



Royal Navy Medical Officers' journals 1793 - 1880

A new project to fully catalogue the journals of Royal Navy Medical Officers 1793 - 1880 has been launched following funding from the Wellcome Trust.

Project launch

The National Archives was awarded a grant in June 2008 under the Wellcome Trust's Research Resources in Medical History programme, which provides funding for high-quality projects to catalogue and preserve significant history of medicine collections. The two-year project will fully catalogue over a thousand journals prepared by medical officers of the Royal Navy between 1793 and 1880 - held by The National Archives in the record series ADM 101 - to make this under-used resource accessible to medical historians and other researchers.

The project aims to have the first tranche of the enhanced catalogue entries for 1793 to 1819 uploaded to the catalogue by February 2009.

For medical historians and researchers

The journals relate to Royal Navy, convict and emigrant ships and provide detailed information on diseases, patients, injuries, treatments and living conditions on board. The goal is to create fully searchable material within The National Archives' electronic catalogue, enabling medical historians to define and pursue lines of enquiry, test hypotheses and explore the awareness, spread and practical application of the findings and theories of the period's great health reformers.

Medical researchers will be able to track cases to compare the treatment regimes - and relative success - of different medical officers; to examine the prevalence and persistence of particular diseases; to see which factors affected health; and to study how factors such as conditions onboard, the route followed and the countries visited impacted on sickness rates. There is also scope for using this material in conjunction with other records, such as those relating to the Victualling Board, with the Minutes of the Sick and Hurt Board, and with hospital musters or census returns.

For family historians

The project will prove a fascinating resource for many family historians. As it will be name-searchable, there will be a real opportunity to track ancestors who came into contact with the surgeons during this period, whether they served on board ship, were emigrating to start a new life, or were being transported.

Rich content uncovered

The cataloguing will help to reveal some of the other extraordinary material contained in the journals. These include watercolour illustrations, hand-drawn maps, pictures of local flora and fauna, charts showing details of climate, details of the layout of vessels and details of the countries visited and people encountered.

The cataloguing project is being undertaken by two cataloguers working full time. The project is scheduled for completion in March 2010 and is managed by Bruno Pappalardo, Principal Records Specialist, Maritime and Transport Team, Advice and Records Knowledge Department.

Up to now 21 journals have been catalogued under this project and this cataloguing can be searched through our on-line catalogue by key word etc. 17 basic document level descriptions have also been updated in the ADM 101 series.

Bruno Pappalardo

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