

Dr. Edward Jenner. b. May 17th, 1749 Berkeley, Gloucestershire.

Jenner was born at a time when the patterns of British medical practice and education were undergoing gradual change. Slowly the division between Oxford or Cambridge trained physicians and the apothecaries or surgeons, who were much less educated and who also acquired their medical knowledge through apprenticeship rather than through academic work, was becoming less sharp and hospital work was becoming much more important.

Jenner was a country youth, the son of a clergyman. Because Edward was only five when his father died, he was brought up by an elder brother who was a clergyman. Edward acquired a love of nature that remained with him all his life. He attended grammar school and at the age of 13 was apprenticed to a nearby surgeon. In the following eight years Jenner acquired a sound knowledge of medical and surgical practice. On completing his apprenticeship at the age of 21, he went to London and became the house pupil of John Hunter, who was on the staff of St. George's Hospital and was soon to become one of the most prominent surgeons in London. Even more important, however, he was an anatomist, biologist, and experimentalist of the first rank; not only did he collect biological specimens but he also concerned himself with problems of physiology and function.

The firm friendship that developed between the two men lasted until the death of Hunter in 1793. From no one else could Jenner have received the stimuli that so confirmed his natural bent - a catholic interest in biological phenomena, disciplined powers of observation, sharpening of critical faculties, and a reliance on experimental investigation. From Hunter, Jenner received the characteristic advice, 'Why think, why not try the experiment'.

In addition to his training and experience in biology, Jenner made progress in clinical surgery. At the end of two years in London he returned in 1773, to country practice in Berkeley and enjoyed substantial success. He was capable, skilful, and popular. In addition to practising medicine, he joined two medical groups for the promotion of medical knowledge and wrote occasional medical papers. He played the violin in a musical club, wrote light verse, and, as a naturalist, made many observations, particularly on the nesting habits of the cuckoo and on bird migration. He also collected specimens for John Hunter.

As a youth he had noted a local belief that if an individual had suffered from eowpox, then he or she could not catch smallpox. Cowpox, which affected the udders and teats of cows, was a relatively trivial illness if caught by man; the effect was usually a few blisters on the hands. Smallpox, however, was a deadly disease, often fatal, and if not fatal left its victim horribly scarred and often brain-damaged or blind. A census taken in 1802 recorded that 45,000 people died annually from the disease in the British Isles, and world-wide the figure would run into millions. For twenty-five years Jenner observed cases of both diseases and pondered, and then decided to put his theory to the test.

A dairymaid named Sarah Nelmes had a cow called Blossom. Blossom developed eowpox and Sarah caught the disease, a blister developing on one of her hands. On the 14th. May, 1796, Edward Jenner took fluid from the blister and transferred it to an eight-year old boy named James Phipps. James developed eowpox. Dr. Jenner had to wait two months for a case of smallpox to develop in the area and when it did he transferred the disease to James Phipps. The boy did not catch smallpox; he was immune. Jenner repeated his experiment with tremendous success.

In 1798 Jenner published details of vaccination for all to read and practise. By 1806 the great social reformer William Wilberforce was able to say 'Even in remote countries, and even in China, a country in which innovation is jealously opposed, it has been admitted. In India it is used'. Jenner's fame spread far beyond the shores of Britain. Vaccination was practised in France and Napoleon became an enthusiastic patron of the institution set up for the development on the continent.

It is now possible to travel anywhere in the world without the protection of vaccination, in the certain knowledge that there is no danger from smallpox, and it all resulted from the work of that country doctor in Gloucestershire. His great legacy to mankind was the complete eradication of one of the world's most terrible diseases. It did not end there because the vaccination principles are used to combat other diseases, tetanus, diphtheria, yellow fever and many more.

Due to the early period of freemasonry when record keeping was not terribly reliable, Jenner's initiation into a lodge is not recorded, however, it would appear he was raised to the degree of a master mason at the age of 53 in the Lodge of faith and Friendship which at that

time bore the number 449 on the register of the Premier Grand Lodge. This lodge is now the Royal Lodge of Faith and Friendship No. 270, which meets at the Berkeley Arms Hotel, Berkeley, Gloucestershire. He served as Junior Warden in the Lodge of Faith and Friendship in 1804, but it was another eight years before he reached the Chair, an interval caused by his strenuous public duties. He constantly travelled to advocate vaccination, persuading the sceptics and teaching the ignorant. He frequently visited London and he personally vaccinated large numbers of people, notably the men of the 85th. Regiment of Foot. All this was very time-consuming. However, when he was Master of the lodge he was very diligent, presiding at ten meetings. He was exalted into Royal Arch Masonry in April 1805, and ten years later filled the office of Third Principal on several occasions.

His eldest son, Edward, died in 1810 and his wife, Catherine, in 1815, both from tuberculosis, his wife's illness being particularly long and heart-rending. It is regrettable that the man who saved the lives of millions could do nothing for his own family. After the loss of his wife the high spirits of his younger days declined, and he retired in deep sorrow to his 'rustic haunt, old Berkeley'. He found pleasure in extending sympathy and benevolence to those in affliction around him. He derived great comfort from attendance at his lodge, and from the beginning of the year 1816 until the end of 1819 he was constantly at its meetings. After a serious illness he again appeared among his brethren on the 1st. July, 1822 when he acted as Immediate Past Master. He was present at one further meeting on the 14th. July, 1822, six months before his death.

On a cold 24th. January 1823, he went to see a patient, the local coroner, who had had a stroke. The next day Jenner himself suffered a stroke, and it was the doctor who was to die first. He was greatly mourned for his rectitude and charity. Money never attracted him, and he was ready to vaccinate the poor as the rich. He offered free vaccination to those who were so poor that they could not afford a fee and as many as 300 of the poorest would wait at his door. Parliament had to intervene to help him financially and he was voted £10,000 in 1802, and a further £20,000 in 1807. These were very large amounts at that time.

In 1896 he was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. He received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Harvard in 1803 and in 1813 the University of Oxford awarded him an Honorary Doctorate of Medicine. His most prized gift was a Wampum belt from the Five Indian Nations of North America for the help

he had given them in overcoming smallpox among their tribes.

A memorial service at Gloucester Cathedral was arranged for Tuesday, 19 . August, 1823 when a large gathering of freemasons assembled. That day the Deputy Provincial Grand Master of Gloucestershire received the following letter from the late Dr. Edward Jenner's son,

Dear Sir and R.W.Brother,

Permit me to address you to offer my tribute of gratitude for the honour which my Brother Masons are this day about to confer on the memory of my late father, nor can I withhold acknowledging that I am not a little proud that it is my duty to return you and all the brethren of the Craft who are met this day at Gloucester my most cordial thanks for the distinguished manner in which you come forward and assemble on the present occasion.

I have the honour to be yours most fraternally,
R.F. Jenner.

Bro. Robert Jenner was a Lieutenant Colonel in the South Gloucestershire Regiment, and he was Master of the Royal Lodge of Faith and Friendship on four occasions, 1827,1828, 1847 and 1848.

At this service sufficient funds were collected to commission a magnificent statue which was placed inside the West Door of Gloucester Cathedral. Of the countless people who walk past it, few will realize what this great man did for mankind, for on the plinth there is just one word, 'JENNER'. In 1862 a statue of Edward Jenner was removed from Trafalgar Square in London and erected in Kensington Gardens. He would surely have approved of this; the peace and quiet of the Gardens instead of the noise and dust of Trafalgar Square, for he was a countryman at heart. He wrote many ornithological papers for which he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.

When the boy James Phipps grew to manhood, Jenner gave him a cottage as a gift. This cottage eventually became the first Jenner Museum. About fifty years after Jenner's death his old home the Chantry was sold in 1983 and a Jenner Trust was formed. An appeal for funds was launched and with a gift of £500,000 from a Japanese, the Chantry became the new Jenner Museum. A visit to the Chantry in Berkeley is a visit to the home of one of

England's greatest men. As a man and a mason he was kind, gentle and benevolent, always thinking of others. After his death his friend Dr. Baron wrote,

He lived with the generosity of a good man and the simplicity which befits a great one. He never met anyone without trying to gain or impart knowledge, wishing from his earliest years to show how much information and amusement lie scattered around us, how bountifully the sublimest sources of gratification are supplied, and how desirable it is that all should be taught to taste them - to traits such as these were added a benevolence which put his medical skill and his purse at the service of the poor and a power of sympathy which made him a welcome guest wherever a brother's sufferings claimed a brother's pity.

And as a doctor, he was without doubt one of the greatest - if not the greatest. His achievement is best summed up in the words of a Professor of Medicine at the University of Bristol, who wrote a few years ago,

'Edward Jenner has probably saved more human lives and reduced more human suffering than any man who has ever lived. His discovery of the scientific principles of vaccination not only led to the eradication of smallpox from our planet, but provided the example for other scientists to provide other vaccinations for other diseases'.

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References.

1. Britannica.
2. Quatuor Coronati. Vol. 104.
3. The Library and Museum of Freemasonry.