

Helen V Smith, *Death Certificates and Archaic Medical Terms*, Unlock the Past , Modbury North SA, 2011, ISBN: 9780980874624, \$10.00, 36pp.

I've known Helen for many years and it is good to see that she is now a team member and author with Unlock the Past. This publication is also of interest to me as I have always been fascinated by some of the strange causes of death I have seen on death certificates.

The first part of the book includes a chapter on the evolution of death certificates with an explanation of the various fields to be found on death certificates. This is followed by a look at the occupational causes of death and the classifications of causes of death.

Chapter 4 is an interesting and useful comparison of death certificates from the various Australian states and territories as well as England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland. This is followed by a chapter on obtaining death certificates and finally further avenues of research to follow up.

The final part of the publication is the glossary of archaic medical terms and it is an interesting exercise simply to read through the glossary.

For example, canker rash is another name for scarlet fever while whooping cough was also known as chin cough. An occupational hazard for grocers was grocer's itch which was a skin disease caused by mites in sugar and flour while soot sore was a chimney sweeper's disease, a cancer.

There is also a very brief index which doesn't include the glossary entries.

For future editions of this very useful book, I would like to see some of the more common diseases pulled together so that all names for a disease can be seen easily. For example, yellow fever appears a number of times throughout the publication but there is no listing under yellow fever in the glossary. Alternative names include American plague, bronze John, dock fever and yellow jack and cross referencing would make it easier for researchers unfamiliar with yellow fever and its many names.

Overall this is a very easy to read, informative and affordable little publication which researchers will find useful next time they obtain a death certificate with an out of the ordinary cause of death.

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