

News, Notes, and Queries

Edward Jenner's Schooling

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Accounts of Edward Jenner's early years and education are vague and confusing. Jenner, John Hicke's and Caleb Hillier Parry all attended the Cirencester Grammar School, and the three are said to have started their lifelong friendship during this time. In a small school all the pupils shared a common classroom, all age groups were together and had opportunities for fraternizing that are difficult in the modern segregated classroom. (The school with its large schoolroom is now a private house.)

Baron writing the definitive biography of Jenner fifteen years after his death was not greatly interested in his early years. He referred to his school only briefly: "When about the age of eight years, Jenner was put to school at Wotton-under-Edge, under the Rev Mr Clissold. He was next placed under the tuition of the Rev Dr Washbourn at Cirencester". And later "His scholastic education being finished, he was removed to Sodbury near Bristol, in order to be instructed in the elements of surgery and pharmacy by Mr Ludlow an eminent surgeon there."¹ Baron did not give age or date for this event, but

seventeen years earlier, in Jenner's lifetime, a slightly different account had been given by the Rev. Thomas Fosbroke in an appendix to Smyth's *Lives of the Berkeleys*.² He described vividly Jenner's inoculation with the smallpox virus at the age of eight years by Mr Holbrow of Wooton-under-Edge, "After this he went to Cirencester to a school, at which he stayed half a year . . . His health not being yet quite re-instated, he was consigned to the tuition of the Rev. Mr Clissold, at Wooton Underedge." Fosbroke, a friend of the Jenner family for many years, stated that he derived his information about Edward Jenner from friends and family. His account does not exclude the possibility of Jenner's returning to Cirencester when he was fully recovered from the debilitating effects of the smallpox variolation.

Some definite dates have been found recently which throw new light on the vague accounts of Jenner's schooling. The owner of the Old School House in Cirencester has kindly provided a copy of the Order by Lord Chancellor Greaves appointing Dr Washbourn as headmaster

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¹ John Baron, *Life of Jenner*, London, Henry Colburn, 1838, vol. 1, p. 3.

Dr Charles Parry, in an unsigned biography of his father, wrote, "Young Parry received the rudiments of his education at the school of the Rev. Mr Washbourn, at Cirencester, and there formed with the late Dr Jenner, a friendship which during the remainder of their lives contributed to the advantage and happiness of both." See William Macmichael, *Lives of British physicians*, London, John Murray,

1839, pp. 275–304. Modern biographies of Jenner state that he left school about the age of thirteen to be apprenticed to Mr Daniel Ludlow at Chipping Sodbury. Richard B Fisher concludes that Jenner "left the Reverend Mr Washbourne after between two or three years, probably during the summer of 1751 (?) when he was twelve"; see *Edward Jenner 1749–1823*, London, André Deutsch, 1991, pp. 19–20.

² Thomas Dudley Fosbroke, *Smyth's lives of the Berkeleys and biographical anecdotes of Dr Jenner*, London, John Nichols and Son, 1821, pp. 221–2.

in June 1764, when Jenner was about fifteen years old. If he had left at thirteen, as commonly stated, he would not have been taught by Dr Washbourn, as Baron and Parry suggest. In addition, it now appears that the accepted story of Jenner's being apprenticed to Daniel Ludlow is also incorrect. Dr Joan Lane of the Centre for the Study of Social History, at the University of Warwick, who has been studying the indenture of medical apprentices in eighteenth-century England has kindly provided the following information about Edward Jenner's indenture: "Edward Jenner was apprenticed in 1765 to George Hardwick, an apothecary of Chipping Sodbury for seven years and with £100 premium . . . It is possible that for some reason Jenner was transferred to Ludlow as a master

after beginning his apprenticeship with Hardwick."³

No evidence has been found to establish that such a change occurred, and there does not appear to have been any reason why Jenner should have switched masters. Besides, Baron's own account is contradicted by a letter he himself recorded.⁴ In 1797 Dr Hardwick of Sodbury wrote to Jenner, "Retired as I have long since been . . . I shall feel myself flattered to be noted by a man of your professional character, who was formerly (I am proud to say) my pupil." This letter, the indenture and the date of Rev. Washbourn's appointment provide strong evidence that Jenner stayed at school until he was sixteen, later than generally thought, when he became an apprentice of George Hardwick.

³ Joan Lane, personal communication.

⁴ Baron, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 117.