Much of the information necessary to apply for and take the exam is already present in the booklet issued by the Royal Colleges when an application form is requested; however this book does clarify and I feel candidates should have access to it. I would strongly recommend this book be obtained by hospital libraries as a reference source for people thinking of applying for the exam and those already enrolled.

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An examiner’s review of this book will appear in the May/June issue of the Journal.

Henry Wellcome. By Robert Rhodes James. Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, London, 1994. 422pp. £25.00.

The years that followed the ending of the Civil War in the United States were associated with a remarkable expansion of entrepreneurial spirit throughout the country. This led to the establishment of a series of highly successful commercial empires which accumulated a great amount of wealth. Individuals such as John D Rockefeller, Johns Hopkins and Andrew Carnegie all amassed fortunes which were greater than either they or their heirs could handle. They therefore turned to the creation of important charitable trusts which were to prove highly influential in the development of medical research and teaching in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth. In the United Kingdom, however, there were no comparable developments during those years, apart from the provision of the Beit Research Fellowships, funded by the profits of South African diamonds, and it was not until later that Lord Nuffield, his success based on the increasing popularity of the motor car, founded the Nuffield Foundation. As in America, the Nuffield Foundation was to prove exceptionally helpful to the development of medical teaching and research, particularly in Oxford after the 1930s.

Sir Henry Wellcome will always be remembered not only for the pharmaceutical business that he created, originally with Silas Burroughs, but also for the charitable Trust that he established under his will when he died in 1936. The profits from his business, the Wellcome Foundation, were to be controlled by Trustees who were instructed to use their funds for the support of medical research, tropical research and the history of medicine. At first the Trustees were in considerable difficulty because of the terms of the Will and the payment of death duties and it was not to be until the 1950s that the Wellcome Trustees, led by the redoubtable Sir Henry Dale, were able to disburse significant funds for medical research. The importance of the Wellcome Trust to medical research and to the development of the academic study of the history of medicine has been unique in Britain and the Trust is now the most significant source of non-government research funds in this country.

For some time Sir Henry Wellcome has deserved a full-length and comprehensive biography in recognition of his many contributions. Robert Rhodes James’ account, supported by the Wellcome Trust, tells the story of a penniless American from Wisconsin, trained in pharmacy in the United States, who came to Britain to form his partnership with Burroughs in 1879. The partnership was not entirely harmonious but in the end Wellcome became sole head of his own business when Burroughs died in 1895. Thereafter, Wellcome became increasingly successful, amassing a personal fortune that enabled him to indulge his passion for collecting and for travel. His books became the Wellcome Historical Library and the artefacts that he brought to London from all over the globe formed the basis of the Wellcome Museum, now transferred to the Museum of Science and Technology. At the same time Wellcome was one of the first to establish a research laboratory as part of his business and he chose Henry Dale, future Nobel Laureate and President of the Royal Society, as an early director, with the responsibility of developing pharmacological research. It is a measure of the success of Wellcome’s Research Laboratories that so many of their scientists have subsequently been elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society.

In June 1901 he married Syrie, daughter of the famous Dr Barnado, an alliance doomed to end in divorce just under ten years later when Syrie eloped with Somerset Maugham. To some extent the sadness of this biography is the clouding of Wellcome’s life by the failure of his marriage for although increasingly successful, as well as remarkably wealthy, he seems never to have been truly happy again. Rhodes James gives a sympathetic account of Wellcome but he seems to have found the manifold organisations with which Wellcome’s name became associated difficult to fathom. The later part of the book, perhaps not unnaturally, lacks the excitement of the earlier years. It would also have been interesting to know more about the relationship between Wellcome and his only son. Nevertheless, this book is an important biography which is a significant contribution to the history of science, medicine and the pharmaceutical industry in the twentieth century. It illustrates both the success and the sadness of a remarkable American from the Mid-West, later to become a British citizen, who was rewarded by his adopted country with both a knighthood and the Fellowship of The Royal Society. However flawed he may have been, his was a remarkable achievement.

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