guidebooks (often written by the physician-owners), paintings and prints, biographies, and letters and journals. Hickman vividly recreates the physical and visual structure of the gardens and their component buildings, aided by copious illustrations in the book. However, her focus is rather on the use and experience of gardens. These range from teaching at the Chelsea Physic Garden and at Hope’s Garden in Edinburgh, via a fascinating discussion of the use of the senses in learning plants, to experimental cultivation of crops and medicinal plants, to parties, to receiving guidebook-bearing visitors, who might leave with a plant secreted in their pocket.

The second strand is concerned with networks of exchange, whether of plants or of knowledge. As Hickman points out, the late Georgian period was something of a golden age for botany, with the increasing availability of plants from overseas colonies, and the tools of Linnaean botany. Physician’s gardens, with their keen attention to classification and labelling, formed an important part of networks of circulation of plants. Fothergill’s garden in West Ham was estimated to contain 3,400 species of “exotics”. Throughout, the book is also concerned with knowledge exchange, between these physicians, and with the wider botanical community.

This is not a book directly concerned with pharmaceutical history, although materia medica make occasional appearances, but historians of pharmacy will very much benefit from reading this book. It is deeply informative about the intersection of gardens and medicine in the Georgian period. Alongside the case studies described above, the wider historical and scholarly context is deftly sketched throughout. It is hard to convey the full breadth of topics covered in this assured and enjoyably readable book. Hickman’s integration of research into places and knowledge networks is innovative and exciting, and always informed by astute readings of a wide range of source material. *The Doctor’s Garden* will surely inspire its readers, as it has me, to take a fresh look at the sites – whether laboratories, museums and hospitals as much as gardens – of medical history.

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